

Claiming the Spiritual Exercises for Contemporary Women: A Feminist Perspective Based on the Self-in-Relation Theory

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Abstract: This article examines how to integrate the feminist perspective into meeting the need of contemporary women when giving the Spiritual Exercises. The paper outlines the necessity of adaptation for contemporary women, structural sins on women, Self-in-Relation theory, and adaptation of the giving of the Exercises based on a feminist perspective. It then articulates the definition and characteristics of a self-in-relation, and moves to discuss the dynamics of the Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises based on feminist spiritual direction. More specifically, the dynamics are as follows: (1) The First Week is about helping the retreatant to renew one's self-in-relation with God. Through the first and second meditations, one might explore his or her sin of a poor self-image. Then from the third to the fifth meditations, the director might facilitate the retreatant to experience God's mercy—that is empathic empowerment from God. (2) The Second Week aims at growing in mutual intersubjectivity. The retreatant and Jesus Christ participate in one another's life and eventually establish mutual intersubjectivity between them. (3) The Third Week is a moment when the retreatant shares mutual empathy in suffering. The contemplation of the Passion serves as a means of developing empathic interaction between the retreatant and Jesus Christ. (4) The Fourth Week facilitates the retreatant to connect with Jesus Christ and share the view of the risen Christ. Thus the retreatant could see the world in an enlarged vision to the extent that one could find God in all things.

Keywords: feminism, Self-in-Relation theory, the Spiritual Exercises, spiritual direction

Introduction: The Necessity of Adaptation for Contemporary Women

The flexibility and adaptability elaborated by Ignatius in Annotation 18 provide the foundation for considering adaptation for contemporary women in giving the *Spiritual Exercises*. Because Annotations 18 to 20 manifest the feature of adaptability of the Spiritual Exercises, the essential spirit of such flexibility is to adapt to the need of the person. Hence, the adaptation could encourage contemporary women to “take their own unique needs and desires seriously” in making the Exercises.¹

Based on this notion, the question that arises here is: how does a spiritual companion (or spiritual director) adapt the *Spiritual Exercises*, which are composed by a man in the sixteenth century, for contemporary women to be transformed and to transcend themselves? If they are not adapted, some contemporary givers of the Exercises such as Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert, argue that for women, “The *Spiritual Exercises* present serious obstacles, either in their content or the way they have been interpreted and presented.”²

The point is that the *Spiritual Exercises* were composed when the social context and church situation were quite different from what they are today.

¹ Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin, and Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 10.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

Besides, Ignatius used imagery and language in a more masculine way to articulate and expound some exercises. For example, in the Kingdom exercise [92-108], he describes how a king calls for conquering the whole world and every enemy. In Two Standards [137-148],³ he uses metaphors of commander and battle. In Rules for Discernment [327], he talks about a military leader setting up his camp and inspecting the enemy, and so on. Such “military” and “masculine” content and language might be alienating, and hard for a contemporary woman to resonate with. The images of “commanding” “obedient submission,” “winning-losing,” and “fighting-fleeing” do not cohere with the aspirations and perspective of many women in contemporary culture.

To put it further, the more masculine image and language manifest tension between being powerful and being powerless and assume that men gain more power than women due to social and economic status. Exercising power on the one hand and becoming dominated on the other hand make the tension grow even higher. Pierre Bourdieu notes, “If women, subjected to a labor of socialization which tends to diminish and deny them, learn the negative virtues of self-denial, resignation, and silence, men are also prisoners, and insidiously victims, of the dominant representation.”⁴ Since domination results in valuing someone and devaluing others, it is harmful to both men and women. In this sense, an adaptation of the Exercises to be more androgynous (suitable to or for either sex) might help to reduce the tension and make it easier for the retreatant to resonate with.

There are, of course, some other images in the *Exercises* that manifest the closeness, friendship, love and fragility of God, which are easier for the retreatant to understand. For instance, the colloquy of the First Week reads,

³ The number in square brackets in this article refers to the paragraph number in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 49.

“speaking as one friend speaks with another” [54]; in the Third Week “how the divine nature goes into hiding” [196]; and in the Contemplation to Attain Love, “love consists in mutual communication” [230]. These images are greatly valued in modern theology, particularly in feminist theology.⁵ The reason is that mutual communication, empathy, and identification with fragility make more sense based on women’s self-knowledge and the way they relate to others.

It is not possible here fully to debate the disputed question of masculine language and female language in spiritual direction; these issues include a universal biological factor and cultural diversity as well. Hence this essay will focus more on exploring women’s experience and emphasizing that the spiritual companion needs sensitivity and flexibility in attending to the inner experience of the female retreatant when giving the Exercises. The spiritual companion has the responsibility to accompany a retreatant to understand each exercise, to be able to resonate with the grace asked for, and engage in an intimate colloquy before the end of each prayer. Thus the retreatant’s experience might be interwoven into the dynamic of each Week to achieve the goal of the Exercises—the rebirth of a new self in a renewed relationship.

A Broader Perspective: Structural Sin Imposed on Women

Kathleen Fisher points out, “It is clear that spiritual friendship will not meet the needs of women unless it reflects an awareness of the cultural and religious situation in which women find themselves, and an acknowledgment of the harmful effects of the sexist society in which we live.”⁶ It is obvious that

⁵ Nerea Alzola, “Women helping to give the Spiritual Exercises,” *The Way* 49, no. 1 (January 2010): 52.

⁶ Kathleen Fisher, *Women at the Well: Feminist Perspectives on Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press: 1940), 5.

the social and cultural value system has a major influence on people's life. Demaris Wehr highlights *sexism* as one of the factors that impact human life. She notes, "sexism consists of limiting beliefs about the "nature" of women and men...women are the ones who stand outside of the definition of the fully human...Women find many difficulties in claiming adult status, responsibility, and authority."⁷ That is, sexism is damaging to both genders, but it is particularly wounding to women in terms of how women should live their life.

Most people are not aware that sexism is a "lens" through which they see the world and thus make sexism a structural sin in human society. God creates humans as a whole person, yet the worldview of sexism distorts humanity and brings about unequal status and oppression both on men and women. Women's sense of self is easily damaged to the extent that the self is treated as an object, not normative, and even not fully adult. Therefore Kathleen Fisher notes,

Perhaps what women need to die to is the false system imposed on them by patriarchy...dying to this false self would prepare for the birth of their true selves. Men, on the other hand, may need to die to a self—experienced as separate and distinct from others, and be reborn into relationality.⁸

In this sense, it is important to analyze the social situation to help women "differentiate between internal and external sources of conflict."⁹ For instance, the spiritual companion should begin with the woman retreatant's experience, encourage her to rely on her own experience, not on what

⁷ Demaris Wehr, *Jung and Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1988), 15.

⁸ Fisher, *Women at the Well*, 117.

⁹ Fisher, *Women at the Well*, 17.

someone from the ruling group tells her what her experience should be. Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt gives an example of this: “Human sinfulness, taking the form of physical violation of women, is a pervasive expression of sexist behavior with long-term and depressive effects on women's spirits.”¹⁰ Different forms of violence against women are truly human sinfulness, namely the violation of connections among oneself, God, and others.

Although feminist psychology highlights women's experience of self-knowledge, it also challenges various genders to recognize problematic workings in different cultures and socio-economic dynamics, especially the widespread ideas of patriarchy and its injustice. Ignatius wrote in Annotation 1: “every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies...to seek and find the divine Will...is called a Spiritual Exercise.” One might say a retreatant who has benefited from the Exercises might be willing to advocate social justice thus enhancing the dignity of all humans. This is the value of making the Exercises.

Feminist Psychology: Self-in-Relation Theory

Definition of Self: A Being- in-Relationship

John Calvin asserts that without the knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God, and without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self.¹¹ That is, self-knowledge and knowledge of God are a *mutual enhancement* in our journey of seeking and union with God. If the self-knowledge of a person increases, he or she might have a better understanding

¹⁰ Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt, “Women and the Exercises: Sin, Standards, and New Testament Texts,” *The Way Supplement* 70 (Spring 1991): 20.

¹¹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), 30.

of God and build a closer and healthier relationship with him as well. Therefore, how a woman's self grows and relates to others influence her faith journey. Feminist theorists from the Stone Center at the Wellesley College in America¹² assert the development of a woman's self is a "self-in-relation," instead of "separation-individuation" proposed by Erik Erikson,¹³ which is a more masculine view. Self-in-Relation Theory offers meaningful insights in understanding a woman's self- development. They assert that a woman's self grows in a mutual, reciprocal attachment.

One question arises here: what is *self* after all? Judith Jordan defines it as a construct that refers to "the organization of a person's experience and construction of reality that illuminates the purpose and directionality of her or his behavior."¹⁴ One might say that a self is the central consciousness of one's being that is aware of and constructs his or her own reality. Moreover, how a person perceives and experiences the reality have an impact on his or her way of living almost beginning from the stage of an infant. When a girl infant's self develops, it tends to be a *being-in-relationship*,¹⁵ which means she feels what is going on in her mother as well as what is going on in herself. That is, attending to each other's mental states and emotions is a woman's nature in terms of the development of her sense of consciousness.

This "*being-in-relation*" is the base of all continuing psychological growth. The essential concept is what Jean Baker Miller observes: a woman's

¹² Judith V. Jordan et al., *Women's Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991).

¹³ Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950).

¹⁴ Jean Baker Miller, "The Development of Women's Sense of Self," in *Women's Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991), 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

growth “occurs within emotional connections, not separate from them.”¹⁶ Miller also notes, “women’s sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make, and then to maintain, affiliations and relationships,” and that “eventually, for many women, the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived not just as a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self.”¹⁷

Further, feeling more related to another person means one’s self is enhanced, not threatened. In general, a woman does not feel threatened in connection but utilizes the opportunity to organize and develop the self in the context of an important relationship. That is, relationship is the basic goal of development; a woman’s self aims at deepening her capacity for building and maintaining relationship.

In this sense, self-in-relation theory has profound importance in explaining a woman’s development of a sense of self. In Janet Surrey’s words, “The notion of the self-in-relation involves an important shift in emphasis from separation to relationship as the basis for self-experience and development.”¹⁸ Surrey also asserts that self-in-relation theory serves to explain “the complex needs of women and the role of relationships in their development and functioning.”¹⁹ Hence, women grow in many facets and develop toward a more connected relationship, which becomes a base for their life.

¹⁶ Surrey, “The Self-in-Relation: A Theory of Women’s Development,” in *Women’s Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991), 52.

¹⁷ Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 83.

¹⁸ Surrey, “The Self-in-Relation,” 53.

¹⁹ Melinda Pilkinton, “Self-in-Relation Theory: A Model for Helping,” *Perspectives*, 5, no. 1 (2007), 30.

Characteristics of a Self-in-Relation

Mutual Empathy and Intersubjectivity

Based on the definition of self, a being-in-relation, one might say that the human psyche is fundamentally relational in nature. That is, humans are relational beings and most cannot survive in isolation. Here another question arises: What is the feature of relationship? First of all, in Janet Surrey's definition, relationship involves an experience of *mutual empathy*, which refers to the "ability for relatedness, emotional closeness, and emotional flexibility."²⁰ When a woman could experience, comprehend, and respond to the inner state of another person, she has developed the ability to be empathic.

Further, accurate empathy involves "a balancing of affective arousal and cognitive structuring."²¹ In this sense, a woman could empathize with the other person, while receiving the other's response based on affection-cognition balancing. In short, relationship means "an experience of emotional and cognitive *intersubjectivity*: the ongoing, intrinsic inner awareness and responsiveness to the continuous existence of the other or others and the expectation of mutuality in this regard."²² This authentic relationship embodies an *I-Thou* relation described by Martin Buber,²³ and is exactly how Jesus Christ interacts with people who encounter him. That is, authentic relationship is central for all humans across cultures and gender issues.

The third question is: Why is relationship so important to women? What role does relationship play in a woman's life span? According to Heidi Fishman's quotation, Jean Baker Miller emphasizes that relationships are central to women's development because women's sense of self is organized

²⁰ Surrey, "The Self-in-Relation," 53.

²¹ Surrey, "The Self-in-Relation," 54.

²² Surrey, "The Self-in-Relation," 61.

²³ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner, 2000), 6.

around their ability to make and to maintain affiliation and relationships. Women's whole sense of self depends on a process of continuity of emotional-cognitive dialogue, thus forming a process of mutual relational interaction. To put it another way, the "caring for and being cared for" in a mutual way is the key factor in women's self-esteem.²⁴ Hence, women's growth and maturation are "virtually impossible without relating to others and to self."²⁵ That is, a woman's self develops and nurtures within the context of an important relationship.

Furthermore, not only external relationships are important for women, but also internal relationships. On the one hand, internal relationships are those that occur inside a woman's psyche, such as fantasies, images, and memories. On the other hand, external relationships are real interactions with other people in the world.²⁶ In this way, internal relationships and external relationships are interwoven in a woman's psyche, forming an interacting self. Besides, Jean Baker Miller asserts that the interacting sense of self includes "feeling the other's emotions and acting on them as they interplay with one's own emotions."²⁷ That is, a woman would relate to, even engage with others' inner state, while allowing the other's inner state to have an impact on her own. Thus both or all people involved in the relationship might "be encouraged and challenged to maintain connection and to foster, adapt to, and change with the growth of the other."²⁸

²⁴ Heidi Fishman, "Exploring the Self-in-Relation Theory: Women's Idealized Relationship-of-Choice and Psychological Health," *Dissertations* (1992), 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ Miller, "The Development of Women's Sense of Self," 14.

²⁸ Surrey, "The Self-in-Relation," 60.

Mutual Empowerment

Most women build connections through dialogue to empower each other. In conversation, women tend to convey messages and aim at understanding and to be understood by each other. Through dialogue, they try to “remain real, vital, purposeful, and honest in relationship.”²⁹ Ideally, relationship-authenticity serves as a motivation for most women to create mutually an empowerment context within which maturity could occur and continue. As Carol Gilligan’s research demonstrates, interdependence can create strength, build resources, and motivate giving in the mature feminine style.³⁰ Through interdependence, dignity is enhanced and maturity might grow.

Heidi Fishman quotes from Janet Surrey and summarizes a relational self as follows:

(1) It is an interest in, and attention to, the other person(s) which form the base for the emotional connection and the ability to empathize with the other; (2) the expectation of a mutual empathic process where the sharing of experience leads to a heightened development of self and other; and (3) the expectation of interaction and relationship as a process of mutual sensitivity and mutual responsibility which provides the stimulus for the growth of empowerment and self-knowledge.³¹

These three important concepts highlight mutual engagement, mutual empathy, and *mutual empowerment* as well. They are significant features of relationship for women, as Kathleen Fisher notes, “disruption of such

²⁹ Surrey, “Relationship and Empowerment,” in *Women’s Growth in Connection: Writing from the Stone Center* (New York: The Guilford Press: 1991), 162-180.

³⁰ Joann Wolski Conn, *Women’s Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 19.

³¹ Fishman, “Exploring the Self-in-Relation Theory,” 29.

relationship is perceived not just as the loss of the relationship, but closer to a total loss of the self.”³²

In brief, feminism is a vision of life emphasizing inclusion rather than exclusion, connectedness rather than separateness, and mutuality in relationships rather than dominance and submission. Lying at the heart of dominance is the way by which people exercise power. One can hand his power over to others or receive it from others. When one participates in a power structure, he or she is to acquiesce to it to a certain degree and so to hand over personal power.³³ Thus power is actually organized by the relational webs of which one is a part. In the feminist view, mutuality means mutual empowerment for all who engage in relationships, thus to connect one another and foster development of self-in-relation.

Adapting the Exercises based on Feminist Spiritual Direction

Based on the core concept of feminist psychology, there would be appropriate adaptation that needs to be considered in giving the Exercises. The following sections will explore how to adapt the main exercises in each Week based on these theories.

The First Week: Renew Women’s Self-in-Relation with God

The following sections discuss how the meditations in the First Week renew the retreatant’s self in regards to relating and maintaining the relationship with God. The spiritual companion should be aware of how the distortion of the biblical revelation of God as a male being prevents a woman

³² Fisher, *Women at the Well*, 118.

³³ Jamie Calder, *The Mission of Jesus Christ: The Kingdom of Kingship and Belonging*, page 7. Class resource.

from “valuing and affirming herself as authentically an image of God.”³⁴ The fruit of the First Week should be the restoring of self-image and God-image, and the experience of one’s self as a beloved sinner.

Principle and Foundation: Respond to and Interact with God

“The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by so doing to save his or her soul [23].” Ignatius himself makes clear that humans’ life is to respond to God’s love; to put it in another way, God’s incarnation embodies the divine self that relates to humans, and we need to respond to God continually to keep this relationship fresh and energetic.

This principle serves as a foundation for evaluation and discernment of our relationship with other creatures, as Ignatius expounds, “One must use other created things in so far as they help towards one’s end, and free oneself from them in so far as they are obstacles to one’s end [23].” Therefore, a person’s self exists, identifies and energizes in connection to God and all creatures. Ignatius pinpoints the self that needs to grow in the context of responding to God, namely to praise, reverence, and serve him.

In Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert’s view, a feminist spiritual companion should help a retreatant in the exercise of Principle and Foundation to be aware of God’s creation and presence within the mystery of one’s self. The idea is that a woman who pays more attention to her self might be the prelude to paying more attention to God. Based on the notion of self-in-relation, the key idea here is to relate a woman’s self to God, as well as to emphasize her self-identity before God, thus to facilitate her self-awareness and benefit from the exercise more greatly.

³⁴ Conn, *Women’s Spirituality*, 14.

Further, in this exercise, Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert highlight the importance for the spiritual companion to see the woman retreatant’s personality and be aware of her experience within her worldview. The spiritual companion might ask questions like: How do you relate to other people and God’s creation? How do you sense your role in cooperation with God’s creation? These questions could help the retreatant to deepen one’s consideration of the Principle and Foundation through bringing one’s own worldview. In this sense, a woman’s experience of her world and her relation with others would be considered thoughtfully, thus she might increase the awareness of her sense of self-in-relation to all creatures.

Another point in this exercise is about the desire for *indifference*. Regarding indifference in Principle and Foundation, Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert argue, “Women cannot act with indifference in any positive sense until they have identified their desires and passions.”³⁵ The companion might help the retreatant to list her desires and passions by discerning between “ought to seek and ought not to seek,” and it is quite possible the list might embody cultural myths on gender, including beauty, body shape, dependency, and so on. Then the retreatant might reflect on whether or not these issues form a false self- image in her.

John Veltri points out the main theme of indifference is about *being spiritually free*. He emphasizes the importance of “understanding the concept of spiritual freedom” and “awareness of an area in his life where he needs to grow in freedom.”³⁶ The woman retreatant might ruminate over the Principle and Foundation first, then ask for the grace of seeing herself in front of God, being aware of some areas in her life that need to grow in freedom. If it is

³⁵ Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 102.

³⁶ John Veltri, *Orientations, For Those Who Accompany Others on the Inward Journey* (Toronto: Guelph Center of Spirituality), chapter 5, 1.

helpful, she could write in her own words about the purpose of her life, the self-identification among various relationships and spiritual freedom she pursues, thus constituting her own principle and foundation of life.

In this broader sense, a woman's relational self could not be disengaged from interaction with significant others, particularly with God. If the mutual interaction has been cut off, a woman's self would be distorted and would wither, thus she would lose her sense of self. In this case, this distorted self-image would influence her image of God, causing a disconnection between her and God; it is possible that sinfulness has been generated exactly when the relationship has been twisted or even cut off.

Furthermore, both women and men will pass through developmental phases, which involve a certain kind of balancing between differentiation and integration, between autonomy and inclusion. As Maureen Aggeler points out: "Both will have and identify 'inordinate attachments' along the way and both will exhibit defenses typical of those stages."³⁷ She asserts that the necessity of freedom from "inordinate attachments" is a key element of discernment.³⁸ It is exactly the grace of Principle and Foundation that will lead women and men to identify inordinate attachments, and to renew the purpose of life.

The First and Second Meditation: the Sin of a Poor Self-Image

In a patriarchal society, people consider God as a male ruler and "sin is to be understood as rebellious behavior against divine sovereignty."³⁹ Such insubordination is unforgivable and the only way to be restored to divine favor is through divine mercy or forgiveness. However, Lavinia Byrne notes,

³⁷ Maureen Aggeler, "Women's Metaphors for Freedom," *The Way Supplement*, 74 (1992): 22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Critique and Re-visioning of God-Language," *The Way* 27, no. 2 (1987): 134.

"Women sin by having a poor self-image, men through pride."⁴⁰ That is, a woman's sin focuses not so much on pride and self-assertion, but rather on the sin of self-doubt, timidity, powerlessness, and even of being a self-hater. The self-hater might lack self-actualization, focus, and ambition, exhibiting too much self-abnegation. Kathleen Fisher notes, "A basic tenet of feminist spirituality is the conviction that women have been socialized to discount their feelings and responses."⁴¹ Similarly, Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt argues, "It may be said that typically women's experience of original sin today is not pride in an honorable lineage or an over-blown sense of self-worth, but shame and self-denigration."⁴² In many cultures, women are led to believe they are virtuous "when actually they have not yet taken the necessary possession of their lives to have an authentic 'self' to give in self-donating love."⁴³ That is to say, the culture of poor self-image can operate as an inner voice or inner figure for a woman, so as to form an obstacle to a healthy self-image.

Therefore, the dynamic of the First Week is "the need for a strong and loving sense of self before God and others."⁴⁴ This transforming of self-image is exactly at the heart of conversion and this conversion might transform the culture of a poor self-image. But how does this happen? Demaris Wehr puts it well: "It is possible that if the woman changes her inner image, by dialoguing with it, befriending it, or in some cases exorcising it, the person's behavior will change."⁴⁵ Therefore, instead of exploring instances of pride, a feminist spiritual companion "might encourage a woman to take on roles of

⁴⁰ Lavinia Byrne, "Women and the Second Week." *The Way Supplement*, 74 (1992): 34.

⁴¹ Fisher, *Women at the Well*, 8.

⁴² Rosenblatt, "Women and the Exercises," 20.

⁴³ Conn, *Women's Spirituality*, 12.

⁴⁴ Dorothy Lee-Pollard, "Feminism and Spirituality: The Role of the Bible in Women's Spirituality," *The Way*, 32, no. 1 (1992): 27.

⁴⁵ Demaris Wehr, *Jung and Feminism*, 21.

responsibility and decision-making.”⁴⁶ Feminist spiritual direction can help women to stop blaming themselves, and learn instead to restructure their beliefs about themselves.

In Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert’s view, sin for women is a relational concept rather than disobedience to laws. Sin is more like the lack of self-voice and absence of authentic relationship, not transgressions of rules. Hence in the light of God’s divine love and mercy, a woman could be aware of her sin in terms of relationships with self, other creatures, and God.

The Third to the Fifth Meditation: God’s Mercy—an Empathic Empowerment

In the second meditation, Ignatius invites the retreatant to conclude with a colloquy about mercy. “All my thoughts will be about mercy and I will thank God for giving me life up till now [61].” The retreatant is enlightened with “Exclamation of wonder, with intense feelings, as I reflect on the whole range of created beings, however have they let me live and kept me alive! [60]” This dynamic of conversion lasts to the third, fourth, and the fifth meditation, God’s mercy lies there for the retreatant. God does not put humans into hell; instead, he has an empathic action to feel the retreatant’s feelings, to tolerate one’s choice of moving away against him, and still keeps one alive. Katherine Dyckman and Patrick Carroll assert if one has not tasted or seen or felt the love of God and others, one cannot recognize and acknowledge sin because “sin, infidelity, is correlative to love.”⁴⁷ That is, God’s mercy elicits one’s conversion.

In the third and fourth exercise, God’s empathic mercy *empowers* one to “feel an interior knowledge of my sins...a sense of the disorder in my

⁴⁶ Annice Callahan, “Some Women’s Perspectives on the Ministry of Spiritual Direction,” *The Way Supplement* 91 (1998): 89.

⁴⁷ Katherine M. Dyckman and L. Patrick Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic, Supporting the Prophet: An Introduction to Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 9.

actions...so that out of abhorrence for it I may put away from myself worldly and aimless things [63].” The retreatant has been empowered and encouraged now to move toward God and re-connect to him. In other words, the retreatant’s self is energized and activated through being in relation with God again. One has been empowered to live out his or her self-in-relation.

The first and second meditation in the First Week leads the retreatant to meditate on the first sin, which was that of the angels’ sin, to the sin of Adam and Eve, then to the sin of any particular individual who has gone to hell, all the way to the record of one’s own sin [50-56]. This funnel-shape of meditation opens the retreatant’s view and enhances one’s awareness of sins from a universal level to a personal level. In this sense, the retreatant might be aware of the whole picture of structural sin, particularly the hidden oppression upon women.

Considering sins from a feminist perspective, the spiritual companion needs to help the retreatant to enhance self-empathy. Self-empathy suggests that one focuses on some experiences in a new, empathic manner.⁴⁸ On the one hand, a self-empathic manner could decrease self-blame and guilt-feeling. On the other hand, it increases the ability to see herself from God’s sight. In this broader sense, facing and admitting one’s sin leads the retreatant along the way to where God’s mercy is.

The Second Week: Growth in Intersubjectivity

In the Second Week, the retreatant asks to better know and love Jesus of Nazareth. This grace helps the retreatant to contemplate Jesus’ hidden life as well as public life. In the contemplation, the retreatant maintains interaction with Jesus Christ through imaginary prayer in contemplation, in which not

⁴⁸ Judith V. Jordan, “Empathy, Mutuality, and Therapeutic Change: Clinical Implications of a Relational Model,” in *Women’s growth in Connection: Writing from the Stone Center*, 286.

only does the retreatant enter into Jesus' life, but she also invites Jesus to be involved in her life span. In this sense, the retreatant and Jesus Christ participate in one another's life, encounter each other in significant life events respectively, and eventually establish *mutual intersubjectivity* between them.

The Kingdoms: Commitment to a Relationship to Change the world

Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert emphasize that the grace of the Second Week is a deepening relationship with Jesus that offers new ways of knowing, loving and following. They argue that "beneath the image of the King and Kingdom lies the truth of commitment, single-heartedness, sacrifice, and freedom."⁴⁹ However, the language of monarchy seems repugnant to contemporary women because this parable emphasizes God as a male conqueror. A woman retreatant might reject being in a relationship with a powerful male in a hierarchical and impersonal system. Hence they suggest reconstructing this context as if "one recalled a person who unleashed one's admiration and loyalty in a relationship that elicited personal greatness."⁵⁰ This relationship evokes a great desire-sharing vision, which could be understood as a commitment to a relationship and as the necessary disposition for entering the kingdom of peace and justice.

Jean Baker Miller notes that power is "the capacity to move or to produce change."⁵¹ In this sense, power is not defined as "domination, control, or mastery, implying power over."⁵² This shift in the definition of power leads us to reconsider the focus of the Kingdom. For women, the essence of this exercise is not about "conquer[ing] all the land of the infidels" [93], namely

⁴⁹ Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 190.

⁵⁰ Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 193.

⁵¹ Miller, "Women and Power," 198.

⁵² Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment," 162.

winning over others, but about producing change according to a desire to follow Christ and change this world.

Furthermore, meditating on the Kingdom helps the woman retreatant to be empowered by Christ, who asserts “they will afterwards share with me in the victory, as they have shared with me in the labours [94].” The mutuality of sharing in the Kingdom empowers women to be alert to Christ’s call and to be firm in following him.

Rules for Discernment: Dancing in Mutual Harmony

In writing rules for discernment, Ignatius helps the retreatant to be more aware of the way one dances with the good spirit or evil spirit. Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert offer a psychological perspective in understanding the movement of dancing with a good or evil spirit. They assert that the spirits are intrapsychic rather than external.⁵³ Timothy Gallagher also explains, “Besides Satan and demons, [evil spirit] includes the tendency in our psyches which spring from egoism and disordered sensuality and also from other individual human persons or society insofar as these are an influence for evil in our lives.”⁵⁴ Luigi Rulla also notes, “The ‘spirits’ to be discerned are understood not in the preternatural sense of demons and angels, but in the sense of the dispositions of the individual person.”⁵⁵ That is, being aware of one’s inner movement is helpful to discern whether one is moving toward God or away from God. In the feminist view, the inner movement represents mutuality in terms of how one responds to Jesus’ call. It is God who initiates an invitation

⁵³ Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 251.

⁵⁴ Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad, 2005) 33.

⁵⁵ Luigi M. Rulla, “The Discernment of Spirits and Christian Anthropology,” 2, Class resource.

to dance with him, and the inner movement in one's psyche shows harmony or discord with his music.

Through prayer and reflection on the inner movement, a woman retreatant discerns the living truth about her self, thus maintaining her integrity and her own authority.⁵⁶ If not, when a woman's self-doubt colludes with Satan, it makes the *enemy of human nature* [334] stronger. In contrast, when consciousness dances with angels and the Holy Spirit, it makes the good spirit increasingly powerful.

Michael Ivens argues that movements of the soul refer to "the interactions of feelings, thoughts ... imagination, impulses of attraction and recoil, which occur spontaneously in consciousness."⁵⁷ The spiritual companion should help the woman retreatant to be aware of what Timothy Gallagher expounds as three key elements of discernment: be aware, understand, and take action.⁵⁸ That is, the movements of the psyche are not just focused on the feelings themselves but on the *direction* to which these feelings lead. In other words, what matters is not only where a person is, but whether their direction to God is forwards or backwards.⁵⁹

In this sense, the spiritual companion needs to be aware of consolation and desolation in terms of three components: the feeling itself, the source of that feeling, and the consequences of that feeling on one's life and decisions. Antonio Guillén writes, "discernment is not a technique, but a constant call to search for God."⁶⁰ Elizabeth Liebert also emphasizes, "ideally, discernment becomes an entire way of life, beyond simply a process for making a single

⁵⁶ Lee-Pollard, *Feminism and Spirituality*, 30.

⁵⁷ Michael Ivens, *Understanding The Spiritual Exercises* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1998), 210.

⁵⁸ Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 16-17.

⁵⁹ Ivens, *Understanding The Spiritual Exercises*, 211.

⁶⁰ Antonio Guillén, "Deceptions in Discernment," *The Way* 49, no. 3 (2010): 92.

decision.”⁶¹ Therefore, at this stage, the woman retreatant has learned how to listen to God’s music, to move toward him, and to dance with him in mutual harmony.

Two Standards: Identifying with Jesus’ Value System

Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert argue that language referring to poverty, reproaches, and humility in Two Standards are not easy for contemporary women to resonate with, especially for those who are oppressed. One reason might be that humility implies submission to an authoritative figure, and this seems to be in conflict with finding a voice and asserting oneself. Consequently, Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert stress a different aspect of humility for women. They suggest insult and contempt are not imposed by culture, class or economic situation, but “(arise) from freely identifying with the poor out of love for Christ.”⁶² Hence for women, the essence of Two Standards is not about victory or conquering enemies; rather, it is about identification with a value system, which invests energy in empowering the oppressed. The standard of Christ will lead one toward imitation of Jesus Christ’s self-emptying, namely living in poverty, insult and contempt, which resonate with most women’s need to be empowered.

Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt writes, “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.”⁶³ The dichotomy deepens one’s awareness of inner movement and serves as a reference point for choosing the beloved’s value system.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Liebert, “Discernment for Our Times,” *Studies in Spirituality* V18 (2008): 13.

⁶² Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 198.

⁶³ Rosenblatt, “Women and the Exercises,” 22.

Based on this notion, Rosenblatt asserts that “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.”⁶⁴ Because a woman's psychological orientation is for total commitment in love and relationship, the conquest is replaced by the love of a woman for her beloved. In this sense, the spiritual companion might utilize the image of “bride of Christ” (John 3:29; Revelation 19:7) to enhance the retreatant's identity with, and commitment to Jesus Christ's value system, which aims at liberating the oppressed.

Three Classes of Persons: Toward Spiritual Freedom

Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert interpret the three classes of persons with three terms. The first class is a *postponer*, the second class is a *compromiser*, and the third class is a *surrenderer* who is a wholeheartedly indifferent person.⁶⁵ The third person roots his or her decision in love and desires for true spiritual freedom to choose whatever Christ desires for him or her with indifference. Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert interpret indifference as getting rid of nailing desire to specific objects, which creates addiction; that is *attachment* in Ignatius' words.⁶⁶ They suggest questions like “What is the one thing I refuse to turn over to God's care?” thus helping the retreatant to cooperate and dance with God freely. In this way, the retreatant's spirit even transcends indifference and chooses to give over the whole of life to imitate Jesus Christ and let him guide his or her way of living.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁵ Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 200-201.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 200.

Making an Election: Focusing on Responsibility and Relationship

For a spiritual companion, to help a woman retreatant to maintain growth in prayers is important. This means to develop “the ability to heighten awareness of what one really wants in life and how one really feels in God’s presence.”⁶⁷ Journeying through the Exercises, the woman retreatant might be more aware of her desire and affirmation of her self and be more indifferent to make an election in her life in terms of taking actions to be a bride of Jesus Christ.

Regarding making an election, Carol Gilligan found that men use abstract rules or principles to decide, while women seem to view moral problems as those that arise from “conflicting responsibilities and relationships rather than from competing rights.”⁶⁸ She argued that women consistently use relationships and personal responsibility as their primary reference points in making moral decisions.⁶⁹

Kohlberg describes how the most mature level of moral development accords with universal principles of justice and respect individual rights; however, for women, Gilligan argues moral imperative repeatedly emerges as “an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the world’s trouble.”⁷⁰ Likewise, Heidi Fishman notes, women’s moral judgments are embedded in “a context of human relationships, mutuality, communality and interdependence.”⁷¹ To put it another way, responsibility and relationship lie at the heart of making decisions for women. The spiritual companion should understand that responsibility is conceived in terms of a woman’s caring and

⁶⁷ Conn, *Women’s Spirituality*, 12.

⁶⁸ Aggeler, “Women’s Metaphors for Freedom,” 21.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Conn, *Women’s Spirituality*, 18.

⁷¹ Fishman, “Exploring the Self-in-Relation Theory,” 3.

involving with others, and thus help the woman retreatant find an appropriate way of expressing mutuality and interdependence.

Joann Wolski Conn notes, “Christian spirituality entails the conviction that God is indeed personal and that we are in immediate personal relationship to another, an Other who ‘speaks’ and can be spoken to, who really affects our lives.”⁷² In this sense, making an election is about maintaining a vital personal relationship with God. Thus the election made in this stage is “not externally determined but internally determined.”⁷³

The Third Week: Sharing Mutual Empathy in Suffering

The contemplation of the Passion serves as a means of developing empathic interaction between the retreatant and Jesus Christ. In the contemplation on the Last Supper, the grace asked for is “*grief, deep feeling and confusion* because it is for my sins that the Lord is going to the Passion [193].” In contemplating the narratives of the Passion, the retreatant asks for “*grief with Christ in grief, to be broken with Christ who is broken, and for tears and interior suffering* on account of the great suffering that Christ has endured for me. [203]” These phrases describe a strong emotional connection, which engages with each other’s deep and authentic feeling and thus conveys a mutual empathy between the two parties. Ignatius insists that through following Jesus Christ, people are not simply to be led into all truth but also “into the vulnerability of Jesus’ way.”⁷⁴ Jesus’ way is through poverty, insult, and contempt, to true humility [147], thus it is like what Katherine Dyckman and Patrick Carroll expound, “To really love others means to become

⁷² Conn, *Women’s Spirituality*, 50.

⁷³ Aggeler, “Women’s Metaphors for Freedom,” 22.

⁷⁴ Philip Sheldrake, “Befriending our desires.” *The Way* 35, no. 2 (1995): 93.

progressively more vulnerable to them.”⁷⁵ Christ’s way is riskier, losing what one possesses, rather than gaining any personal benefit or success. In this sense, the God-image of an exalted father has been changed into a vulnerable person, which is easier for women to resonate with.

A woman retreatant steps into Christ’s experience in suffering in the Third Week; meanwhile, she is empowered by Christ to face the experience of suffering in her life. Thus, her election made in the previous Week is confirmed and she is strengthened as well. This mutual empathy is activated, validated, and sustained through sharing in each other’s suffering.

Compassion: Maintaining a Faithful Presence to the Beloved one

Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert note difficulties for women, for instance, in contemplating the victim image of Christ and considering the Cross as a sign of domination and violence. They suggest a woman retreatant might pray over the passage on the unnamed woman anointing Jesus Christ prior to his death (Mark 14:3–9; Matt 26:6–13), because he recognizes the significance of her action and values her enthusiastic spirit. Another alternative might be to pay attention to the women who helped Jesus out of their resources (Luke 8:3), Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42), the daughters of Jerusalem (Luke 23:28), to say nothing of Jesus’ mother and other women at the foot of the Cross (Mark 15: 40–41). These women described in the Bible “communicated eloquently by their faithful presence at the death and burial of Jesus.”⁷⁶ Therefore, faithful presence to the beloved embodies women’s authentic love and deep compassion even in a dreadful situation.

Adaptations like these might increase a woman retreatant’s commitment to discipleship and friendship with Jesus Christ. The point is, after being with

⁷⁵ Dyckman and Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic*, 9.

⁷⁶ Dyckman, Garvin, and Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 221.

Jesus in his suffering, they might encounter the suffering Jesus in their own experience of suffering too. This will eventually deepen the union with Christ. In the light of such understanding, presence at Christ's suffering and facing one's own suffering might teach one the true meaning of compassion.

In brief, women could deal with suffering through having faith that God has not abandoned them. The capacity for compassion helps women to feel with Jesus—to be flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood—thus manifesting mutual empathy.

The Fourth Week: Union in Relational Empowerment

Mutual empathy in the Third Week has deepened the relationship between the retreatant and Christ, thus an authentic interaction is confirmed. Both persons are connected and united in each other's suffering. Now in the Fourth Week, the retreatant asks for the grace to "*feel gladness and to rejoice intensively over the great glory and joy of Christ Our Lord* [221]." All grief and tears are replaced by rejoicing in the Fourth Week. The resurrection of Christ gives power to the woman retreatant for renewing her self. In this sense, relational empowerment is a process in which one could "enlarge vision and energy, be stimulated through interaction, in a framework of emotional connection."⁷⁷ That is, the woman retreatant connects with Jesus Christ and shares the view of the risen Christ; she could see the world in an enlarged vision to the extent that she could find God in all things.

In the Tomb: Waiting with Tenderness and Connection

In the first contemplation of the Fourth Week, Jesus Christ appears to his mother Mary. However, before his appearance, Mary was waiting quietly. Ronald Mercier interprets Mary's waiting very well. He notes, "waiting in the

⁷⁷ Surrey, "Relationship and Empowerment," 171.

transition—a transition into, not out of, emptiness—allows for creation of the space into which the Risen Lord comes, if we let the quiet ripen.”⁷⁸ The transition from suffering into emptiness deepens and widens one’s soul to welcome the risen Christ. Mary shows us the significant meaning of waiting: let the quiet ripen till it bears fruit. Furthermore, her waiting manifests a beautiful way that characterizes a female’s tenderness and connection that interrupt even death.

Resurrection: Generating Life and Giving Birth

God the Father raises Jesus Christ from the dead and somehow renews his self through resurrection. Contemplation on the narratives of resurrection is like meditating on the process of generating life and giving birth to a renewed self. In this sense, for a woman retreatant, resurrection is similar to pregnancy and giving birth, yet it is generated by the Holy Spirit, not by human power. Union with the risen Christ is a powerful yet gentle paschal experience.

The spiritual companion might help the woman retreatant to put any “dead experience,” for example, an unfinished business or an unrealized dream, beside Jesus Christ’s body in the tomb in her contemplation. Then the retreatant can ask God the Father to touch it when he raises Jesus Christ. Thus the woman retreatant might share the joy of his resurrection, experience a renewed self-generation within, and give birth to new possibilities for an enlarged world.

Furthermore, the narrative of appearance in which the risen Christ appeared to his followers strengthens disciples in various ways. He is truly a consoler who bestows comfort abundantly, as Ignatius writes, “To observe how Christ Our Lord fulfills *the office of consoler*, and to draw comparisons

⁷⁸ Ronald Mercier, “Without the Drama: The Transition from Third to Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises,” *Review for Religious* 71, no. 1 (2012): 30.

with the way *friends are accustomed to console one another.*” [224] Jesus Christ consoles people according to their needs, and touches them deeply. At this stage, a desire to see him again, listen to him again, and encounter him in one’s life, might grow intensely in the heart of the woman retreatant. She desired to be a faithful companion in the previous Week; similarly, now she desires to share Christ’s gladness and joy in his resurrection. Margot Donovan asserts, “In the accounts of resurrection-appearances, the risen Christ is described as giving joy, confidence, and peace”⁷⁹ to people who remained open to him. She also highlights, “The Lord is portrayed as consoling primarily by reassuring his friends of his identity in difference; the consolation that he gives is that he is alive and with them.”⁸⁰ The retreatant also receives this assurance as a gift onwards: The risen Christ’s newborn self is always dwelling in one, thus renewing one’s self.

The Contemplation to Attain Love: Practicing Mature Intimacy

The dynamic here is what Ignatius terms “love (which) ought to find its expression in deeds more than in words; love consists in *mutual communication* [230-231].” This statement expresses the very essence of love and gives the retreatant a lens to contemplate all creatures and life events. That is, mutual understanding, giving and receiving, speaking and listening, calling and responding, namely mutual communication is exactly the fruit of this contemplation.

God is always the one who initiates an invitation, loves creatures first, and then waiting for humans to cooperate with him. Ignatius suggests, “To consider how God *works and labours* on my behalf in all created things on the face of the earth...” [236] Schemel and Romer expound, “God the Worker is

⁷⁹ Margot Donovan, “Contemplating Christ Risen.” *The Way Supplement* 46 (1983): 80-81.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

at work and myself as yoke-fellow, the *co-worker* with God in building the kingdom.”⁸¹ That is, God and humans are reciprocal partners in building a redeemed earth.⁸² This is the effect of the Paschal Mystery, it leads the retreatant all the way to *attain* love, which means to “reach to or arrive at” a growing love on our part for God.⁸³

In this sense, the *Contemplatio* is not a conclusion of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Rather it serves as a *transition* from the Exercises to daily life. It invites one to discover new meanings in current reality after making the Exercises. The retreatant would realize that God’s essence is love, “who freely conceives and creates, whose peculiar mode of being is compassion and mercy for both women and men.”⁸⁴ Particularly for most women, their belief is that *mature intimacy* includes not only interdependence but also belonging to each other, thus in the *Contemplatio* women might find not only their whole selves belong to God but also they could find God in all things.

Conclusion

As a comprehensive world-view, feminism addresses all human experiences. It concerns men as well as women.⁸⁵ If a spiritual companion understands the way one’s psychological dynamics moves in each Week, this understanding might apply to attending the experience of both genders. For a feminist spiritual companion focuses on how men and women differ in terms of the way they develop the self; however, it does not neglect cultural factors that impact both sexes. In other words, psychosexual development is a process

⁸¹ George J. Schemel, S. J. & Judith A. Roemer, “The Fourth Week and the *Contemplatio ad Adorem*,” *Beyond Individuation to Discipleship* (Private Printing), 288-289.

⁸² Ruether, “Feminist Critique and Re-visioning of God-Language,” 142.

⁸³ Ivens, *Understanding The Spiritual Exercises*, 172.

⁸⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Abounding in Kindness: Writings for the People of God* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015), 144.

⁸⁵ Fischer, *Women at the Well*, 2.

of growth that embraces all aspects of our human reality, including physical, cognitive, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions.⁸⁶ Hence in giving the Exercises, the feminist spiritual companion should be aware of the psychosexual development of the retreatant and understand how the dynamics of the Exercises might influence psychosexual dimensions, particularly in regard to self-development. Besides, a feminist spiritual companion always focuses on the graces the retreatant asks for, and adapts a language that is easier for the retreatant to resonate with, thus fostering a more relational self and building up a more authentic connection with Christ—a desire that God has for all humans.

Gilligan rejects autonomy as the only appropriate goal for human maturity, instead, she argues that both men and women equally value relationships as a goal.⁸⁷ It is possible that autonomy and relationship are both important drives to develop a healthy self. A feminist spiritual companion can be aware of socio-cultural contexts that shape genders. Therefore, giving the Exercises from this broader viewpoint might increase the possibility of experiencing God's desire to equally relate to humans, as well as humans' desire to love him back. Making the Exercises facilitates the retreatant's self to grow, change, transform and transcend through the dynamic of each Week, to liberate the oppressed self of both sexes and become a reborn self-in-relation with the ultimate One, and thus to respond to the call to be whole and holy.

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⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁷ Conn, *Women's Spirituality*, 60.

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[摘要] 本文探討如何依據女性主義觀點的靈修輔導幫助現代女性進行神操，希冀從女性主義找到符合現代女性心理需求的輔導方法。本文首先討論提供神操給現代女性時，調整方法的必要性；其次探討關係自我理論的重要概念，最後闡述這些概念如何融入神操的逐週動力中。具體而言，第一週是幫助避靜者更新與天主關係中的自我，在操練中碰觸扭曲自我形象的罪，而在天主的慈悲中體驗被賦能。第二週目標是幫助避靜者跟耶穌基督彼此參與對方的生活，經驗彼此互為主體。第三週對基督苦難的默想，幫助避靜者在相互同理中共赴苦難。第四週則是分享耶穌基督的復活，經驗新生命的誕生，與基督加深連結，而能以更廣的眼光在一切事中找到天主。

關鍵字：女性主義，神操，關係自我理論，靈修輔導