

## ***The journey of Roberta C. Bondi***

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*Praise be to the one God who speaks continually to our hearts, 'Be not afraid!'*

Roberta C. Bondi.<sup>1</sup>

*Be quite certain that when you truly encounter another human being and look with the eyes of wisdom and love you are not only seeing them in truth, you are truly seeing and meeting God in them. So pay attention, and never scorn or dismiss anybody as unimportant or unworthy of you.*

Roberta C. Bondi.<sup>2</sup>

*Love is a disposition we grow into, or are healed into, or are transformed into by God. It is a way of relating to the world, to God, to others, and to ourselves that includes a combination of actions, habits, ways of seeing, and making judgments, as well as feelings.*

Roberta C. Bondi.<sup>3</sup>

### **Introduction**

This little essay is about Roberta C. Bondi, a Benedictine oblate, and her spiritual pilgrimage. Bondi's life and writings have been a real grace in my life, and it is my hope that through this reflective summary she may grace the lives of others by taking readers from this slim *bors d'oeuvre* to the very substantial *entrée* of her own corpus of writing. What is so special about Bondi? I think it is that she has the gift of blending theology and

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<sup>1</sup> Roberta C. Bondi, *Memories of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Roberta C. Bondi, "God 101: Back to School with Julian of Norwich," *The Christian Century* (August 28-September 10, 2002, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Roberta C. Bondi, *A Place to Pray* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 94.

spirituality, autobiography and psychology in a very credible way. One readily understands her work, and identifies with her insights.

Let us begin with the all too obvious realization that everyone carries baggage with them through life, no exceptions. Each of us is born into a particular family with its own history of joys, works, sufferings, and psychological challenges. It is of the highest importance to have some degree of awareness and consciousness of our baggage because, without that awareness, we will certainly be less happy and content as we move through the life-cycle, and our relationship with God and creation, always fragile, will be deeply impaired. These fairly self-evident truths lead Roberta Bondi to affirm that “Both our unexamined, gut-level images of God and our basic patterns of relating to other people are formed very early in us out of our childhood experiences of parents, grandparents, teachers, or ministers who are in a position of nurture and authority over us.”<sup>4</sup> It is one thing to affirm that *notionally*, of course, and quite another *really* to accept it, but, once accepted, growth in relationship with God and creation becomes a genuine and immensely satisfying possibility. Not everyone grasps this because it is far from easy to accept that “It is sin, and the wounding that comes from it that above all gets in the way of our ability to see God or the world for what it is.”<sup>5</sup> Difficulty in real acceptance of these ideas flows from the difficulty of realizing that our parents and the significant mediators of Christianity to us were not perfect but flawed, that we are not perfect but flawed, and that the flaws from them to us are deep inside us.

Who is Roberta C. Bondi? She is a Methodist theologian and church historian. She taught for many years --- and she is now *emerita* – at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta. She was brought up in the 1950s and 60s, and shares with us in her writings the joys, sorrows and challenges of her Christian upbringing and development. Her upbringing and personal experience are not especially unique. We all have our joys, sorrows and challenges, but when we read about those of someone else, there issues from that reading and engagement an invitation to spiritual growth.

### **Early Wounding**

“The oldest child of two young, perfectionistic parents who were both convinced that I could do very little right and that my every action at any given minute was about to reflect badly upon them, I grew up with a sen-

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<sup>4</sup> *A Place to Pray*, p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> Roberta C. Bondi, *Nick the Cat: Christian Reflections on the Stranger* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), p. 52.

se of living under a continual negative human judgment rendered or about to be rendered against me.”<sup>6</sup> Thus does Bondi describe her parents and their parenting. Small wonder, then, that she experienced herself as: “A timid, little girl who was afraid of everything... A lonely child who could never seem to fit in... A child who worried about God and the cosmic meaning of things.”<sup>7</sup> Roberta was shy, and consequently spent a lot of her time in books. Her parents divorced when she was eleven and a half.

In her various writings she goes on to unpack some of her baggage. For example, her difficulty in thinking about her father and about God as Father: “I was already intimidated by what I saw in my father as the same combination of fixed, often inexplicable law and unpredictable anger that would blaze out at me when I violated his commands by my deliberate or accidental disobedience.”<sup>8</sup> God the Father was intertwined with and mangled by the often indeliberate, non-malicious but severely dysfunctional fathering.

She went to college in Iowa, and was married at eighteen to a boy of twenty-one, Glenn Chesnut. He reminded her of her father, pretty much absent from her life after the trauma of the divorce when she was a child. She looks back on her marriage and describes it in these terms: “I spent the years between eighteen and thirty-five in an excruciatingly anxious marriage in which I could not please my husband. I was bitterly blamed by him for everything in the universe that made him unhappy, including not only forgetting to bring home all the items on the grocery list, but also bad weather and his father’s death.”<sup>9</sup> She continued from college to graduate school with her husband. Both attended seminary at Southern Methodist University, Dallas. This was her initial exposure to academic theology and it had a particular feel to it: “Serious theology concerned itself only with what theologians assumed was universally true. It did not waste its time addressing the personal and the ‘subjective,’ the everyday or the particular... Theology was abstract, logical, propositional, and systematic, and so was its God.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, men were the thinkers, women were the feelers.

In 1963, she bought herself a Hebrew Grammar and a Hebrew Bible, and developed an interest in the Semitic Languages of Scripture and early Christianity. With these foundations Roberta went, along with her husband, to Oxford University, England, for doctoral work initially in Hebrew

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<sup>6</sup> Roberta C. Bondi, *Night on the Flint River: An Accidental Journey in Knowing God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *A Place to Pray*, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> *Night on the Flint River*, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 9.

and Old Testament studies, but later moving into early church history. Glenn also was researching early church history. As in seminary, here too Roberta found theology to be very objective: “In both places the importance of putting aside one’s individual experience and commitments for the sake of rationality, ‘real theology,’ and objectivity was stressed.”<sup>11</sup> An acute example of this clinical objectivity that made an impression on her came through the Regius Professor of Hebrew, the Scotsman, James Barr. Reading the Book of Job in class. Roberta asked him: “Can we talk about the meaning of the Book of Job?” Barr replied: “My dear madam, that is something to ask your tutor in the privacy of your own tutorial.”<sup>12</sup> Although Barr’s goal in class may have been to increase his pupils’ proficiency in Hebrew, the Book of Job speaks to human experience so powerfully that it is difficult to understand how a teacher might not seize such an opportunity. It confirmed Roberta’s understanding that theology to be theology must be objective, unrelated to human experience.

Eventually, she moved over from biblical studies to the history of early Christian thought. She studied Syriac with L. H. Brockington, at the time the most recent editor of T. H. Robinson’s famous *Introductory Syriac Grammar*. On one occasion, as she found herself in the Bodleian Library looking for a dissertation topic, looking through many ancient Syriac texts, she came across “The Thirteen Ascetical Homilies of Philoxenus of Mabbug.” This collection of homilies from the Egyptian desert became a focus of her research, eventually published as *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug*.<sup>13</sup> Her depression, the intensity of her challenges, and her ongoing research prompted her to find a temporary refuge for three days in the Anglican Benedictine House in Oxford. There she sensed a freedom in the sisters, a healing freedom that assisted her own slow healing.

The homilies of Philoxenus, along with the writings and sayings of the desert *ammās*/mothers and *abbas*/fathers opened her eyes to a different kind of God. These early Christian witnesses remain with her as a source of personal renewal and spiritual renewal. We may see in her engagement with them the beginnings of a transition to a different way of doing theology and thinking about spirituality. Most of these *abbas* and *ammās* lived in the ancient Near East: in Egypt, Palestine and Syria from the fourth through the sixth centuries. Obviously our culture, our times, are so very different from theirs. So, it’s not a matter simply of absorbing what these

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<sup>11</sup> *A Place to Pray*, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), published under her name at the time, Roberta C. Chesnut.

ancients have said, but much more a process of discussion with them, of dialogue with them: “The agenda of ancient Christianity is not always ours. Here is where we must remember that this is to be a dialogue, a back-and-forth movement between our agenda and theirs. They must be free to tell it as they see it; we must not always expect to agree or even like what they have to say.”<sup>14</sup> In any real discussion our personal experience, and reflection based on that experience, must be open to challenge and correction, or, quite simply, there is no discussion. At the same time, we do not simply or immediately abandon our reflection as we listen to another. There is a mutual challenge going on in real discussion, inviting mutual enrichment and not compelling personal capitulation. And so, precisely through her love of the ancient monastics, Roberta refuses to canonize them. She and they, we and they, choose to engage in mutual gifting, not in apotheosis. Speaking of love as the perfect goal of Christian life for both the ancients and us, she comments: “Some brothers and sisters probably never knew any better; others did what human beings of all periods do: they simply forgot their goal, confusing their means with their end. We find many stories warning against such a confusion... No amount of pious behavior or Christian discipline can replace love.”<sup>15</sup>

Further, she learned from these ancient Christians that there is no one right way to live in communion with God. Of course, Christians have much in common, sharing a single goal. But she writes: “There is no one single right route everyone must follow to get there. People are different from each other... Because they took the necessity of diversity so seriously, one text sometimes even seems to contradict another...”<sup>16</sup> Thus, there is no fear of diversity. A certain kind of spiritual pragmatism is established: find out what works *for you*, and don’t be so certain that the particularities of your way must be infallibly the particularities of everyone’s way. “Abba Poemen said that Abba John said that the saints are like a group of trees, each bearing different fruit, but watered from the same source. The practices of one saint differ from those of another, but it is the same Spirit that works in all of them.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Further Wounding**

Roberta and Glenn Chesnut returned to the United States, and she started teaching at the University of Notre Dame in 1970. She was still finishing her dissertation, and this was still the time when college teaching,

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<sup>14</sup> *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *To Love as God Loves*, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> *To Love as God Loves*, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *To Love as God Loves*, p. 12.

perhaps especially in theology, was widely regarded as a man's world of privilege. As she made her way into teaching the history of Christian thought, Roberta taught this discipline of theology in the manner in which she had been taught theology, that is to say objectively, as though it had nothing to do with one's own spirituality or experience. "I was perpetuating in my students the same problems I had in my own education. I was stifling their most pressing questions and encouraging them to believe that reflection on their own experience in light of the theology they were studying was only a private, pious exercise."<sup>18</sup>

Two children were born to the couple: in the middle of her dissertation, her daughter, Anna Grace, and five years later, Benjamin. Roberta's struggles were now exacerbated. She was struggling with the children, with her husband, and most especially with herself. Once Glenn said to Roberta after she had said something theologically embarrassing at a party: "Did you know you make a fool of yourself every time you open your mouth to talk about something that isn't the early church?" Roberta comments on this episode: "Self-consciously, for years afterwards, at parties, conferences, faculty meetings I remembered what he told me and I kept a watch over my mouth."<sup>19</sup> Looking back on her life, she recognizes that she had been suffering from depression until she was about forty-five: "By the time I was forty-seven years old, my depression finally grew so deep that I might as well have been living in a cave."<sup>20</sup>

### **The Slow Healing**

The Chesnuts divorced, and Roberta moved to the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. There she met and married a younger man, Richard Bondi, an ethicist. He was a real companion to her, and became a real, caring father to her two children. Years later, reflecting on her desert *ammās* and *abbas*, and equally on her own personal journey through life, she writes: "Most human beings fail to love or love badly a lot of the time. This is because we are dominated by the fear of death and of our own physical and emotional vulnerability, and by our ways of compensating for this fear. We need power over other people. We are afraid of the future. We suffer from envy, resentments, depression, hyperactivity, and boredom."<sup>21</sup> Out of her dual reflection, out of Christian history and out of her own personal, existential history, significant change began to take place for her.

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<sup>18</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Night on the Flint River*, p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 165.

<sup>21</sup> *To Love as God Loves*, p. 20.

Her teaching began to change. She came to see that theology is about “saving lives, and the work of theology... is saving work.”<sup>22</sup> She encouraged students to bring their own experience and theological convictions “into conversation with the ancient material,”<sup>23</sup> so that she and they practiced “The kind of theological reflection... in which, in the presence of God, we bring the whole of who we are, and what we have actually experienced --- emotionally, bodily, rationally --- into truthful conversation with scripture and the tradition.”<sup>24</sup> Theology thus interacted with one’s living, and ceased to be what it should never have been, a purely intellectual discipline.

Her prayer life began to change. “While this new way of teaching was evolving, I also began a daily discipline of prayer that committed me to facing many issues that had hurt me for a long time. The method of this prayer involved a careful and painful examination of my life and of my corresponding theology as it had affected me since childhood.”<sup>25</sup> Let us linger for a moment with some of her thoughts on prayer, in concert with her beloved monastic *ammās* and *abbas*. “I have learned that prayer is also a movement between us and the whole Christian community, ancient and modern, as we learn from it, critique it, find our feet in it, and are sustained by it.”<sup>26</sup> The verbs are important in this sentence: learn, critique, find our feet, sustain. Each verb names a moment in the process of prayer. “Learning prayer” means that it comes to us from others, like everything else in learning. We pick it up from those who have gone before us, and in turn, have learned to pray from those who have gone before them. “Critiquing prayer” means that as we pray we will find ourselves constantly engaged in a mutual intellectual challenge. The words and ideas we have learned and use we need to think through: What do they mean? Have I grasped this adequately? Equally, these words and ideas will challenge and stretch our own self-understanding, our presuppositions about God and life, and also our baggage. “Finding our feet” suggests a growing confidence in the process of prayer. In the beginning, and for most of us a very long beginning, prayer is a fumbling around, a not being too sure of what we are saying or doing, at times a very strong reliance on the prayer formulas of others who have taught us. But, then, we begin to find our feet, and more confidently move into our own prayer words. Finally, we are sustained by prayer. It holds us up, gives us energy, brings consola-

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<sup>22</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> *A Place to Pray*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> *To Pray and to Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 12.

tion, invites us to weep and to lament. It becomes the shape of our living. "Prayer is sharing ordinary life, with its ordinary silences, distractions, pains and pleasures, with God."<sup>27</sup> And so these ancient, often forgotten Christian sources of wisdom have mediated to her an understanding of prayer that she now mediates to others: "Perhaps most significantly the ancient teachers have taught me not to be discouraged with my own prayer but to persist in it, for prayer, like love, as a way of life is not something that comes to us ready-made simply by deciding we want it. We learn it with the help of the Holy Spirit over a lifetime by practicing it, pondering it, and using the resources, including Scripture, that other Christians have passed on to us."<sup>28</sup>

Her understanding of God began slowly to change. Over against the judgmental God of her childhood, Roberta began to discover "The gentle and generous God of the early monks."<sup>29</sup> Her words are powerful and very moving, especially as we appreciate something of the change, the painful change that has come about in her life: "I cannot believe that God is cruel, nor do I think that fear is an appropriate response to God's will. What does fear have to do with our anticipation of God's Kingdom? Nothing, except for the fear of missing it altogether because we refuse to participate in it, or of not paying attention to it when it is right under our noses. 'Don't be afraid,' Jesus again and again tells his followers in the Gospels. 'Do not be afraid.'... The God my ancient teachers showed to me was one who at the same time was infinitely mysterious and an intimate lover of individuals. This was a God who draws (and was drawing me) into relationship, a God who was tolerant of human weakness of all sorts in a way no human being in my life had ever been."<sup>30</sup> She was growing out over a pusillanimous way of thinking about God to a generous and magnanimous way of thinking.

The God that Roberta comes to acknowledge is the God whose best name is Love (1 John 4:8). She waxes lyrically of this God: "God is love. God loves beyond our dreams, extravagantly, without limit. Whatever we might imagine God's love for us to be, it is far deeper, steadier, gentler. It cannot be manipulated or bargained with. It cannot be earned or lost. In the words of Psalm 125, it surrounds us as the mountains surround Jerusalem. It fills the whole creation with light. It shines with a kind of joy in the heavens, and it illuminates each blade of grass, each tiny bug, opening our eyes to see them. It is the air we breathe, the ground we walk on, the

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<sup>27</sup> *In Ordinary Time* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> *To Pray and to Love*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 133.

<sup>30</sup> *A Place to Pray*, pp. 61, 78.

food we eat.”<sup>31</sup> This is the God of the mystics, indeed, it is the God of the truly Catholic tradition. It is the God of Jesus. Because to see Jesus is to see the Father, Roberta began to realize that “To name God Father in prayer is not to submit to a God who tells us as women to be respectful of the *status quo*. It is, rather, to invoke God’s fatherhood as a mighty corrective against all the murderous images of fallen fatherhood that hold our hearts and persons, our churches and our world captive.”<sup>32</sup> Gradually, these changes enabled her to recover a relationship with her own father: “The man whom I had seen as my all-powerful and invincible father not only wanted me as I am, but also needed me to stand by him through the long journey into his own death. It still seems to me to be an astonishing gift of God’s grace that in the last years of his life I was able to stand with him as his friend who was his adult child.”<sup>33</sup> What a truly wonderful thing to be able to say!

Roberta has a full but never naive conviction in the power of prayer to heal our woundedness. The promise of God’s story, the promise of the Scriptures, and at least the implicit promise of the desert monastics is that “In God all things are finally healed.” She acknowledges that some of God’s healing will only be completed at the Parousia when God is all in all. This is the meaning of some words of Abba Antony about Jesus gathering us in: “[He will continue to gather] us out of all regions, till he should make resurrection of our hearts from the earth, and teach us that we are all of one substance, and members of one another. For [the one] who loves his [or her] neighbor, loves God: and [the one] who loves God, loves his [or her] own soul.” At the same time, however, she says: “But much more than most of us are ever willing to imagine can be healed in the course of this life as well if we truly seek it and do not dictate to God what shape that healing is to take.” Her confidence of healing in this life proceeds, at least in part, from her understanding of the communion of saints. “In the very body of Christ, although our unity in a single humanity is far from complete, we have truly begun to be as closely bound to one another as we were meant to be. It is because of this very real unity with each other in Christ that we never pray alone. Of course, we pray as individuals. Nevertheless always joined to our prayers are the prayers of all those who have ever been lovers of God, as well as the other Christians, living or dead, who make up the Body of Christ with us.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *To Love as God Loves*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>32</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> *Memories of God*, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> *To Pray and to Love*, p. 45.

### **This God Who Is Love**

The changes that brought about a graceful healing for Roberta have made God's love for us utterly permeative in her thought and writing. "As images of God, we are beloved by God, who loves us as unwaveringly and responsively as a mother loves her baby... God's love is not the love of a dispassionate and just king for his distant subjects. It is intimate, tender, and vulnerable, as a mother's is for her baby." She continues, citing Abba Macarius: "A baby, though it is powerless to accomplish anything or with its own feet to go to its mother, still it rolls and makes noises and cries as it seeks its mother... And she picks it up and fondles it and feeds it with great love. This is also what God, the Lover of [humankind], does to the person that comes to [God] and ardently desires [God]."<sup>35</sup>

Additional teaching responsibilities in the field of church history took her into the Middle Ages, and there she too found her connection. There she found her favorite medieval *amma*, Julian of Norwich, about whom she avers: "She was a saint to whom God gave a deeper and more radical sense of God's love than to any other human being I have ever known or read, and God gave her such a sense, according to her own testimony, not for herself alone, but for the upbuilding of all God's people."<sup>36</sup> Julian's testimony surely may not be de-limited to a medieval anchoress, but provides the foundation of all forms of vowed religious life, and, indeed, of all Christian life.

From the desert mothers and fathers, Roberta came to learn: "The early monastic conviction that love of God and love of neighbor is the goal of the Christian life. For our Christian forebears only a person who loves is a fully functioning human being. Yet, because of the presence of sin in the world, loving as God intends for us does not come easily. Learning to love is, in fact, what the Christian life is about, and it is a lifetime's enterprise. Prayer is a profoundly integral part of this enterprise of learning to love." She cites Abba Antony: "From our neighbour are life and death. If we do good to our neighbour, we do good to God: if we cause our neighbour to stumble, we sin against Christ."<sup>37</sup>

This idea is made even more explicit in one of Roberta's favorite desert *abbas*, Dorotheos of Gaza. "Browsing through his homilies," she notes, "the reader is struck by how much space Dorotheos gives to the problems of judgmentalism and self-righteousness which must have been common in his monastery." She often turns to an illustration that came to her from this sixth century Palestinian desert monastic. "Supposing we

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<sup>35</sup> *To Pray and to Love*, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Night on the Flint River*, p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> *To Pray and to Love*, pp. 13, 31.

were to take a compass and insert the point and draw the outline of a circle. The center point is the same distance from any point on the circumference... Let us suppose that this circle is the world and God is the center; the straight lines drawn from the circumference to the center are the lives of [human beings]... But at the same time, the closer they are to God, the closer they become to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they become to God.”<sup>38</sup> She comments at some length on these wise words of Dorotheos: “This love of other people who are God’s images is not an abstract love of humanity, a warm feeling of kinship toward humankind in general. It is very easy to love in the abstract --- the homeless, children, the suffering. It is not so hard to love those with whom we have infrequent or only surface contact when love is defined as a kind of unfocused friendly feeling... [The monastics] knew that love required them to be attentive to the people with whom they spent most of their time, people whom they could find irritating from such close contact, or people whose presence they might so much take for granted that they hardly noticed them at all. It would appear that for them, as for us, it was easy to love in a crisis situation. When it came to the ‘little things’ of ordinary life, however, it was another matter.” This real love of God and love of one another is “the long-term attitude of heart which must be learned...”<sup>39</sup>

It hardly needs to be pointed out, as she notes with Evagrius of Pontus, that it is impossible to love every one equally: “It is not possible to love all the brethren to the same degree. But it is possible to associate with all in a manner that is... free of resentment and hatred.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, “We are not asked to enjoy the company of all people equally. Nevertheless, we are commanded to deal with everyone out of the very disposition of love.”<sup>41</sup> Unless we see the love of God and the love of our fellows as inextricably and irrevocably bound up one with the other, we live as a split personality with all its negative consequences: “There is a whole generation of schizophrenic Christians who have two personalities, one for God and the church, and another for the everyday world of science and common sense. They do not see the intimate relationship Dorotheos sees between the love of God and the love of other people.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *To Pray and to Love*, pp. 14-15, 32; *To Love as God Loves*, p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> *To Pray and to Love*, pp. 32-33; *To Love as God Loves*, p. 31.

<sup>40</sup> *To Pray and to Love*, p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> *To Love as God Loves*, p. 33.

<sup>42</sup> *To Love as God Loves*, p. 26.

## Conclusion

To lay out something of one's spiritual pilgrimage in public writing is enormously courageous. One might compare Roberta's corpus of writing with St. Augustine's *Confessions*, or with Cardinal Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. One Newman commentator believes that we have in the *Apologia* "a literature not mainly of argument but of experience."<sup>43</sup> I think we may fairly say this of Roberta Bondi. Both experienced a difficult pilgrimage through life, at least in part, both combated depression and a variety of challenges. Both found in the literature of Christian history and tradition support and invitation to grow. Both, albeit in rather different circumstances, have invited us into the inner sanctum of their spiritual pilgrimage. Newman knew and Roberta knows that "being a Christian means learning to love with God's love."<sup>44</sup> Their lives demonstrate the experience, and provide us with encouragement and hope that we too may learn to love with God's love, whatever our difficulties, whatever our circumstances.

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<sup>43</sup> William E. Buckler, "The *Apologia* as Human Experience," in Vincent F. Blehl, S.J. and Francis X. Connolly, ed., *Newman's Apologia: A Classic Reconsidered* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964), p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> *To Love as God Loves*, p. 107.