SPIRITUALITY AND HIGHER LEARNING: THINKING AND LOVING

Roberta L. Bondi

What is the relationship between the life of the intellect and the life of the spirit? This is a complex and painful question. In this paper I would like to approach the problem, not by jumping into the middle to answer the whole of it, but by pondering with you only one part of it having to do with what it means for a Christian to think rationally. As members of our own culture, all of us have been reared to believe at some level that even for the Christian, intellect and spirit are and need to be kept separate. A good deal of my education, even my Christan education, over the years, and yours too, I suspect, was based in the conviction that our human minds are only really trustworthy, that is, "objective," when we are able to discard from our thought processes our own particular, individual perceptions of the world, our own particular experiences, our own particular points of view, and our own values. In short, in order to meet the criteria of acceptable thought we have not only tried to make a division between intellect and the spiritual. We have actually tried to throw out of our definition of what it means to think a good deal of what we know and who we are as human beings and as Christians. In order to help us think about this, I would like to tell a story. It is my story, but I tell it because I suspect large parts of it are your story as well.

Roberta Bondi, *Professor of Church History at the Candler School of Theology of Emory University, has also taught at the University of Notre Dame. She is a member of the steering committee of the working group on the apostolic faith, Commission on Faith and Order, National Council of Churches. Her three previous books, most recently* To Pray and To Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church, *have brought the study of the early church piety and theology to an enormous new audience. This address, which she delivered at the Lilly Fellows Conference '92, will appear in a different form in her forthcoming book,* A Book About God: Theological Reflection on an Autobiography, *to be published by Abingdon Press.*

One Friday morning in the winter of 1950 when I was in the fourth grade in P.S. 41, I went with the other forty members of my class to a movie in the school auditorium. Apart from the quizzes we inevitably had afterwards, which I would nearly always fail from daydreaming through them, I liked the school movies. Being about the progress of Mankind in industry, one way or another, they were all the same. Moving pistons, spinning vats of dough, crashing looms, and clacking printing presses whirred against a background of speeding music and virile voices. Sunk down in my seat with my feet up and my arms around my knees, I felt the presence of a huge man, dressed in a blue over-all with red stitching on the pockets, striding across the mechanized farms of the Great Plains of America into distant hills. The movies made me proud to be a human being.

This Friday started out like all the other Fridays. The movie was on the mining, processing and use of coal. Because it talked about fossils, however, I didn't daydream as much as usual. Coal was made from the compressed bodies of dinosaurs and giant ferns long dead, from slithering and flying creatures no longer found on earth. I loved the idea of fossils.

The film had begun wonderfully. By the time we were taken a mile below the earth's crust and into the blackness to witness the enormous underground drill, however, my stomach was going around with it. All of a sudden it was obvious: if coal were only made from long gone plants and animals, the amount of coal on earth had to be limited. If no more coal could ever be made, then the time would come when human beings would run out of coal. There would be no more pulsing machines, no more electricity, no more big vats of dough. Houses would have no heat; people would have no food. Maybe mothers and fathers would leave their children.

Normally, I was too shy and sullen ever to ask a question to class, but today when the lights came on, I truly

leaned into the Question and Answer Time. I straightened out of my slouch and raised my hand. Miss Jason called on me: "You there, in the fifth row."

I stood up. "What will happen when the coal runs out?" I asked.

Miss Jason was disconcerted. She looked at me fiercely, the inside corners of her eye-brows touching. "What do you mean?" she answered. "The world will never run out of coal."

"But Miss Jason," I persisted, as I saw the five boroughs of New York City, my home, spread out before me, dark and empty. "That can't be true if all the dinosaurs are already dead. Sooner or later, we'll have to use up the coal!"

"Sit down right now and be quiet," she ordered. "Believe me; be reasonable. I am telling you, we will never run out of coal."

I slid back down on my backbone, humiliated and angry, confused and guilty. I had gotten in trouble in school again. I couldn't be reasonable. I couldn't figure out how not to believe what seemed so obvious.

This happened to me all the time. Once, at recess, for example, I came out late to find the girls from my class by the high wire fence at the back of the playground, behind the slides. They were in little clumps, whispering and looking over their shoulders.

"What's going on?" I whispered, too.

"Did you notice Carolyn isn't in school today?" Rosanna, who was precocious, answered. "When Carolyn came home yesterday her mother was lying in the hall and there was blood everywhere and she wouldn't wake up. I know this is true because Carolyn told me she had to clean up all the blood!" The other girls nodded.

"Yes, an ambulance came and they took her to the hospital!" another girl whose name I forget added. Everyone looked solemn, with the self-importance of knowing something only the adults were supposed to know, and a bit frightened as well.

"Where did the blood come from?" I had to ask.

They looked at each other. "We can't figure it out," said Miriam, but "but when Carolyn asked her father he got mad and told her to mind her own business. I asked my mother, and all she will say is that I'll know when I'm older."

Before we had a chance at further speculation, Miss Jason stomped up to us in her lace-up school-teacher shoes. She clapped her hands. "All right, girls," she said, "I'm not going to tell you any more to stop talking about Carolyn's mother. Now get out there and play!"

I never did learn what had happened to Carolyn's mother. I assume now that she had a miscarriage, and I suppose she must have lived. I began, however, to have suspicions about the durability of my own mother. After a few sleepless nights, I finally asked Mama as cautiously as I could, without mentioning Carolyn's mother, "what will happen to Freddie and me if you die?"

"Oh," she replied, "I won't die till you are an old woman."

"But what if you get sick?" I wanted to know. "What if you have a car crash?"

"I already told you. I'm not going to get sick, and I'm not going to get in a wreck!" she said, firmly.

"But how can you know?" I cried, by this time, really anguished.

To which she irritably replied, I suspect, with the answer mothers through the ages have given to the questions mothers cannot face from their children. "I just know. That's how! Now, go out and play and get some fresh air." I slunk out in a rage of frustration and anxiety.

As I grew, an increasing number of my struggles of this sort were connected with being a female child. Every night after supper, for example, I would help with the dishes while my brother Fred would build things with his erector set. I thought this was terribly unfair. "Why do I have to do the dishes, while Freddie gets to play?" I would ask. "Because you are a girl and he is a boy," my mother would answer (I would not have dared complain in front of my father). Everyone seemed to take it for granted that male privilege corresponded to a reasonable law of nature based in female inferiority: my father, probably like every other father in the apartment complex, nightly brought home jokes about pushy and emotional broads at work who couldn't think. The boys in our neighborhood spoke of girls in just the same way: "girls are disgusting; girls are crybabies; girls are dumb."

This was the story of the intellectual life of my childhood. Before I could catch myself I was always making observations or asking questions that didn't fit with what the adults were telling me about the way things were, and I didn't know how to make sense of the differences between the simple answers they gave me and the messy or ambiguous possibilities I saw under my nose. I was certainly smart enough to know that it was unlikely that I would be right about something and the entire adult world wrong, but what was I supposed to do with my own knowledge and experience? I thought I must be crazy. I was afraid of my thought processes, because they got me in trouble and drove people away.

This was also the story of the "spiritual" life of my childhood. From the summer revival sermons at my grandmother's Pond Fork Baptist Church and my weekly attendance at Calvinistic Sunday Schools I worked out early that

there was something about God that made any sort of speculation about God risky. There, I had learned that God said he loved me. But how could I believe God loved me? I was always in trouble with adults for my questions, and God the creator was the power and might behind adult authority. God wanted me to believe what I was told. Indeed, God was so serious about this that God sent Jesus, God's own child, to die on a cross to make me believe. If I believed as God commanded, I would go to heaven. If I sinned by not believing, I would go to hell. I was terrified of Jesus, frightened witless by a God I couldn't believe in and who asked me not to be who I was, not to know what I knew and who gave me no way to obey.

As I grew into adolescence, these problems did not go away. Indeed, anxiety and guilt about my inability to put aside my own perceptions in order to "believe," to see things "rationally" only grew worse.

Help seemed to me to be at hand when I fell in love at fourteen with a beautiful blond boy named Herbert. (In those days, love was the answer to a girl's every problem.) Like me, Herbert was in the band and the orchestra—he played French horn, I played flute—and like me, he read books nobody else read and asked questions nobody else asked. He was funny, and smart, and full of energy. I could hardly take my eyes off him.

The most wonderful thing about him, however, was his family and the way they liked me and welcomed me into it. Both of Herbert's parents had grown up in old New England Unitarian families. His father was an academic scientist, a biochemist who moved purposefully, correcting his sons in the same calm, unanguished voice in which he discussed biochemistry. His mother was an intelligent, decisive, and absolutely no-nonsense woman. She knew everything there was to know about art, music, literature, old movies, psychology, math, and history. She was also able to make anything, including her husbands' perfectly tailored sport-coats, the sleek, modern salmon colored sofas upon which they sat in their elegant gray living room, and the intricate silver knives and forks with which they ate.

Unable as I felt myself to be to escape from the ambiguity of the pain, isolation and guilt of my own intellectual, emotional, and religious childhood struggles, what Herbert's family had to offer seemed wonderful. Above all, they believed in Reason. This was not reason as it had been defined in my childhood, that is, as what the grown-ups told you anybody with any sense who wanted to be good believed on faith. Rather, "reason" meant logic. It was literally, no-nonsense. Reason was for the purpose of solving problems and knowing things. Only what could be worked out by the universal laws of logical reason could be true, and thus real. The laws of modern physics and chemistry were true. Mathematics was true. Human progress was true. Reason was, above all, clean.

The enemy of reason in that household was "traditional" religion. Traditional religion was illogical, authoritarian and impeding of progress, and thus, by definition, not true. This sounded good to me. If I could believe it, in the name of truth and science I could escape the murky and guilt-inducing claims of my childhood God which were so mixed in for me with all the other things I had strained against my own judgment to believe when I was small. In exchange for isolation in the chaos of my tortured, guilty inability to identify the real I would receive a well-structured and shining world of rationality. I would no longer have to live in guilt and pain. I could become an independent thinker.

During the next three years of high school I loved the Taylors more passionately than reason would allow, and I tried my best to embrace the rational as they did. I was not more than half successful, of course. Faith, even Enlightenment faith, is never simply the result of the exercise of logic. The deep beliefs we are called to in childhood are not abandoned all at once, even if we never did fully accept them in the first place. At the same time, observation and reflection on what I could see for myself continued to make me unable to believe that life was so transparently, cleanly simple as objective reason made it out to be. Nevertheless, by the time Herbert and I broke up when I was seventeen, even with my doubts, I was more convinced than not. I had an extravagant longing to be trained in the ways and wonders of Western Civilization.

College and later, seminary, were happy to do the job. The world of the university was populated by a whole society of people prepared to induct me more fully into the ethos of "the life of the mind" and teach me its nuances. As it had been for Herbert's family, the foundation of that ethos was a commitment to reason, that is, to a model of learning and knowing based in the logical methodology of the hard sciences. This was not new.

Now, I was taught explicitly for the first time that the opposite and enemy of reason was emotion. Where reason was objective, and universally verifiable, emotion was dangerously subjective, belonging to the misleading realm of personal, particular experience. Only by stripping away emotional responses to particular people or problems was it possible to arrive at the truth. That my own emotions and experience so often stood in opposition to the conclusions of reason did not mean that those conclusions should be re-examined. It meant that my emotions and experience were to be discounted.

At the same time, I learned a new way to think about the moral life. According to Kant, as we learned in Philosophy 101, a person of principle never lied, even in

order to save the life of an innocent person, for to make an exception in one case meant to open the flood-gates of social distrust and chaos. To be moral meant to lay aside the distorting private pulls of pity, preference and the particular for the sake of the rational and austere sternness of universal law. Ethics was about justice, and justice, like the rationality of which it was an expression, was blind.

Soon, in the ethos of the seminary, I would learn how God fit into all this, that is cleanly, unambiguously, and at a civilized distance. There, it would be suggested to me that God, as the source of the structures of reality, was Universal Reason. God was "the ground of our being" who "accepted us in spite of our unacceptability." But God was not interested in the sins or sufferings of individuals. God's concern was with the human race, and that concern was for social justice. God did not break the laws of nature for the sake of the inner or outer pain of individuals. Intercessory prayer might do good for the person praying, but it did not move God at all. Intercessory prayer was superstitious, anthropomorphic, subjective, and even selfish. God does not miraculously heal people from cancer, or help children find lost dogs.

As for Jesus, he was a far cry from Pond Fork Baptist church's "personal Lord and savior" who died to make me believe as I was told. He was Lord, yes, in so far as he showed forth the Kingdom and gave us a perfect example of how to live into it by sharing with us in all significant human experience. But Jesus was only a man. The virgin birth, the miracle stories, the resurrection—all this was merely the mythological language of the early church, from which we needed to extract the universal truth.

I embraced this university ethos with eagerness. It was so optimistic, and it offered such freedom. It valued asking questions and challenging received truths about the world. Its refusal to take the emotional and the personal seriously promised protection against my fears and anxieties. It was so clean, its answers so unambiguous, so natural. Fear of death? Death is the natural end of life. Guilt over sex? Sex is as natural as eating or mowing the lawn. My murky childhood God who demanded belief was to be replaced with an impartial, rational God who asked only for justice. Some good came out of all this, not the least of which was the mobilization of my whole class of seminarians in support of the Civil Rights Movement in many cases against the opposition of their own churches!

On the other hand, even during high school I think I realized that this model of reality was actually no more objective than the one I had grown up with. There was so much still that I could not make myself believe. It was full of questions I must not ask if I did not want to be labeled irrational, immature, or even immoral. It took the most fundamental, complex and subtle human realities and declared them insignificant. How could I accept death as the natural end of life in the case of a starving child, or a mother dying of breast cancer, frantic for her small children? Even under the best of circumstances, I was unable *not* to know that the reality of death was not clean, universal, simple.

One of the most paralyzingly painful things about this ethos was the way all the claims of objective rationality intertwined with explicit and implicit judgments about what it meant to be female. I began to learn this at the end of the first day of my freshman History of Civilzation. The affable and witty instructor had finished explaining that the course was to be structured around a study of the economic forces which had created the rise and fall of the world's great empires. The insect sounds of early fall came peacefully through the open windows of the sunny room. Now, he stood relaxed, waiting for questions, his pipe in his mouth. A show-off student asked a question about Marx; another asked about factors contributing to Napoleon's down-fall. In spite of suffering from elementary school fears of speaking in class, I raised my hand. My stomach hurt. The instructor nodded in my direction.

I tried to articulate my question. "What I would like to learn about is what everyday life was like for ordinary people in each period. What did they think about? Will we be studying that, too?"

The instructor, who was by this time sitting on top of his desk, took his pipe out of his mouth, removed his left ankle from his right knee, looked at me and laughed.

"Just like a woman!" he said. "No wonder women can't think! Women are never interested in the Big Picture; they are so subjective. All they are interested in is feelings! If you want to learn about feelings, go read a women's magazine!"

The class laughed. "Next?" he asked, putting his pipe back in his mouth.

What became increasingly clear in college and seminary was that the whole scheme of rationality depended upon a hierarchical division of the human race into the "thinkers," and the "feelers." Men were the thinkers, the powerful ones, the objective carriers of the higher powers who thought about the big issues. Women were the feelers, the carriers of emotion, the enemy of rationality, the ones who lived in the realm of everyday, particular experience. What happened in my first history course was repeated in nearly every class in college I ever took. To the questions I increasingly tried not to ask, I received a variant on the same answer: "What kind of a question is that? Women are so subjective!"

Women were not taken seriously because they *couldn't* think. As for women who *wanted* to think, who could not

help thinking, these women were contemptible. Women were not *supposed* to want to think. It was the age of the popularization of Freud. Women who thought were told both in university classes and in popular women's magazines that it was the indisputable scientific conclusion of modern psychology that women who thought were unnatural. Smart women made bad mothers. Smart women, like women who were good at sports, threatened, even hurt men.

All this raises two questions. What could I do once I had begun to suspect that as a woman I would never be more than tolerated in the university and seminary world of rational thought? And even more fundamentally, why in the world had I gone to seminary at all?

From childhood, I had read stories to comfort myself over the messiness of the world. Stories from the Old Testament had given me models of resourceful, independent children God approved of, like Joseph in Egypt, or Ruth. Perhaps recalling my childhood pleasure in the stories from the Old Testament, I wanted to write a graduate dissertation on the use of Old Testament imagery in the English metaphysical poets. In preparation for this work, I decided one morning to use the summer of 1963 before I began graduate work to learn some Hebrew at the seminary on campus. With a little effort that same morning I talked one of the Professors into monitoring me, and that afternoon I bought a copy of *Learning Hebrew By the Inductive Method* and a Hebrew Bible.

The next morning I studied the first pages of the grammar, and I opened my new Bible. And then, stumbling in Hebrew through the opening line of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," I had an Epiphany. Why this was so, I do not know, but I still recall the way the shape of the letters and the look of the light falling on the creamy paper were mixed up with what I can only call a sense of cosmic goodness and joy in all created things I had never encountered before. It was as though the page itself was alive and the jots and tittles on the letters little flames. For the first time I could recall, life itself seemed all of a piece and trustworthy, and there was a place for me in it. In that instant I knew that God delighted in creation, in light, in water and mountains, in fruit-bearing trees and grasses, in water creatures, and slithery things, in wild animals and tame, in men and most important for me, in women like me.

I decided at that very moment to leave off graduate work in English and to study Hebrew. Within the next few weeks, I applied to seminary for this purpose, and I was given a scholarship. I began second year Hebrew that fall. I loved Hebrew. The next two years I took as many Old Testament and Hebrew courses as I could for the purpose of a graduate degree in Hebrew.

At the same time, the relationship between my study of Hebrew and my understanding and experience of God was far from straightforward. Of course, I was not able to stop believing in God as I had known God up till then because what we know of God is always wrapped up in who we are, in our ways of feeling, thinking and perceiving, as we have been shaped by our personal experience, and by our larger culture. In fact, it was as though I now knew and believed simultaneously in three mutually contradictory gods.

There was the Christian God I knew from the Calvinistic Sunday Schools and Baptist revivals of my childhood who continued to grip my guilty imagination with threats of love, images of judgment, and demands of belief.

Then, there was the liberal God of the world of the university and the seminary, the civilized, distant God of Universal Reason, to whom any attempt to pray in personal terms or for personal reasons was an act of intellectual dishonesty. God in this guise was the very embodiment of all the supposedly male virtues academics including myself admired: rationality, unemotionality, justice, and impartiality. Unfortunately, however, he was at the same time the supreme rejection of "female" emotionality, particularity, partiality, spirituality. ("A fine paper," my seminary teachers would say, "you think like a man.") Belief in this God necessarily entailed the repudiation of myself as female.

Finally, there was the almost secret, private God whom I did not yet know but whom I had first encountered on that summer day in the first pages of my Hebrew bible.

How was I to live with all this theological mutual contradictoriness? I handled the tension in the way I had been trained in the university: I declared to myself that I was not and would never be a Christian. I simply would choose, rationally, to avoid Christianity. I would not take courses in church history, or New Testament, or theology. Women couldn't think, anyway. I would not grieve for any God I could not please and I could not have. I would spend my life studying Semitic languages, and for two years this is what I did.

Then, I went off to Oxford in England to do graduate work in Semitic studies. I thought I had entirely made my escape. Oxford, with its women's colleges, took it for granted that women could be scholars. The Oxford program in Hebrew suited me perfectly. We wrote Hebrew compositions, both prose and poetry; we studied Semitic philology; we read Hebrew texts; we read few secondary sources and we did not ask questions about what the texts we studied meant. ("Could we take just a few minutes to talk about the meaning of the Book of Job?" I asked the last week of a three term course on the Hebrew text of Job. Embarrassed, the students looked at the table top and shuf-

fled their feet. The small Scottish professor drew back. "My dear madam, that is something to ask your tutor in the privacy of your tutorial!") Leaving the pain of the present far behind me, I retreated into the romantic dust of the ancient world.

The first warning that things were not ultimately going to work as I imagined came at the end of my first term. I was sitting tensely in my tutor's office waiting for what came next in his evaluation my first term's work. He was a small, neat elderly English Baptist, and he was sitting in meditative silence.

"Well, my dear," he said at last, steepling his tidy fingers, and looking at me with his bright eyes, "If you are going to take your examinations in two years, you will need to start your second Semitic language now. Syriac will be just the thing."

"Syriac?" I said, stupidly.

"Yes," he replied. "You will enjoy it. A wonderful language, and all the surviving texts are from the early church!"

I gave him twenty reasons, none of them the real ones, why Syriac with its Christian texts was impossible. In the end, I lost.

I lost badly. Two years later, I found that I was actually going to have to do a dissertation in the area of patristic theology. The beginning of the search for a topic was truly awful. I spent one anxious week after another in the Bodleian library reading in Greek and Syriac texts which soon all ran together in my mind into one. Even apart from the gloom with which these Christian works filled me, I could not get the hang of any of it. They proved the truth of Christianity by pointing to Jesus' miracles; at the same time, they declared that the image of God in human beings resided in human rationality. In their talk about God the Logos, they seemed to combine in a particularly incomprehensible manner the painfully oppressive language, imagery and demands of both of the Christian gods I had tried to escape.

The beginning of my way out of this morass came about six months into my general reading for a dissertation topic. I had learned that the christological controversies of the fifth century were regarded as central to patristic thought, and that many of these texts were in Syriac. I had begun, therefore, to focus my attention on the writings of the monophysites, one of the major parties in the christological debates. One autumn morning as I sat in the Bodleian library surrounded by tall piles of nineteenth century volumes of these monophysite authors, I picked up and opened to the middle of one of these books, *The Thirteen Ascetical Homilies of Philoxenus of Mabbug.*

The homily I opened to that morning was not, however, a christological text. Rather, it was a sermon on the Christian life written in the tradition of the great early founders of Egyptian and Syrian monasticism. It was an exhortation to those early monks not to criticize or judge each other, but rather, to treat each other with the gentleness of God, who especially loves the ones the world despises, and who is always so much more willing than human beings to make allowances for sin, because it is God alone who sees the whole of who we are and who we have been, who understands the depths of our temptations and the extent of our sufferings.

In the reading of those words I was given a second epiphany. I felt my eyes fill with tears of astonishment, gratitude, and hope. Knowing as I did nothing of early monasticism, within five minutes Philoxenus of Maggub had conveyed to me not only the early monastic vision of God, he carried to my alienated and fearful heart the very God of whom he spoke. I had come once again face to face with the elusive God I had met five years earlier in the Hebrew text of Genesis, and for the first time this God was wearing an unmistakably Christian face.

I left the library that morning resolved to do my research on Philoxenus' monastic theology. Unfortunately, this was not to be. Philoxenus was not, after

I was a new teacher, ambitious and confident in my powers to dispel darkness of mind, to make students better human beings. Surely my older colleague was a burnt -out case when he said, "Let's face it. We can't teach students; they can only learn." Now I must sound similarly a cinder to my young associates. It's nothing so simple as "They must have the motivation" versus "The teacher must motivate." My situation today is a more complicated confusion of who shall be taught, what shall they learn, when shall learning take the lead over teaching. What I knew thirty years ago to be merely a process—requiring for success vituoso performance—turns out now to be nothing less than the mystery of human relations—individual, social, corporate, creative, physical, spiritual, cultural, transcendent.....

Truffaut's film gives no answers, but it does comfort me to recognize that the pedagogue's dilemma is perennial. I see myself not only in the figure of M. Itard, the teacher, but also in the person of the child.

W. F. Eifrig

all, noted in the ancient world for his ascetical theology, but for his christology. Even more significantly, however, in the Protestant world of theological scholarship, there was a conviction that the real contribution of the patristic church was made in "the hammering out of doctrine" that took place in the early controversies and Ecumenical Councils. The early monastic movement was understood to be no more than a backwater of the early church, comprised largely of irrational, body-hating, world-denying crazies who were interested only in the "spiritual life." Serious scholars studied the development of doctrine.

The clean intellectual issues of the christological controversies at this point seemed to me not so much clean as they were sterile alongside the monastic material, but christology was what I was supposed to be doing, and so I did it. At first, everything was straightforward. The christological texts were, in fact, incredibly complex, and in spite of my doubts about whether I had enough theological ability to understand them, I enjoyed getting inside the thought patterns of its ancient combatants to make sense of the logic of their theological puzzles. To that end I continued to read widely in the eastern patristic writers.

Slowly, slowly the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries began to come into focus. Slowly, slowly I began to learn that the God of the monks was the God of the christological texts. Something was happening to me as my heart began to make connections the university was breaking.

I am not sure at what point I realized I was in a crisis. I only know that one day I woke up with a severe anxiety attack that lasted for weeks. Day after day when I sat down to work, I was paralyzed. I could not read, I could not write, and I could not think. I did not know what was the matter with me. Only gradually it dawned on me. Without even being aware of it, I had committed myself to the God I was encountering in the texts. The problem, now, was that I had also been completely drawn into the logic of patristic christology. I was afraid of my mind that had gotten me in so much trouble in the past. I was terrified that I would find at the end of my research that all the ancient christology I was studying was basically implausible, and so I would have to abandon the God to whom I had already committed myself as implausible as well.

In my paralysis, I did not know what to do. Then, one day, when I was at my worst, I brought myself to talk with the chaplain at Pusey House, whom I knew slightly. He gave no advice, but seeing that I was suffering from exhaustion, he offered to arrange a three-day rest for me in the guest house of the Anglican Benedictine convent off the Iffley Road in south Oxford. In spite of my rationalistic and low-church Protestant prejudices, I accepted.

I was in bad shape when I got off the bus at the Fairacres stop two days later. I only vaguely remember being welcomed at the front gate and led to the guest house by a smiling, stout, middle aged oblate, dressed in a habit. Dimly, I recall her explanation of the rules of the house and the delicious, comforting smell of food cooking. And I almost remember slowly climbing the stairs to my little room on the second floor, where I shut the door, lay down, and fell into an immediate sleep on top of the bed, still dressed in my coat and hat and mittens.

What happened some time later, however, is sharp in my mind. I was awakened by a knock on my door. Confused and still in my outdoor clothes, I stood up, and nearly before I could say "come in," Mother Jane was in the room. Immediately, her presence overwhelmed me. She was a tall, striking woman in her graceful habit, and she had a welcoming face with rosy cheeks and very clear eyes, but what was overwhelming wasn't any of that. Before she said a word I noticed that there was something odd about the way she walked, and the way she held herself. There was a freedom in her that I had never seen in any woman, or any living human being, for that matter, a freedom that I had not even *imagined* to be possible. This was a woman, a *woman* radiating intelligence, energy, and kindness, absolutely without fear, completely at home in the world and fully, unapologetically herself.

While I stood there, dumbly, she walked toward me. Then, she bent toward me to give me a kiss. The kiss was too much for me. I threw my arms around her neck, sobbing. She patted me soothingly for a few minutes, then asked me gently what was wrong. Somehow, within a few minutes I gulped out honestly not only all my anxiety about my research, but the fear, and humiliation, and hurt I had felt as a woman around the use of my mind my whole life.

I don't recall the exact words of her reply. They were something like "it is God who gave you your mind; never be afraid to use any of God's gifts to its fullest." Because like the God of the early monastic writers she had seen me clearly in all my particular pain and guilt, and she had looked on me with love, she was able to free me from my fear. At the same time, because she was a woman who herself so clearly embodied what she said, she showed me that a human being, and a woman, could live in this freedom from fear, full of integrity and joy, her thought, her feelings and her prayer not divided.

In the days that followed, I slept and ate, thought and prayed in a state of peace that I had never known before. As an enclosed order of contemplatives, the sisters had no contact with visitors. In the chapel, however, during the offices of prayer which I was allowed to attend, I watched the sisters attentively as they prayed. I saw them look out the window, listen to the birds, fidget, concentrate or day-

dream and I knew that for them prayer was neither the pious, private emotional activity that was, as I had been taught, the superstitious opposite of thought, nor was it the rationalistic exercise I had known in seminary. The sisters obviously lived in an intellectual world more real, messier and less truncated than the one I was trying to live in, and they had the same fearless freedom I had met in Mother Jane.

In Mother Jane and the sisters at the convent I met the same integration of the heart and the mind that I had encountered in the great eastern teachers of the early church. For Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Philoxenus of Maggub, as well as for the teachers of Egyptian desert monasticism, there can be no real split between the spiritual and the intellectual. The reason that this is so lies, ironically, in their insistence, first, that human beings are made in the image of God, and second, that the heart of that image is rationality.

As for the exercise of rationality, for the patristic writers, to be rational means to see the world as it really is, that is, to look on the world and especially the people in it, with the clear eyes of God. But how does God see the world as it really is? Not according to the ancient church by looking at it either with the judgmental eyes of a God who sets the rules, or with the unemotional, impartial, analytical gaze of the hard scientist seeking abstract universal truth. God looks at the world through the eyes of *love*. If we, therefore, as human beings made in the image of God also want to see reality rationally, that is, as it truly is, then we, too, must learn to look at what we see with love. For the teachers of the early church, rational thought—especially about God or about other people—is only rational when it is also loving.

As for the characteristics of this love, God's rational love is not an abstract, impartial love that looks on all things and all people with the same calm and benign gaze. Of course God's love is universal in that it extends without fail to every single thing, be it plant, or person, or plateau God made. This had been part of my discovery of God in the Hebrew text of Genesis.

The beginning of my turning point to Christianity, however, came the day I heard from Philoxenus that only God can judge us because it is God alone, who, looking with compassion on the depth and variety of our individual experience and our suffering, really knows us as we are. For the early monastics, the particular, the realm of difference and of experience is not the enemy of rationality. The very trustworthiness of God's rationality depends upon the focused particularity of God's love of the individual. But this implies that, because we are made in God's image, the trustworthiness of our knowledge of others, and the world as well depends upon our ability to see and love the messiness of the particular as well.

History matters to Christians precisely because our religion is a religion of the particular. This, in fact, is what the incarnation is about. God came in flesh and blood among us as a particular human being. Jesus was born in first century Palestine into a particular home, and he died a specific and individual death. In between, he taught and healed real, individual men and women, and he made very specific, non-universal friends and disciples like Mary and Martha, Peter and John. By all this particularity it seems to me that God has demonstrated to us that individual, messy human lives are not only of value to God: it is by looking at the particularity of human lives that we become able to see reality. This, in fact, is why I have used this autobiographical form to reflect on the meaning and characteristics of Christian rationality as it relates to spirituality.

My own educational experience is not unique. Many women and men in this room share my experience. I also know that a number of the destructive assumptions of the ethos of rationality that undergirded my original education are still alive. A major purpose of higher education is to teach people to think. But human beings cannot really think if they are not allowed to be who they are or take account of what they know, even if it is frightening or inconvenient. The heart of the child worried that the world would run out of coal was at last comforted and strengthened by a woman who said and demonstrated in her own person, "God gave you your mind; do not be afraid to use it." In the last analysis for the Christian there can be no split between the intellectual and the spiritual. The way of God, and the way of knowing are one. ❑