

# WOMEN AND THE EXERCISES: SIN, STANDARDS AND NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS

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## *Introduction*

A PART OF THE RICH IGNATIAN LEGACY to the Church in the last 450 years since the founding of the Society of Jesus, it may be said that more women than men have made the Spiritual Exercises. This fact was hinted at by one Jesuit retreat director, that the viability of the Exercises was assured by the opportunity presented by the 200,000 Sisters in the U.S. who made an annual retreat, and this could very often be one according to the Ignatian model!<sup>1</sup> While the number of religious sisters has drastically declined in the last twenty-five years since this optimistic forecast, it is probably fair to say that women outnumber men among those seeking to make the Spiritual Exercises today.

Projects to adapt the language, imagery and process of the Spiritual Exercises to the needs of contemporary society and Church have been successfully and regularly undertaken since Vatican II, especially in the last two decades. International projects of the 1980s have included anthologies published in Rome and Canada.<sup>2</sup> In the U.S., reflections on adaptations of the Exercises regularly appear in *Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits*.<sup>3</sup> An adaptation by Fleming acknowledges a need to re-translate and re-cast the language of Ignatius's directives for the retreat,<sup>4</sup> while Tetlow's project admirably naturalizes the language of explaining the process, revises images for Ignatius's principal meditations, and shows creativity in adapting the approach to the situation of lay-people pressured by the daily demands of their work and family lives.<sup>5</sup>

Ignatius certainly intended that the Exercises be inclusive of women and men, lay as well as religious. The verbs of Annotation 1

place emphasis of the actions of persons, and do not specify the gender of retreatants. The Exercises are for the person ready 'to examine one's conscience, to meditate, to contemplate, to engage in prayer, vocal and mental, and other spiritual activities' (Exx 1).<sup>6</sup> *La persona que contempla* (Exx 2) is inclusive of all those who wish to seek and find the will of God. Later, Ignatius does not exclude the elderly, the frail or the strong (Exx 129) but advises that adjustments in the Exercises be made for them by their director.<sup>7</sup> Certainly in the outlook of Ignatius, the Exercises could be made by women as well as men, since both were persons seeking the will of God, wanting to hear God's word and follow it.

However, the assumption of Ignatius's inclusivity has nevertheless not included attention to directors' and retreatants' assessment of differences between the spiritualities of women and those of men. In the adaptations of the language and process of the Exercises to the changed situation and needs of contemporary retreatants, there are no sustained treatments of the issues posed by the gender of the retreatants. It has been presumed that men and women do not differ in their spiritualities. While they may differ physically, they are fundamentally the same as persons before God in the pattern of their spiritual development.

It can be left to another study to reflect on the process of transmission of the Exercises and their relation to priestly ministration of the sacraments. Suffice it to say that the thousands of women who have profited from the Exercises have in the main, until only the last two decades, undertaken the process almost exclusively under the direction of male retreat directors. As in the sacrament of the confessional, the social roles of men and women within the setting of spiritual direction have been well fixed. It was to men that women disclosed the movements of their souls, and it was according to male-enunciated norms of discernment that the emotions and impressionistic tides within women were interpreted.

However, these roles and practices do not distinguish the process of directing and following the Exercises from the historical track of sacramental reception within the Church itself. Men have occupied the authoritative, directing and ministering roles within the Church. Women have been the receivers of men's ministry according to a theology of grace, Holy Spirit, conversion, suffering, mission and love articulated by male theologians. Both men and women presumed that the spirit itself was not sexually differentiated, and that differences between men and women were limited to

their bodies. This age-old resolution of gender distinctions may assume a base of spiritual sameness between men and women, but the assumption is beginning to reveal its social and ecclesial inadequacies.<sup>8</sup>

It must be acknowledged at the outset that Ignatius was a man of his time, with the social roles of women and men more rigidly defined than in our contemporary western society. That he sometimes thought about some women's concerns is evidenced in his letters to them. They provided much needed funding for his many projects and were to be thanked. They were in need of spiritual direction. Because of internal conflicts within their religious community, he was the authority to whom they preferred to give their religious obedience. They presented some delicate political and economic problems for the Society in their determination to become Jesuits themselves.<sup>9</sup>

However, the actual epistolary evidence suggests that he wrote comparatively few letters to women when one considers the vast corpus of 30 letters prior to the foundation of the society and the 6,813 extant letters from the foundation to his death (1541-1556) in five volumes.<sup>10</sup> It is merely an observation that Ignatius probably did not concern himself much with the spiritual needs of women as distinct from men's. The paucity of female addressees may reflect three biographical factors. In terms of Ignatius's life-history, relations with women were linked with his former way of life as a soldier and courtier before his Manresa experience. After his conversion, he devoted himself to a different life-project and no longer looked to romantic relations with women as confirmation of his manhood or as a vehicle to higher social status. Secondly Ignatius was absorbed by tasks of incorporating new members, launching missions and founding new institutions headed by members of the Society. Finally, Ignatius could only reflect the Church's tradition of spirituality which presumed the spiritual needs of men and women are, at root, identical because both are human beings, creatures of their Creator. The life, call and mission of Jesus Christ, witnessed in the New Testament, thus embodies the same ideal for all Christians.

It would be unfair, therefore, to expect Ignatius himself to enlighten issues concerning the specific spirituality of women and their making of the Spiritual Exercises today. However, the current social and ecclesial revolution in women's consciousness forms the backdrop for the gender-defined assumption that lies at the basis

of this present study: women's specific spiritual needs, soul-language and process of development are different from men's. To be manifest in women's spiritualities are

parts of the total human potential that have not been fully seen, recognized, or valued. These are parts that have not therefore flourished, [and] perhaps they are precisely the ingredients that we must bring into action in the conduct of human affairs.<sup>11</sup>

In maintaining there are significant differences between masculine and feminine experience, women propose that their own experience 'reveals in a more emphatic fashion certain aspects of the human situation which are present but less obvious in the experience of men'.<sup>12</sup> It may be questioned whether women's increasingly insistent and gender-specific concerns can always be addressed within the sequence of themes proposed by the four-week pattern envisioned by Ignatius, reconciled with the principal meditations of the traditional format of the Exercises, or channelled by the selection of New Testament scriptural texts proposed for meditation by Ignatius. For those seeking to adapt the Exercises, women themselves may be considered a specific manifestation of 'the world of the poor, the downtrodden, the disinherited', those who suffer invisibility 'in the world of widespread unbelief'.<sup>13</sup>

In exploring this question of gender-specificity in adapting the Exercises, what issues are highlighted when the present situation of women in the Church is acknowledged? If women, both lay and religious, continue to be the most numerous followers of the Exercises, it seems appropriate that their presence and voice have a major impact on the continuing adaptation of the Exercises in light of Ignatius's goal: that all find a path to a closer following of Jesus Christ and a carrying out of his mission in the world. In the service of making Ignatius's vision more accessible to women, I would like in this initial reflection to propose three topics arising from the Exercises in which the particular spiritual needs of women differentiate them from men who make the Exercises: women's experience of sin and evil, the challenges which confront their self-valuation as women in the meditation on Two Standards, and identification with Jesus in the scriptural texts proposed for women's reflection by retreat directors in the second week.

#### *1. Women's sense of sin and evil and the problematic of the first week*

One of the effects of the first week is surely to raise consciousness, penetrate a system of denial, and evoke a sense of personal

responsibility for one's actions within a context of remembering one's true relation to God. Ignatius no doubt knew women as well as men who took glory in themselves because of their noble lineage, but the considerations of the Foundation may reflect Ignatius's own personal struggle to counteract and contextualize 'a measureless pride, a sharp sense of his honour and glory, an imperious need to surpass himself, to do something big with his life'.<sup>14</sup> It may be said that typically women's experience of original sin today is not pride in an honourable lineage or an over-blown sense of self-worth, but shame and self-denigration. The reticence or depression commonly experienced by many women allies them less closely with self-assured nobility than with men as well as women recovering from addictions who suffer shame and self-hate. It is not pride that must be counteracted, but too little confidence in one's lovableness and acceptability in the eyes of God and others.

Women, however, suffer and endure human sinfulness in ways that differ from men. A woman's experience of sin is essentially related to her having been born a woman, and her vulnerability to particular evils that befall her because of her gender. The statistics of reported incidents of battering, rape, childhood sexual abuse and incest rise each year, suggesting that the silence is being broken surrounding women's long experience of evil as the violation of personal integrity and breakdown of trusting relationships.<sup>15</sup> Human sinfulness, taking the form of physical violation of women, is a pervasive expression of sexist behaviour with long-term and depressive effects on women's spirits.<sup>16</sup> By way of acknowledging this evil, the 1989 pastoral on women's concerns of the Canadian bishops focused attention on domestic violence suffered by women. The document proposes that the theological reinforcement of men's traditional gender roles is a crucial issue to address in discussing sexism within the Church.<sup>17</sup>

The economic disadvantages and consequent poverty endured by women, especially single mothers and elders, are documented facts of U.S. society. Systemic economic and political inequalities take multitudinous forms in the lives of women. Doing the same professional work as men, women are routinely paid less. They have less control over material resources than men; they own less property, direct fewer corporations, and are at the mercy of a juridical system whose laws are articulated and adjudicated largely

by men. Women who are separated or divorced are disproportionately burdened economically with the care of children. The U.S. bishops in their 1988 draft *Partners in redemption* acknowledged these inequalities as expressions of patriarchal sexism and injustice to women.<sup>18</sup>

Women know sin because they suffer physical violence, economic exploitation, social inequality, legal vulnerability as well as ecclesial sexism. Are women guilty of these sins? A similar question may be asked on behalf of both men and women of colour, or the economically disadvantaged in the Third World. Is the traditional language of examination of conscience, repentance, seeking of forgiveness, and conversion applicable to women whose inner spirit and domestic life bear the marks of the social sins of sexism? This is not to say women are free from the sins of commission and omission. However, one must begin to acknowledge that in many ethical contexts women's healing from sin calls for a different assessment of their relation to the commandments than men, and a different conception of examination of conscience, repentance, forgiveness and conversion.

From this perspective the God who seeks a reconciled relationship with humanity calls out different invitations to men than to women for a change of mind and heart. The continuing process of adapting the Spiritual Exercises with women in mind would involve reorientating the tone and theological perspective of the first week to reflect the actual starting place of many women in relation to sinfulness and evil. Given their centuries-long subordinate status in national decision-making and policy-setting, women's personal responsibility for social and structural sin in the world is probably different from the responsibility of men. Appropriate scriptural passages for many women, as well as men who are politically and economically oppressed, might be drawn from the prophetic literature which empowers the discouraged community, offers it another self-image than that of victim, and addresses exiles with hope for a changed future, e.g. Isai 42; 43; 54; 60; 62, and Jer 31 and 51.

## 2. *Women's relation to the life-option: the meditation on the Two Standards*

Ignatius, understandably in light of his experience as a soldier, proposes a basic election of life-orientation using the parable of two leaders and their two strategies (Exx 136-148). That this

metaphoric language of the military has become problematic for many men as well as women is acknowledged by Carroll in his recent study of the practical implementation of the Exercises.<sup>19</sup> Tetlow has successfully recast the language of this meditation, and proposed the parable in less military terms, focusing on the socially beneficial effects of good leadership, and the destructive social effects of self-interested leadership. Toward which outcome will a person direct his or her conscious choices? The meditation represents a life-choice: enslavement to self-interest, or liberation through allegiance to Jesus, and a shared mission which involves a letting go of economic advantages.<sup>20</sup>

From a woman's perspective, several issues deeper than the language or imagery arise in the adaptation of this contemplation. The male metaphors for God, such as king and lord, certainly pose anthropological as well as theological issues well rehearsed by feminist theologians.

Since the concept of God defines and orients a whole way of life and understanding, sustaining a moral universe, the exclusive masculinity presumed in the traditional doctrine of God has also had profound consequences beyond the idea of God.<sup>21</sup>

From a woman's perspective, the imaginative picture of two leaders, evoking the world-view of a Christian crusader, rests on a dichotomous split between a world dominated by the force of good, and that dominated by evil. The Church, in its devotion to the truth and leadership of Christ, is sure to realize victory over God's enemies. Granted, such a perspective has biblical grounding in the literature of the Johannine community. In the Old Testament the victory-defeat dynamic is a conventional biblical image for expressing confidence in the eventual outcome of God's action in the world, especially in 'holy war' passages of the Pentateuch and the prophetic literature of consolation.

In Ignatius's view, the conquest of evil may be understood under the metaphor of the crusade, in which the dividing lines between faithful and infidel, truth and heresy, courage and self-interest are implicitly clear. An empowering image for Ignatius and several generations of the Church, a crusade spirituality releases dreams of the dynamic expansion of the Kingdom of Christ, endows the crusader with courage for a long struggle, serves as a vehicle for expressing the reform of one's life, becomes the expression of the

highest service to God and the Church in obedience to the pope, and entails virtuous renunciation of financial security and the tranquillity of domestic life.<sup>22</sup>

But to be on the 'winning side' of the crusade for most women requires a distinctly secondary sort of activity on the 'home-front' and her identification with maleness rather than femaleness as the more heroic role. She is the 'angel in the house' who is in need of male supervision and protection.<sup>23</sup> Women's inclinations and activities, relational commitments, employment responsibilities and domestic cares do not represent the side of victory, power or spiritual advantage. To be on the side of women's values of reciprocity, interdependence, affiliation and connection, does not assure victory for women's specific interests or secure advantages for them in the dichotomous world of honour and dishonour, victory and defeat, or truth and heresy.

A spirituality of victory-defeat and its sub-text of the crusade inevitably involves the adoption of a binary hermeneutic for appropriating the mission of Christ. Potentially, to take the side of women means to acknowledge and celebrate the fact that even in their ordinary domestic roles, women's very existence has the power to confront and challenge men's value-system 'because they have been made the embodiment of the dominant culture's unsolved problems'.<sup>24</sup> It is a prophetic hope that undertaking the resolution of 'the dominant culture's unsolved problems' embodied by women would be perceived by men as their gain, not their loss of advantage.

In women's election of a life direction, their fidelity to a feminine world-view and non-dominative set of values does not easily acquire definition as a Christ-endorsed choice, unless considerable revisions are made in the way Jesus Christ is presented. 'Each age tends to make its own image of Jesus and to address this imagery in prayer.'<sup>25</sup> What is the re-imagining needed of a Jesus who empowers women and inspires them with confidence to cast their lot into a mission carried out by a discipleship of equals?

A spirituality which sanctifies and heroizes 'the little way'<sup>26</sup> may act as a counter-weight to an action-and-adventure spirituality, but the two spiritualities are articulated through a contrasting set of virtues, one set associated with men in the world, the other with women and other non-combatants at home. If women who follow the 'little way' can become 'just as holy as men', the norm remains a male set of virtues embodied by a Jesus theologized to represent what men consider their ideal of self-realization.



A christology of Jesus, the confident and inspiring leader of men, might be revisioned within a theme of Jesus, image of Sophia-God, a gracious and good God,

who accepts everyone and brings about justice and well-being for everyone without exception . . . especially the impoverished, the crippled, the outcast, the sinners and prostitutes, as long as they are prepared to engage in the perspective and power of the *basileia*.<sup>27</sup>

Such a christology for realizing the Kingdom of God would underline the effects of social transformation which engage one's whole energy and love in the following of Jesus. Emphasis then would fall less upon a leader's triumph over an enemy than upon the performance of those acts which truly liberate the oppressed, the acts of Jesus which express determined and courageous care for those suffering injustice. Some attention might be given to the ethics of 'maternal thinking' which defines strategies of protection, nurturance, conscience-training and peace-making, behaviours typifying women's relation to their children but not to the feminine gender's possibilities.<sup>28</sup>

If some women, as well as men, note that the Exercises emphasize the individualism of one's commitment to Jesus, this tendency may not be completely corrected simply by emphasis on 'a communal, familial following of a wondrous personal lover'.<sup>29</sup> Attention might be given to the gender-distinctive understandings of 'wondrous personal lover' and friend. Instinctively-held images of the lover and close friend are generated by a different mythology for men than for women, according to the popular Jungian-oriented texts by Johnson. For men, the ideal is Parsifal, the adventurous knight, freed from relational attachments, who goes forth alone in search of the grail. Relational disaffiliation is essential for the quest, and it is essentially a project a man achieves on his own. For women, the 'quest' is replaced by the love of woman for a 'mysterious other', of the woman Psyche for Amor, a drama of interaction which takes place between two persons within a domestic setting.

The account of Amor and Psyche is drawn from classical mythology, but its ecclesial counterpart is the 'bride of Christ' imagery. While it may not appeal to many women, the metaphor still governs official ecclesial rhetoric in describing women's nature, identity and mission.<sup>30</sup> While gender-specific social patterns governing friendship and marriage are undergoing many changes today,

women and men have instinctively known what the role-expectations of total commitment used to be in a traditional patriarchal marriage: a man decided all the important issues, the woman said yes to him, and there was no trouble, as she did whatever he wished. Commitment in marriage for a man could rest on an assumption that the relationship would be there for him when he came home, but should not be an encumbrance. A woman's psychological orientation was just the opposite, for total commitment in love entailed her whole life.<sup>31</sup>

While visible male-female social patterns today evidence many changes, deeper social conditioning takes much longer to revise. Female or male directors of the Exercises may have examined or unexamined expectations about marriage and friendship, and may be governed by either traditional or contemporary outlooks on men and women's roles within marriage. In facilitating the Exercises, it is well to consider what gender-specific mythology of marriage and commitment is being evoked in directees by the emphasis on Jesus as leader who invites them to make a total gift of themselves in love and friendship.<sup>32</sup>

For those wishing to follow Jesus, the God-Man seems to address other men who will be willing to step forward and undertake a grand adventure with him for the achievement of a great mission which will bring good to many people. The downside for women is their hearing of a call which leads them to adopt male norms of disaffiliation and freedom for measuring their spiritual courage. On the positive side, some women 'who love too much' need to hear a call to mission which can act as empowerment to seize hold of a life larger than the one circumscribed by feeling-loved or not-feeling-loved. They need liberation from dependency on unreciprocal, unhealthy, emotionally draining relationships which are fed by the dark side of women's valuation of relationship, the feminine values of self-sacrifice and self-donation.<sup>33</sup> Freedom of a pattern of overly dependent relationships entails the choice of a life-goal worthy of their love and energy. The call to self-commitment may evoke in women the courage to confront the reality of conflict and take leave of their habitual role as 'quintessential accommodators, mediators, the adapters, and soothers'.<sup>34</sup>

In many gospel scenes, women appear as single figures who approach Jesus. They certainly model behaviour which the evangelists affirmed as empowering for the entire community, but the interpretation of their role is crucial for women. Their relationship

to Jesus or to the disciples can be interpreted as that of helper to the men rather than initiators of projects themselves. Their activity can be seen as derivative of men's mission, and their role as extenders of a male-inaugurated enterprise. The reigning ecclesial portrait which presents women as forgiven sinners, receivers of love and helpers to men is a powerful reinforcer of the secondary status of women as agents of mission. Women receive guidance from men and experience themselves not as equals, but rather as ancillary to male-inspired projects. This perception of the female role is difficult to shake by both women and men.

### 3. *The choice of scripture texts for the second week*

Along these lines of interpreting women's roles, the particular selection of scripture passages proposed by Ignatius in the second, third and fourth weeks as subjects for contemplation should also be noted. In some respects, the scripture passages chosen by Ignatius in the second week exacerbate these problems. The intensive focus on the infancy narratives in Luke and Matthew (Exx 262-272) confines the woman, Mary, to a relationship with the young Jesus. This confinement is balanced by a corresponding focus on the narratives of the resurrection appearances in the fourth week (Exx 299-312) which feature women in relation to the adult Christ. Mary's role in the infancy narratives features her ancillary, maternal posture. Presented in her maternal role, she represents dispositions of openness, acceptance and responsiveness to God. The focus suggested by Ignatius can result in a powerful evocation of men's tenderness, gentleness, surrender and non-domination of events. But women may increasingly find that an idealization of the submissive, receptive, cooperative portrait of Mary acts as a theological reinforcement of their secondary ecclesial position.

The meditations concerning the relation of women to the public life of Jesus as an adult in the meditations of the second week feature three passages: Mary at Cana (Jn 2, 1-11), the conversion of the Magdalen, i.e. the appearance of the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus (Lk 7, 36-50), and the supper at Bethany at which another unnamed woman appears who anoints Jesus (Mt 26, 6-10). These passages can all function to underline spiritual attitudes of confidence in Jesus, the beauty of repentance, the certainty of forgiveness, and the legitimation of an emotional responsiveness and tenderness toward Christ. As in the meditations on the infancy narratives, these three are effective in releasing and promoting a

non-aggressive, non-combative expression of male energy. But the possibilities for women might be read a little differently. While these three passages emphasize the closeness of an individual woman to the person of Jesus, certain traditional perspectives on feminine behaviour can be subtly reinforced, such as women's confinement to domestic settings, reticence or silence in the presence of men, acting humbly rather than speaking out, and being dependent upon what the man will decide to do or judge the situation to be.

The meditations of the second week, in their focus on the public life of Jesus, emphasize the control of Jesus over nature and his authoritative teaching. In his observations on the 'mysteries omitted', Peters noted that Ignatius assigned no meditation concerning 'the healing of the sick, the blind, the lame, and the lepers, the casting out of devils, the forgiveness of sins, and the explanation of the kingdom by means of parables'.<sup>35</sup> However, he offers a rationale for these choices, along with defending Ignatius's apparent predilection for the 'dark side' of Christ's experience, in light of Ignatius's concern to emphasize the seriousness of God's intervention to regain the love of the human family and the removal of disorder in human desires for honour and power. He notes that in the meditations on the vocation of the disciples, the Sermon on the Mount, Christ's walking on the water, and the raising of Lazarus, there is an ever-increasing familiarity between the exercitant and Christ.<sup>36</sup>

Stanley also takes account of the scripture passages omitted. However, he calls attention to the limitations of the literal definition of the Ignatian 'gospel' where little account is made of Jesus's table fellowship with sinners, forgiveness of them, compassion for the marginalized such as the leper, the victim of 'unclean spirits', the tax-collector and the Samaritan.<sup>37</sup> He argues that updating of the Exercises should include the use of other New Testament texts, such as those which offer the insights of the evangelists into the public and earthly life of Jesus who took pity on sinners, the ostracized and alienated. Focus for meditation rightly includes a Jesus who accepted women as well as men for disciples, displayed loving concern for children, introduced slaves into parables as those endowed with dignity, healed all sorts of diseases, and crossed lines of racial and religious prejudice.<sup>38</sup>

As is commonly the case, directors choose passages which accommodate the special needs of retreatants. Quite reasonably, Stanley's

argument can be extended to include those scriptural passages from the public ministry which offer to women, in particular, images of feminine initiative, empowerment and discipleship, such as the stories of the woman healed of an issue of blood (Mk 5, 25-34), the Canaanite woman seeking the healing of her daughter (Mt 15, 21-28), the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4, 1-42), and the bent-over woman healed in the synagogue (Lk 13, 10-17).<sup>39</sup> The Acts of the Apostles is also a resource, offering the woman-centred passages concerning the raising of Dorcas (Acts 9, 36-41) and the hospitality of Lydia (Acts 16, 14-15). The guiding question for the contemplation is, 'What is Jesus affirming in women and what new possibility is he evoking in them as his disciples?'

Directors who seek to enlarge the repertoire of scripture passages for retreatants make selections from sources ready at hand: the text of the scriptures themselves, or the lectionary with the readings of the liturgical year. In relation to women, there are particular cautions to be sounded in the use of the lectionary or of the readings provided for a particular feast-day. Procter-Smith completed an important analysis of the mention and omission of women characters, both historical and metaphorical, in the Common Lectionary (1983) proposed by the Consultation of Common Texts, an ecumenical task force of North American liturgists. Following closely the Roman lectionary (1969), it enlarged the Hebrew bible material covered in the three-year cycle. However, after a close study of both frequency and significance of readings taken from Old Testament and New Testament, Procter-Smith concluded that even in this up-dated text, 'the lectionary's hermeneutical principles fail to take women seriously as active, significant agents in salvation history. They are regarded as adjuncts to male actors, they are important in relation to marriage; otherwise they are expendable.'<sup>40</sup> She notes that in both frequency of mention and significance of action, the prominence of women's actions in biblical texts is bypassed or downplayed in the lectionary selections.

The state of the lectionary may be offered as an analogy for the challenges presented by the effort to revise the repertoire of readings for the Spiritual Exercises. A revised lectionary would ideally include readings in which we recall and celebrate women of our biblical heritage in whom God has been made manifest and through whom God has worked, among them Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Miriam, Deborah, Jael, Judith, the wise woman of Tekoa and Huldah.<sup>41</sup> While acknowledging the fact that the bible gives

less visibility to women than to men, she does not allow this to be a justification for their comparative invisibility in a lectionary which should be selective, not merely representative of biases within scripture.

### *Conclusion*

It was observed by one director that religious women, when consulted, preferred less emphasis on the first week and more on the fourth week.<sup>42</sup> One reason might well be the nature of the scriptural texts for the fourth week (Exx 299-312). The mystical transcendence of this week's atmosphere seems to revitalize conflicts and divisions that previously existed.<sup>43</sup> Many accounts of the resurrection also feature women prominently, emphasize their special roles as missionaries within the Church, their autonomy, and their unbroken loyalty in following Jesus. It is true that directors, in continuing to adapt the Exercises to the needs of women, quite sensitively choose texts with which women can identify. However, the thematic orientation of those passages is crucial. If the liberation of women from traditional social and ecclesial type-casting as 'weaker sex' females is to be a sought-for grace, then care must be taken that passive, accommodating stereotypes of feminine spirituality not be reinforced.

This reflection was necessarily limited by space to a discussion of some major issues arising in the first and second weeks of the Exercises: women's experience of sin, the problematic of the meditation on the Two Standards, and the New Testament passages proposed by Ignatius as subjects for contemplation in the second week. It was the presumption of this study that women and men differ in their spiritualities, and that the gender issue is especially significant because more women than men seek to follow the Exercises. This is a perspective which has not received attention in the efforts to adapt the Exercises to the needs of contemporary Church and society. It is not clear what will be the eventual impact of Christian feminist theology on the directing and following of the Exercises. But this venture is an invitation to continue the discussion.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> McCall, John R., S.J.: 'The religious woman as retreatant', in *The second cooperative study of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* (New York: Fordham University, 1964), p 74.

<sup>2</sup> These include *Pour mieux donner les Exercices Ignatiens* 2nd ed (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1980); Veltri, John S., S.J.: *Orientations: a collection of helps for prayer* vol 1, (Guelph, Ontario: Loyola House) and Veltri, *Orientations: a manual to aid beginning directors of the Spiritual Exercises according to Annotation 19* vol II (1981); *The 18th Annotation: the Exercises and catechesis* 2nd ed (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1983); *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola in present day application: social, psychological, scriptural, pastoral* 2nd ed (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1984); Schnier, George P.: *Ignatian spirituality in a secular age* (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984). A pleasing revision of the first week's scriptural focus on the Israelites' desert experience and its relation to Mark's account of Jesus in the desert is provided by Josef Neuner S.J.: *Walking with him: a biblical guide through thirty days of Spiritual Exercises* (India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1985, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> See in the last decade Schineller (1980), Begheyn (1981), Sullivan and Faricy (1983), McDermott (1987), Brackley (1988), Tetlow (1989), and Carroll (1990).

<sup>4</sup> Fleming, David L., S.J.: *A contemporary reading of the Spiritual Exercises: a companion to St. Ignatius' text*, 2nd ed rev (St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Tetlow, Joseph, S.J.: *Choosing Christ in the world: directing the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola according to Annotation Eighteen and Nineteen: a handbook* (St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Loyola, Ignace de: *Texte autographe des Exercices Spirituels et documents contemporains (1525-1615)* ed by Edouard Gueydan S.J. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1986), p 65.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p 104.

<sup>8</sup> One sign of the assumption's breakdown is manifest in the unresolvable tension in the U.S. today between an ecclesial rhetoric of gender-equality according to a scriptural ideal and the impossibility of its actualization by women within the social and sacramental structures of the Church as presently defined. The acknowledgment of this many-faceted tension in response to the second draft of the bishops' pastoral letter on women, *One in Christ Jesus: a pastoral response to the concerns of women for Church and society* has resulted in a postponement of vote by the American bishops originally scheduled for November, 1990. See the statement of opposition by the U.S. Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 'Critiquing the women's pastoral draft', in *Origins* vol 20, no 12 (August 30 1990), pp 185, 187.

<sup>9</sup> Loyola, Ignatius of: *Letters to women*, collected by Hugo Rahner S.J. (New York: Herder, 1960); English trans from the German edition (Frieberg: Herder, 1956).

<sup>10</sup> Figures are from Simon Decloux: *Commentaries on the letters and spiritual diary of St Ignatius Loyola* 2nd ed (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1982), p 9.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, Jean Baker: 'Woman and power', in *Women and therapy* vol 6, nos 1-2 (Spring-Summer, 1987), p 10.

<sup>12</sup> Saiving, Valier: 'The human situation', in *Womanspirit rising: a feminist reader in religion*, ed by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), p 27. Saiving's essay was originally published in 1960.

<sup>13</sup> *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola in present day application* (1984), p 8.

<sup>14</sup> Ravier, André, S.J.: *Ignatius of Loyola and the founding of the Society of Jesus*, trans by Maura Daly, Joan Daly and Carson Daly (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p 402.

<sup>15</sup> Pellauer, Mary D.: 'Moral callousness and moral sensitivity: violence against women', *Women's conscience, women's consciousness*, ed by Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf and Mary D. Pellauer (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 33-50.

<sup>16</sup> See the discussion of the undervaluing of women, their illusory experience of real economic equality, feminization of poverty, sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence in 'Social consequences of gender misconceptions', in M. E. Hawkesworth: *Beyond oppression: feminist theory and political strategy* (New York: Continuum, 1990), pp 47-69.

<sup>17</sup> *Violence en héritage: Réflexion pastorale sur la violence conjugale* (Montréal: Comité des affaires sociales de l'Assemblée évêques du Québec, 1989).

- <sup>18</sup> 'Partners in the mystery of redemption: a pastoral response to women's concerns for Church and society', *Origins* vol 17, no 45 (April 21 1988). See #84, #116-119, #135-146.
- <sup>19</sup> Carroll, Patrick L., S.J.: 'The Spiritual Exercises in everyday life: a practical implementation', *Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits* vol 22 (January, 1990), p 19.
- <sup>20</sup> Tetlow, Joseph, S.J.: *Choosing Christ in the world*, p 148.
- <sup>21</sup> Johnson, Elizabeth: 'The incomprehensibility of God and the image of God male and female', in *Women's spirituality: resources for Christian development*, ed by Joann Wolski Conn (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), p 256.
- <sup>22</sup> Wolter, Hans, S.J.: 'Elements of crusade spirituality in St. Ignatius', in *Ignatius of Loyola: his personality and spiritual heritage, 1556-1956: studies on the 400th anniversary of his death*, ed by Friedrich Wulf S.J., Series II, no 2, Modern Scholarly Studies about the Jesuits, in English translations (St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), pp 97-134.
- <sup>23</sup> Noddings, Nel: *Women and evil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p 59.
- <sup>24</sup> Miller, Jean Baker: *Toward a new psychology of women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976, 1977), p 56.
- <sup>25</sup> Dalton, William J. S.J.: 'How to use the bible in the Exercises', in *The word of God in the Spiritual Exercises* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1979), p 15.
- <sup>26</sup> The phrase was used by St Thérèse of Lisieux, a cloistered Carmelite, who found her path to God, not by dramatic accomplishments, but by attending with faithfulness and love to the hidden challenges of domestic duties and communal life within the monastery.
- <sup>27</sup> Schüssler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth: 'The Sophia-God of Jesus and the discipleship of women', in *Women's spirituality: resources for Christian development*, ed by Joann Wolski Conn (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1986), p 21.
- <sup>28</sup> Ruddick, Sara: *Maternal thinking: toward a politics of peace* (New York, Ballantine Books, 1989), pp 13-27 and the earlier article 'Maternal thinking', in *Feminist studies* vol 6 (Summer, 1980), pp 342-367, which reminds readers of women's child-caring in which they typically 'foster growth and welcome change', p 352. I am grateful to Diane Jonte-Pace at Santa Clara University for this material. I also acknowledge the contribution of Elizabeth McMillan R.S.M., of Catholic Health Association (U.S.A.) in her reflections on an ethic of 'maternal thinking' in her essay in a forthcoming volume from Paulist Press, *Where can we find her: searching for women's identity in the new Church*.
- <sup>29</sup> Carroll, p 20.
- <sup>30</sup> 'On the dignity and vocation of women' (*Mulieris dignitatem*), *Origins* vol 18, no 17 (October 6 1988), pp 261-283. The metaphor of the bride, drawn from Revelation and the Epistle to the Ephesians, is discussed in #23, 29, and 30.
- <sup>31</sup> Johnson, Robert A.: *She: understanding feminine psychology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976, 1986), pp 17-19. See the other volumes by the same author, *He: understanding masculine psychology* and *We: understanding the psychology of romantic love*.
- <sup>32</sup> This perspective has implications for the first week. For what shall a woman feel the deepest and therefore the most potentially empowering regret: a sense of failure in a particular relationship, or a project that was conceived, but unrealized?
- <sup>33</sup> Norwood, Robin: 'If I suffer for you, will you love me?' in *Women who love too much* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Pocket Books, 1985, 1986), pp 47-64.
- <sup>34</sup> Miller, Jean Baker: 'A new psychology of women', in *Women's spirituality: resources for Christian development*, p 120.
- <sup>35</sup> Peters, William A. M., S.J.: *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: exposition and interpretation* (Jersey City, N.J.: The program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises, 1968), p 114.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p 116.
- <sup>37</sup> Stanley, David, S.J.: 'Contemporary gospel criticism and the "mysteries of the life of our Lord" in the Spiritual Exercises', in *Ignatian spirituality in a secular age*, ed by George P. Schnier (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), pp 32-34.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p 45.



<sup>39</sup> I am grateful to Fr Carroll O'Sullivan S.J. of Sacred Heart Retreat Center in Los Gatos, California, for his comments about these pages and their relation to the needs of women. He has directed women for over half a century.

<sup>40</sup> Procter-Smith, Marjorie: 'Images of women in the lectionary', in *Women, invisible in Church and theology*, ed by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and Mary Collins (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Ltd), *Concilium* vol 182 (1985), p 59.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p 60.

<sup>42</sup> McCall, John R., S.J.: 'The religious woman as retreatant' (1964), pp 75, 78.

<sup>43</sup> I am indebted to Paul Crowley S.J., for this insight, and for his gracious assistance in this project, as I also am for the help of Theodore Mackin S.J., and James Reites S.J., my colleagues at Santa Clara University.