

Learning by heart

by [Hannah Faith Notess](#) in the [June 27, 2006](#) issue

The service will be over in ten minutes, but we're stuck
saying the creed. It's hot. Our voices
run together, muddled, a swampy stream.
We stick at the sibilants, slogging through, plodding on.

No clarity, except for when we all pause
for the same breath, suck up all the air
in the room, and use it to shape these worn-out words
so many have already spent breath saying.

I believe—

—who was conceived by the Virgin married, I say, a slip
I hope no one heard, but then a man behind me
falters, mumbles something about light (that isn't in this one)

and I recall saying the Nicene Creed standing
beside one of my college professors
who quietly called the Holy Spirit "She"—

—She has spoken to us through the prophets, I tried saying
once, but then all day, I couldn't stop thinking about
Her, deep in those quiet conversations, handing over words

to be handed down, the ones we should have
learned by heart by now. How disappointed she must be
we still slip after all this time?

We're walking along the rickety edge of Babel

trying to learn by heart, without reading,

trying to walk by faith, still slipping.