comes from, and argue that it is an outcome of our conventional methods of teaching.

In Chapter 3 I analyze those methods and describe their impact on students. After asking why this mode of teaching is so widespread and tenacious, despite many efforts at reform, I tell a story about another way to teach and learn—a fourth century tale from the desert fathers and mothers who founded the monastic movement and are a root-source of Christian spiritual tradition.

In Chapter 4 I explore the image of truth at the heart of that tradition, the image of a person who said “I am . . . the truth” and who invited all who wished to know truth into a community of faithful relationships. I spell out some implications of this personal and communal conception of truth—not only for religious knowledge, but for our knowledge in physical science, social science, and the humanities.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I describe some practical ways of teaching and learning that flow from this way of knowing. Here I suggest that “to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced.” Chapter 5 asks how the teacher can create a space for learning. Chapter 6 asks how teachers and students can practice obedience to truth within that space.

In Chapter 7 I explore the spiritual disciplines necessary to do that kind of teaching. If we teachers are to help form our students in the image of truth, we must attend to our own re-formation. Having had our vision shaped by one-eyed education, and working under conditions that discourage us from opening the other eye, we are in special need of exercises that can help us see and be whole.

1. Knowing Is Loving

The Violence of Our Knowledge

I have felt it myself. The glitter of nuclear weapons. It is irresistible if you come to them as a scientist. To feel it’s there in your hands—to release the energy that fuels the stars. To let it do your bidding. To perform these miracles—to lift a million tons of rock into the sky. It is something that gives people an illusion of illimitable power and it is, in some ways, responsible for all our troubles, I would say—this what you might call technical arrogance that overcomes people when they see what they can do with their minds.¹

These words were spoken by a celebrated physicist in The Day after Trinity, a film documentary about the team of American scientists who produced the first atomic bomb. “Trinity” was the ironic code name for that original explosion, and only on “the day after” did the scientists stop to analyze and agonize over the outcomes of their work.

The film is filled with images of horror. For me, the most horrifying is not that mushroom shape that appears in our dreams and lurks just over our waking horizon. Instead, it is the image of intelligent and educated people—the most intelligent and the best educated our society has produced—devoting themselves so enthusiastically to such demonic ends. They appear in the film as people possessed by a power beyond their control—not the power of the government that summoned their services, but the power of their knowledge itself. One scientist interviewed in the film reveals that “prior to the shot, back in the lab, there had been some speculation that it might be possible to explode the atmosphere—in which case the world disappears.”² But the “experiment” went on as scheduled, the irresistible outcome of the knowledge that made it possible.

Watching this film, reliving that history, I saw how our knowledge can carry us toward ends we want to renounce—but we
renounce them only on "the day after." I understood then what Jonathan Schell says in The Fate of the Earth: "It is fundamental to the shape and character of the nuclear predicament that its origins lie in scientific knowledge rather than in social circumstances." I understood, too, what Robert Oppenheimer meant in his post-Hiroshima pronouncement, "The physicists have known sin."

We need images of hope to counteract our horror, knowledge of grace to counteract our knowledge of sin. That is what I want to offer in this book by describing a way of knowing and educating that might heal rather than wound us and our world. But in my spiritual life I have learned that hope and grace do not come cheap. They require honest self-scrutiny first, and then confession, an offering up of our own inner darkness to the source of forgiveness and transformation.

I am not a nuclear physicist, and I have never participated in a project with such vast implications as "Trinity," but I identify with those scientists. Their story is my story too, and when I am tempted to sit in judgment on them I am only evading the judgment that falls upon me. I value their confession of sin on a large scale because it helps me make my own confession of smaller but similar sins.

For all the differences between those scientists and me, we have one thing in common. We are well-educated people who have been schooled in a way of knowing that treats the world as an object to be dissected and manipulated, a way of knowing that gives us power over the world. With those scientists I have succumbed to the arrogance that comes when we see what our minds can do. The outcomes of my arrogance have been less than world-shaking because my powers are small. But in my own way I have used my knowledge to rearrange the world to satisfy my drive for power, distorting and deranging life rather than loving it for the gift it is.

In my late twenties, still impressed by what I could do with my mind, I wrote a book about how we know the world around us. (By grace, that book was never published—not, I suspect, because it was wrongheaded, but because my wrongheadedness was not packaged well enough to sell.) The themes of that book may sound distant and abstract, but bear with me for a moment: I want to show how they shaped the way one educated person used his knowledge and lived his life.

In that book I argued that knowledge emerges as we impose a mental order on the chaos that surrounds us. The world, I said, presents itself to us as nothing more than a welter of sensory impressions—colors, tastes, smells, and textures; weights, heights, and lengths. To make sense of this chaos we use concepts to organize our impressions and theories to organize our concepts. The test of truth for any one of these mental constructs is simply how well it fits the data and helps us solve the intellectual or practical problem at hand.

Not only did my book imply that the world has no necessary shape or order of its own; it also suggested that the shape imposed on the world by our minds has no validity outside of a culture that happens to find that pattern congenial. Christians and Zen Buddhists, scientists and artists have different ways of ordering the world because they live in different cultures and have different problems to solve. By my scheme, knowing becomes an arbitrary process, subject only to the rules of whatever culture-game one happens to be playing at the time.

Looking back, I see how my theory of knowing helped form (or deform) my sense of who I was and how I was related to the world. For many years I regarded thinking as a kind of board game in which we move the pieces around until we have solved the problem, placing the pieces in patterns that allow us to "win." "Winning" meant different things in different settings, according to different rules. For a while, my setting was school. Here, the winning pattern of pieces was whatever the professors were willing to reward with high grades. Truth was reduced to whatever would give me an "A." As I moved into professional academic life, winning meant arranging the pieces in ways acceptable to my peers. Now the criteria of truth became publication in professional journals and academic appointments and ad-
vancements. When I left the academy to go into community organizing, truth was weighed by its ability to help me win the political battle at hand. My ethic was opportunistic, dictated by the demands of the situation—an ethic that reflected the manipulative mode of knowing described in that stillborn book, where “truth” is whatever works.

Watching The Day after Trinity I saw that same ethic, that same mode of knowing at work. I also saw, projected on a very large screen, the violence wrought by this way of knowing and living. In my own life, the dimensions of that violence eventually became clear. I was distanced and alienated from the world around me; too many parts of it became pawns in my game, valued only for how they might help me win. I worked toward shaping that world in my own image. Sometimes I succeeded—but the results were only temporarily pleasing, since the image in which I was shaping things was that of a distorted, driven self. Sometimes I failed, since the world does not always yield—then the results were anger and even more violent efforts at compelling the world to change. The ultimate outcome for me was growing weariness, withdrawal, and cynicism. What else could result from a way of knowing and living driven mainly by the need for power and deficient in the capacity to love?

A recent Carnegie Commission survey of American undergraduates suggests that my story is not unique. The study reveals that these best-educated of our young men and women are darkly pessimistic about the future of their country and their world. They are, among other things, “fearful of the economy, pollution, crime, morals, energy, and nuclear war.” But at the same time they are brightly optimistic about their personal futures. They believe that the knowledge they have gained through education—especially with the access it gives them to their professions—will enable them to carve out a niche of private safety and sanity in the midst of public calamity. They believe, as I once did, that they can “win” while everyone around them is losing.

The researchers cite this interview as typical:

Interviewer: Will the United States be a better or worse place to live in the next ten years?
Student: The U.S. will definitely be a worse place to live.
Interviewer: Then you must be pessimistic about the future?
Student: No, I’m optimistic.
Interviewer (with surprise): Why?
Student: Because I have a high grade point average, and I’m going to get a good job, make a lot of money, and live in a nice house.

There are various ways to interpret these findings. A psychiatrist might call these students schizophrenic; by clinging to a fantasy of private well-being, they shield themselves from overwhelming public horrors. A liberal arts teacher would see their answers as evidence that vocationalism has replaced education’s historic goal of helping us see and think clearly. But my own experience suggests that their fantastic ethic reflects the mode of knowing in which they have been schooled. They have learned that the world is an object to be manipulated, and though they have lost my generation’s confidence that the whole world can be rearranged, they still believe that a small part of it can be organized to suit their personal needs.

Conventional wisdom will bemoan the fact that these well-trained men and women have turned their backs on the world and are unlikely to use their knowledge to help solve its problems. But many of the problems these students fear and flee from (notably the nuclear threat) were created by their well-educated predecessors. The respondents to the Carnegie survey all grew up on “the day after Trinity”; they are victims of a kind of knowing that begins and ends in human pride and power. Since this is the same kind of knowing in which these students themselves have been formed, we must wonder whether those who refuse to flee but decide to engage the world will not in turn become the victimizers of the next generation.

The Trinity scientists, the Carnegie students, and I—each of us
overcome by the arrogance of our knowledge, each of us inflicting that arrogance on the common life. Such, at least, is my confession, a confession that other educated men and women may wish to share. But confession is only a first step in the spiritual life, my first step toward a spirituality of education that might yield a knowledge that can heal, not wound, the world. As we pray for grace and hope, we must try to understand more about the knowledge we possess; for that knowledge also possesses us.

The Origins and Ends of Knowledge

The ends of knowledge has been a subject of much earnest and worried talk in recent years. We have celebrated the powers of the human mind in our century, reveled in the far-reaching advances of science. But now we begin to wonder where all this knowledge is taking us. We worry about the ecological consequences of technology, about the power of applied social science to manipulate human behavior, about the grotesque potentials of genetic engineering, and above all about the translation of nuclear physics into instruments of oblivion. Is our knowledge—the very knowledge that distinguishes human beings from the beasts—creating a world far less human, far more beastly, than the natural world itself?

The question is urgent, and the evidence in response to it is troubling. But the problem will not have been truly engaged until we ask about the origins of our knowledge as well as its ends. Where does our knowledge come from? What is its ultimate source? What is the wellspring of our passion to know?

We have ignored the question of origins because we imagine that knowledge begins as neutral stuff—"the facts." Facts are facts, we say, and we can neither alter them nor stop gathering them. The problem, we believe, is not how our knowledge arises but how we use and apply those neutral facts. We think that knowledge itself is passionless and purposeless. So our strategy for guiding its course is to surround the facts with ethics, moral mandates meant to control the passions and purposes of those who use the facts—the engineers, the industrialists, the politicians. It is a strategy now employed by our schools where the occasional course in "values" is offered as a supplement to the standard factual fare.

But I have come to see that knowledge contains its own morality, that it begins not in a neutrality but in a place of passion within the human soul. Depending on the nature of that passion, our knowledge will follow certain courses and head toward certain ends. From the point where it originates in the soul, knowledge assumes a certain trajectory and target—and it will not easily be deflected by ethics once it takes off from that source. In a day when nuclear missiles have become ominous symbols of our knowledge, "trajectory" and "target" are apt images. If we are worried about the path on which our knowledge flies and about its ultimate destination, we had better go back to its launching pad and deal with the passions that fuel and guide its course.

History suggests two primary sources for our knowledge, both of which are evident on "the day after Trinity." One is curiosity; the other is control. The one corresponds to pure, speculative knowledge, to knowledge as an end in itself. The other corresponds to applied science, to knowledge as a means to practical ends.

We are inquisitive creatures, forever wanting to get inside of things and discover their hidden secrets. Our curiosity is piqued by the closed and wrapped box. We want to know its contents, and when the contents are out we want to open them too—down to the tiniest particle of their construction. We are also creatures attracted by power; we want knowledge to control our environment, each other, ourselves. Since many of the boxes we have opened contained secrets that have given us more mastery over life, curiosity and control are joined as the passion behind our knowing.

Curiosity sometimes kills, and our desire to control has put deadly power in some very unsteady hands. We should not be surprised that knowledge launched from these sources is heading toward some terrible ends, undeflected by ethical values as basic
as respect for life itself. Curiosity is an amoral passion, a need to know that allows no guidance beyond the need itself. Control is simply another word for power, a passion notorious not only for its amorality but for its tendency toward corruption. If curiosity and control are the primary motives for our knowing, we will generate a knowledge that eventually carries us not toward life but death.

But another kind of knowledge is available to us, one that begins in a different passion and is drawn toward other ends. This knowledge can contain as much sound fact and theory as the knowledge we now possess, but because it springs from a truer passion it works toward truer ends. This is a knowledge that originates not in curiosity or control but in compassion, or love—a source celebrated not in our intellectual tradition but in our spiritual heritage.

The goal of a knowledge arising from love is the reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds. A knowledge born of compassion aims not at exploiting and manipulating creation but at reconciling the world to itself. The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know as the heart reaches out to love. Here, the act of knowing is an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing we know and are known as members of one community, and our knowing becomes a way of reweaving that community’s bonds.

Our spiritual heritage does not merely claim that knowing ought to begin in love, though surely it should. But that claim is mere exhortation, another futile attempt to deflect the course of knowledge by battering it with “oughts.” Our spiritual tradition makes a deeper and more substantial claim: the origin of knowledge is love. The deepest wellspring of our desire to know is the passion to recreate the organic community in which the world was first created.

The minds we have used to divide and conquer creation were given to us for another purpose: to raise to awareness the communal nature of reality, to overcome separateness and alienation by a knowing that is loving, to reach out with intelligence to acknowledge and renew the bonds of life. The failure of modern knowledge is not primarily a failure in our ethics, in the application of what we know. Rather, it is the failure of our knowing itself to recognize and reach for its deeper source and passion, to allow love to inform the relations that our knowledge creates— with ourselves, with each other, with the whole animate and inanimate world.

This love is not a soft and sentimental virtue, not a fuzzy feeling of romance. The love of which spiritual tradition speaks is “tough love,” the connective tissue of reality—and we flee from it because we fear its claims on our lives. Curiosity and control create a knowledge that distances us from each other and the world, allowing us to use what we know as a playing thing and to play the game by our own self-serving rules. But a knowledge that springs from love will implicate us in the web of life; it will wrap the knower and the known in compassion, in a bond of awesome responsibility as well as transforming joy; it will call us to involvement, mutuality, accountability.

“Love in action,” said Dostoevski, “is a harsh and dreadful thing,” and so it can be. A knowledge that springs from love may require us to change, even sacrifice, for the sake of what we know. It is easy to be curious and controlling. It is difficult to love. But if we want a knowledge that will rebind our broken world, we must reach for that deeper passion. We must recover from our spiritual tradition the models and methods of knowing as an act of love.

“Models and methods of knowing” may sound like an abstract topic, but it takes very concrete form in our daily lives. Those models and methods are institutionalized in the way we educate, in the formal and informal schooling to which all of us are exposed. The terrors of “the day after Trinity,” my own defaults, and the distorted world-view of those students in the Carnegie Commission survey were created in part by the exploitative knowledge we teach and learn. How can the places where we learn to know become places where we also learn to love? How
can we educate today so that “the day after” will be a time of compassion rather than combat? Some answers can be found, I believe, as we try to recover the spiritual ground of knowing, teaching, and learning.

A Prayerful Education

Any attempt to develop “a spirituality of education” is full of peril. It invites a host of resistances, distortions, and misunderstandings. Education is supposed to deal with the tangible realities of science and the marketplace. Spirituality is supposed to address an invisible world whose reality is dubious at best. Many of our schools are supported by the state which is legally barred from imposing religious claims on its citizens. The nurture of spiritual life is regarded as a function of family and church. So any effort to recover the spiritual grounds of education seems to run into that wall of separation we have erected between sacred and secular, private and public, the church and the state.

The challenge of this book—and its central irony—can be illustrated by the continuing debate over prayer in school. Many people yearn for a return of “religiousness” to education, so they press for laws permitting vocal prayer in the classroom. But I cannot join them. Vocal prayer in class dictates a consensus that does not exist in our pluralistic society, and any prayer that is so vaguely worded that it sounds agreeable to all is, by my limits, no prayer at all.

I cannot support such prayer because I am too deeply concerned about the problem it pretends to address. There is an illness in our culture; it arises from our rigid separation of the visible world from the powers that undergird and animate it. With that separation we diminish life, capping off its sources of healing, hope, and wholeness. We cannot settle for pious prayer as a preface to conventional education. Instead, we must allow the power of love to transform the very knowledge we teach, the very methods we use to teach and learn it.

While rejecting laws allowing moments of vocal prayer, I am calling for a mode of knowing and educating that is prayerful through and through. What do I mean by prayer? I mean the practice of relatedness.

On one side, prayer is our capacity to enter into that vast community of life in which self and other, human and nonhuman, visible and invisible, are intricately intertwined. While my senses discriminate and my mind dissects, my prayer acknowledges and recreates the unity of life. In prayer, I no longer set myself apart from others and the world, manipulating them to suit my needs. Instead, I reach for relationship, allow myself to feel the tuggings of mutuality and accountability, take my place in community by knowing the transcendent center that connects it all.

On the other side, prayer means opening myself to the fact that as I reach for that connecting center, the center is reaching for me. As I move toward the heart of reality, reality is moving toward my heart. As I recollect the unity of life, life is recollecting me in my original wholeness. In prayer, I not only address the love at the core of all things; I listen as that love addresses me, calling me out of isolation and self-centeredness into community and compassion. In prayer, I begin to realize that I not only know but am known.

Here is the insight most central to spiritual experience: we are known in detail and depth by the love that created and sustains us, known as members of a community of creation that depends on us and on which we depend. This love knows our limits as well as our potential, our capacity for evil as well as good, the persistent self-centeredness with which we exploit the community for our own ends. Yet, as love, it does not seek to confine or manipulate us. Instead, it offers us the constant grace of self-knowledge and acceptance that can liberate us to live a larger love.

In prayer we allow ourselves to be known by love, to receive this freeing and redeeming knowledge of ourselves. In prayer we learn to know others and the world in the same loving way. The mind immersed in prayer no longer thinks in order to divide and conquer, to manipulate and control. Now, thinking becomes an
act of love, a way of acknowledging our common bonds and assuming our rightful role in the created community.

Thomas Merton, who was also concerned with educating in love, once wrote that “the purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself authentically and spontaneously in relation to his world—not to impose a prefabricated definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of the individual himself.” Merton’s words resonate with our secular, humanistic tradition, in which self and world are the great subjects of education and freedom and truth the great goals. But when education is not prayerful, when it does not center on transcendence, it fails to create authentic and spontaneous relations between the self and the world. Such an education allows self and world to imprison each other in prefabricated definitions that issue neither in freedom nor in truth.

When education divorces self and world from their transcendent source, they become locked in an endless power struggle to create each other in their own image. Since a self and a world that do not allow themselves to be known by love have a distorted self-image, the outcome of that struggle is always unfreedom and untruth. Such an education either turns out people who force their own inner distortions on the world, or it produces people who have succumbed to the world’s distortion of themselves.

The self creates the world by means of projection. Much of the world’s violence, for example, is an acting-out of the violence we find within ourselves, an effort to get rid of our inner demons by projecting them “out there.” We help create the outward enemy (be it Russians or Asians, blacks or WASPs) to distract us from the inward enemy who always threatens to overcome us. More subtly, the self creates the world by forcing it into the limits of our own capacity to know. If we can know only what is available to our senses and our logic, then reality is reduced to those narrow terms.

The world creates the self by means of conditioning—the very systems of conditioning with which education is so preoccupied.

Taken as a physical-chemical system, the world shapes us into creatures governed by bodily needs and desires. Taken as a political system, the world casts us in the roles of exploiters or victims of power. Taken as a system of ideas, the world makes us into pure minds. And since education takes the world in all these ways and more, breaking it into fragments called “disciplines” with little attempt at unity, we finally understand ourselves as having no more coherence than the fragmented world itself.

Only by transcending self and world can we find the authenticity and spontaneity, the truth and freedom, of which Merton speaks. As long as we stay locked in their closed logic, allowing self and world to circle each other in an endless quest for power, we have little choice: dominate or be dominated. But when we know self and world from the vital center touched in prayer—and when our prayer allows us to be known—then we are free from the cycle of dominance, free to love the world, each other, and ourselves. An education in transcendence prepares us to see beyond appearances into the hidden realities of life—beyond facts into truth, beyond self-interest into compassion, beyond our flagging energies and nagging despairs into the love required to renew the community of creation.

We must resist the popular tendency to think of transcendence as an upward and outward escape from the realities of self and world. Instead, transcendence is a breaking-in, a breathing of the Spirit of love into the heart of our existence, a literal in-spiration that allows us to regard ourselves and our world with more trust and hope than ever before. To experience transcendence means to be removed—not from self and world, but from that hall of mirrors in which the two endlessly reflect and determine one another. Prayer takes us out—not out of self and world, but out of their closed, circular logic.

If our education, and our knowledge itself, became prayerful through and through, we would create a great countercurrent to the tides of cynicism and violence in this “well educated” society of ours. Formed in transcendence, the knowledge of physical science would be less readily translated into devices to destroy the
ecology of earth; the insights of social science would be less easily turned into programs of social and political manipulation that break our faith with one another; and literary studies would be less likely to breed cultured despisers of our common life. An education in transcendence would open us to compassion and the great work of co-creation.

Knowing Face to Face

I have spoken of spirituality in general terms so far, but now I must become more specific. There is no such thing as “spirituality in general.” Every spiritual search is and must be guided by a particular literature, practice, and community of faith. In my definition of transcendence I have already suggested the source on which this book draws. It is the Christian tradition, whose central claim is not that God takes us out of ourselves and our world into ethereal realms, but that God broke in to reveal us and our world as we are: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In this movement Spirit and matter were fused and made whole; the distinction we make between sacred and secular was overcome; self and world were permeated with transcendent possibility, the possibility of love.

In Christian tradition, truth is not a concept that “works” but an incarnation that lives. The “Word” our knowledge seeks is not a verbal construct but a reality in history and the flesh. Christian tradition understands truth to be embodied in personal terms, the terms of one who said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” Where conventional education deals with abstract and impersonal facts and theories, an education shaped by Christian spirituality draws us toward incarnate and personal truth. In this education we come to know the world not simply as an objectified system of empirical objects in logical connection with each other, but as an organic body of personal relations and responses, a living and evolving community of creativity and compassion. Education of this sort means more than teaching the facts and learning the reasons so we can manipulate life toward our ends. It means being drawn into personal responsiveness and accountability to each other and the world of which we are a part.

The most lyrical expression of these themes is found in Paul’s famous teaching on love in 1 Corinthians 13:

If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. . . .

Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offense, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people’s sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes.

Love does not come to an end. But if there are gifts of prophecy, the time will come when they must fail; or the gift of languages, it will not continue forever; and knowledge—for this too, the time will come when it must fail. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect; but once perfection comes, all imperfect things disappear. When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and think like a child, and argue like a child, but now I am a man, all childish ways are put behind me. Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known.

In short, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.

On this “day after Trinity,” two thousand years after Paul’s words were written, we can appreciate what Paul means when he says that our present knowledge is “imperfect,” that “the time will come when it must fail.” He describes the sources of that failure with unerring accuracy when he likens our knowledge to “a dim reflection in a mirror”—the reflections created by a self and a world endlessly looking for chances to shape and dominate each other, reflections that distort the world and ourselves.

But Paul goes beyond criticism to give us an image of the
knowledge we must seek: “then we shall be seeing face to face.” This is the personal knowledge toward which Christian spirituality calls us, a knowledge that does not distance us from the world but brings us into community, face to face. A knowledge that heals and makes whole will come as we look creation in the eyes and allow it to look back, not only searching nature but allowing it to search us as well. This will be perfect knowledge, Paul says, for “then I shall know as fully as I am known.” The “objects” of our knowledge will no longer be objects but beings with personal faces, related to us in a community of being, calling us into mutuality and accountability. It will be as the poet Rilke says, “... There is no place at all that isn’t looking at you—you must change your life.”

Yet Paul understands that we are between the times, between the dim knowledge that distorts our lives and the truth that sees us whole. So Paul urges us to reach for the deepest source of knowledge—love—allowing it to transform our way of knowing and being. This love “is always patient and kind; it is never jealous... never boastful or conceited.” Transformed by love, we do not arrogantly impose our powers on the world around us or allow the world to overcome us. Transformed by love we use our minds to recall and recreate the community in which we were created, to know the world in the same spirit in which we are known.

2. Education as Spiritual Formation

Monastic Disciplines and the School

In Genesis we are told that humankind was first formed “in the image of God,” the image of love. But as we move from myth to human history, the image of God within us becomes dim or forgotten, distorted or obscured. From the moment of birth other powers imprint our souls with images less than divine.

Spiritual communities have long recognized how difficult it is to affirm the reality of love when history and our own biographies offer so much evidence of division, destruction, and death. So they have developed spiritual disciplines, daily practices by which we can resist these deformations of self and world, recalling and recovering that image of love which seems hidden or beyond reach. Through the disciplines of spiritual formation we seek to be re-formed in our original, created image.

These disciplines have been especially emphasized in the monastery, that ancient form of spiritual community in which our schools have one historic taproot, and from which we can recover a sense of education as a process of spiritual formation. From monastic tradition I have learned three spiritual disciplines, three ways of maintaining contact with love’s reality in the midst of misleading appearances: the study of sacred texts, the practice of prayer and contemplation, and the gathered life of the community itself.

Through the study of sacred texts, I maintain contact with the spiritual tradition, with the seeking and finding of those who have gone before. These texts allow me to return to times of deeper spiritual insight than my own, to recollect truths that my