

15. The placement of the rules for eating has been a source of some discussion. Various suggestions have been offered: this kind of awareness ties in well as an embodiment Third Week prayer; the one receiving the Exercises is learning to carry the Exercises into daily life by becoming reflective even about so ordinary an occupation as eating, and even that there were so many directions and things to internalize earlier in the Exercises that this position is merely a “clear space” for this new practice of intentionality. See Peters (1967), 13–14, 139–41.


The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women. by Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin and Elizabeth Liebert. ((2001))

Chapter 4

Grounding in Truth: Principle and Foundation

*Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of this to save their souls.*

*The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in working toward the end for which they are created.*

*From this it follows that I should use these things to the extent that they help me toward my end, and rid myself of them to the extent that they hinder me.*

—Spiritual Exercises [23]

*I am drawn outside any time the weather permits. Here I come alive in an unaccountable way. Energy rises gently inside me even as I become still.*

*A student has just given me a book on chaos theory. I am strangely moved and excited by the photographs. Suddenly unlikely things are related: an aerial view of the coast line of Great Britain and a mushrooming cumulus cloud. An oak tree reproduces the same pattern as the cloud—down to the smallest vein in the smallest leaf. Fractals, they call them. Invisible to us until computers could graph*
the countless points of non-linear equations. Funny, what finally lets us see what has been there all along. Hmmm.

My eyes range over the salt-water marsh at my feet and up the side of the forested mountain which the Native peoples believed to be a sleeping princess. I can see her hair streaming out behind her. Where I am now sitting is just about in her ear. Today she is clothed in muted grey-green velvet, trimmed in browns around her neck. She has straw hair at her crown. The colors of the marsh upon which she lies are likewise muted. The morning fog lingers over the damp turf. Two brilliant white egrets move in and out of my line of sight as they fish in the waterways. A gull wheels. My attention is caught by a hummingbird in the oak just over my shoulder. For a while, my eye traces the delicate angular etching of the oak tree against the sky.

The marsh edge is also a people place, a space caught between hills, where animals and humans alike share the corridor. Once I saw a fox in the yard, napping. School sounds waft out over the marsh from the playground next door.

I sigh deeply, exhaling all the air out of my lungs. Again. The air smells damp and cool and clean.

Suddenly everything comes together. I know why I am here. I know the purpose of human life. There are moments when we—and I—manipulate, destroy, create, cure. But our true place in all this is so simple. To notice. To appreciate. That's all.

—A Contemporary Woman

Juxtaposing Ignatius's seemingly didactic statement and one woman's narration of her religious experience raises the question of appropriate starting points for the Spiritual Exercises. Both are human responses to the meaning of life.

Human beings are formed within a matrix of stories of family, culture, religion. One's very life is story. Every human person tells and lives within many stories throughout a lifetime. One periodically needs to ask: Who am I? Who is God? How do I fit in this world? What is my heart's desire? Is God leading? Am I? Or are we walking together?

Entering into the Spiritual Exercises joins one more deeply with individual and cosmic senses of story. The Exercises concern personal stories as well as the stories of faith communities, the community of the universe and ultimately God's story-in-Jesus.

This chapter will explore the Principle and Foundation both for its distillation of Ignatius's story and for its invitation to consider one's own relationship to others, the world and God. Considering both the problems and possibilities inherent in its articulation will involve contrasting sixteenth- and twenty-first-century worldviews or stories and their implications for women, as well as for theology and spirituality. In light of women's ever-expanding consciousness and experience, a contemporary reframing of the Principle and Foundation will conclude the specific suggestions for persons giving the Exercises.

Different Ways of Telling the Story

The Principle and Foundation tightly articulates the basic principles of Ignatian spirituality (Ganss 1991, 393, n. 18) and expresses the prevailing sixteenth-century European worldview. A worldview situates humans with respect to earth and its events, other persons and companion creatures, and God. As a document of the sixteenth century read in the twenty-first, however, the Principle and Foundation often raises strong resistances. The history of interpretation also reveals a certain hesitation and ambiguity about the real purpose of the Principle and Foundation and how the one making the Exercises can best deal with it.

Contemporary persons can easily be offended by the anachronistic and privatized notion of "saving their souls," the objectification of
nature and the preoccupation with the well-being of humans. The very language of "using" or "ridding" self of things in working toward one's end sounds more like either Pelagianism or an outgrowth of an individualistic consumer society than a lofty ideal toward which to strive. To make oneself "indifferent" to all created things could suggest a coolly detached, almost antiseptic stance toward creation, in contrast to the positive view of creation that figures so prominently in the Contemplation to Attain Love at the close of the Exercises. The admonition not to seek certain life situations rather than others in a dualistic hierarchy seems presumptuous, especially in light of desires one "ought" to have. It is startling to confront the possibility that health, wealth and good reputation may not be the "goods" that one supposes.

For women, probably the most offensive portion in the original text has usually been translated, "...man is to use [other things on the face of the earth] as much as they help him on to his end." Although "man" presumably refers to humankind, as Ganss renders it, women's current consciousness that for thousands of years they and nature have been used as a means to an end triggers a painful reaction.

Principle and Foundation in the Structure of the Exercises

Structurally, the Principle and Foundation [23] and the Contemplation to Attain Love [230–37] represent bookends to the four weeks of the Spiritual Exercises (Cusson 1988, 52, n. 21; Tetlow 1989, 13). The Principle and Foundation distills the fruit of Ignatius's mystical experiences in the period from his recuperation at Loyola to his most treasured experience along the river Cardoner at Manresa about two years later, when he received an intellectual vision of great depth and intensity. Yet it reads much like a rational philosophical statement. The Contemplation to Attain Love, on the other hand, is

an impassioned outpouring of gratitude and mutuality of love by and for a God who lavishes gifts of all kinds, seeks to assure every form of presence and labors in and with humans in all of creation. The Contemplation to Attain Love may well be, like the Song of Songs, a reciprocal pledge of love and deeds between God and the person.

The Spiritual Exercises can be likened to a symphony in which the opening movement (the Principle and Foundation) presents various themes. Subsequent movements then develop them through repetition and variation, with everything culminating in a final grand movement that unites all in a sweep of sound and passion. In essence, the Principle and Foundation establishes the basis and contains, in highly compressed form, the themes and dynamics of the entire Exercises.

History of the Principle and Foundation

Ignatius's early mystical experience moved him to begin composing the Spiritual Exercises, originally known only as "the book." His profound awareness of being loved and taught by God set free his desire for the Holy Mystery. His subsequent education in classical theism, which stressed the transcendence of God, was balanced by his own mystical experiences, which gifted him with a heart-knowledge no book could impart. Regardless of how he phrased the Principle and Foundation, this mystical experience reoriented his life. While the theologically proper terminology of the Principle and Foundation could not adequately express his subjective experience, it could and did withstand the inquiring probe of the Inquisition.

Historically, Ignatius began giving a simpler version of the Exercises to pious persons of good will, especially women, at Manresa, Barcelona and Alcalá (Cusson 1988, 46). These first Exercises lasted about a month and included a number of instructions that presumably
incorporated the material of the later Principle and Foundation. In Paris, he further modified his presentation, allowing a preparatory stage to create the necessary dispositions.

Ignatius's purpose for the Principle and Foundation seems to have been twofold. He wanted to situate the one making the Exercises within God's plan of creation but he also hoped that reflecting on the wonder of creation might elicit a deeper affectivity, a great desire for this God who so desires each person.

Like any good director, he "felt out" each person's religious depth and only if the individual evinced a certain maturity of experience did he speak of his own awareness or move the person into the full Exercises. In this sense, the experience of the Principle and Foundation served as a kind of screening process.

Apparently, from the time Ignatius wrote the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth Annotations until the publication of the Official Directory in 1599, the Principle and Foundation was considered part of the matter connected with the Election and consequently not utilized with persons making the Exercises according to the eighteenth Annotation. In other words, Ignatius connected the Principle with making the whole of the Exercises according to the twentieth Annotation (Tetlow 1989, 19).

At least two recent commentators seem to have touched the core of the Principle and Foundation. Joseph Tetlow (1989) employs the Latin term Fundamentum for Principle and Foundation, a term found in all the sixteenth-century directories of the Exercises. William Barry (1994, 9) speaks of the affective Principle and Foundation. Both understand the essence of the Principle and Foundation as a profound felt awareness of "being created **momently** by our God and Lord in all concrete particulars" (Tetlow 1989, 7). Tetlow's choice of the word "momently" conveys the radical awareness that creation of each person consists of a continual outpouring of gifts and a luring by God through the individual's deepest desires. This luring leads to transformation and to the service of others, including the universe. To paraphrase John's Gospel, "The Father/Mother goes on working and so do I" (John 5:18). Placing that insight within the context of an emerging scientific paradigm gives an expansiveness and awesomeness to Ignatius's inspired genius that has hitherto been unavailable.

Humans have always struggled to find meaning, to locate their place in relation to others, the world and God in light of their understandings or perceptions of the world. The recognition that God creates humans moment by moment expands to include the sense that God creates everything moment by moment—suffuses the very evolutionary process—and that humans can and indeed must collaborate in that process.

The Exercises provide symbols that mediate a dynamic deeper than antiquated terminology or images. The Principle and Foundation evokes a religious experience in the one making the Exercises, a sense of awe and wonder at this God-in-Christ who cherishes and creates each one momently through the different eras of our lives. Such a relationship fosters liberation and a growing desire to become God's word for others.

**Cosmology and Worldview**

A brief survey of the cosmology and general worldview of the sixteenth century will provide significant clues to the formulation of Ignatius's Principle and Foundation.

A woman's worldview is like a pattern emerging in her individual life, a thread that draws apparently disparate pieces together and joins them into a coherent whole, a tapestry of her story. Her personal, functional worldview, the background myth within which she lives, has been radically shaped by the totality of life experiences: location
and situation of birth, family of origin, illnesses, religious background, opportunities for travel and education, interrelationships, physical makeup and condition, as well as cultural circumstances. The effectiveness of her personal worldview, or the birth of a new one where the old has failed, rests ultimately with the individual and the extent to which she is in touch with her experience, deepest intuitions and longings as part of a larger moment in time (Zohar 1990, 232–33). Ignatius described his worldview; each woman needs to bring her own to consciousness.

Cosmology, or the story of the universe at large, including its origins, development and destiny, as well as humans’ place in the dynamics of the solar system, has an enormous impact on one’s worldview even though one may be unconscious of it. Traditional cosmology operated as a kind of wisdom tradition, drawing upon philosophy, religion, art and natural science. In the last three centuries, cosmology has become increasingly mathematical, seeking concrete answers to physical facts of the universe, its size, composition, age, structure and so on. Social and political structures, philosophy, theology, as well as anthropology, ecclesiology and spirituality—literally every aspect of life—mirror one’s perception of the universe.\(^1\)

**Ptolemaic Cosmology**

Ignatius lived between 1491 and 1556, at the cusp of the late Middle Ages and the European Renaissance, and just before the Scientific Revolution—an enormously unsettling process that began with the publication of Copernicus’s theory of astronomy, “On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres,” in 1543. Prior to Copernicus (1473–1543), Western scholarly thought about the universe had been largely dominated by the work of Plato and Aristotle and the ensuing cosmology of Ptolemy (2nd c. A.D.).” Thomas Aquinas (1224–74) embraced the thought of Aristotle, assuming the inferiority and subordination of woman, along with a Ptolemaic and Aristotelian geocentric or earth-centered cosmology. Christendom subsequently came to accept this cosmology because it seemed compatible with Christian Scripture and provided a perfectly balanced whole.

Ptolemy envisioned the planets as a series of nested or concentric spheres in which lower layers were moved by the next higher ones. Each layer was embedded in a single ethereal sphere or “shell” and carried around by it. The sphere of the stars, which did not move but remained fixed to spheres and carried about by them, surrounded all. Ptolemy adopted Aristotle’s notion of the four elements—earth, water, air and fire, which extended as far as the moon in an area of change, generation and corruption. During patristic and medieval times, including the period in which Ignatius lived, people thought the airy realm between earth and the moon was filled with demonic spirits, with the devil ruling over the nonhuman and non-Christian world (Ruether 1983, 81). In contrast, the supralunar world of Ptolemy’s cosmology, a magic region composed of ether reaching from the moon’s orbit outward to the stars, was changeless and imperishable. Later theology saw this as the dwelling place of God and the angels and saints.

A metaphor, the “Great Chain of Being,” referred to a hierarchy of existences beneath this incorruptible substance of the heavenly world, each imparting form and change to the one below it. The farther one was from the pinnacle, the Unmoved Mover, the more inferior the being. Women ranked toward the bottom of the chain, but above animals and lifeless matter. The hierarchical dualism of mind over body was duplicated in the hierarchy of male over female and human over animals and nature.

Patriarchy, a system of oppression of women that has existed in Western civilization for the past five thousand years, also affects social structures as well as cosmological, scriptural and theological
formulations. In patriarchal cultures, domination of women provides a social and symbolic link to the domination of the earth, which is seen as feminine.²

As one commentator explains, “Medieval theology as a whole can be characterized as an all-embracing Christian interpretation of the world, but at the same time, as an interpretation of Christianity from a geocentric cosmology” (Wildiers 1982, 77). This total enmeshment of physics and religion reflected a cosmological worldview that was static, ordered, hierarchical, dualistic and anthropocentric or human-centered (McFague, 1993, 136). It was also clearly androcentric or male-centered. As historian and philosopher Carolyn Merchant points out, any potential advantage women might have accrued from their association with earth as the center of the universe in a geocentric Ptolemaic cosmology was obliterated in the next scientific shift (1983, 128) when the sun, associated with man, became the center.

In 1543 Copernicus published his thesis postulating a heliocentric or sun-centered universe. This threatened not only the Ptolemaic model of the universe, which Christians had adopted, but also the status of theology and women. Challenging the reigning cosmology’s claims about the physical universe repudiated the preceding religious outlook as well as the antiquated science.

While the medieval cosmology of Ignatius’s time was flawed, the mechanistic worldview that ultimately followed proved even more harmful to nature and to women. While the birth of Newtonian physics did away with the Great Chain of Being, the popular association of women with earth persisted. The living cosmos of Greek and medieval times was now understood as a nonliving machine. The rational mind was seen as the essential self, while matter, nature and the universe became objects for exploration and mastery. With the universe now mere matter, lifeless and dead, nature could rightly be probed, subjugated and manipulated (Johnson 1993, 14). Women, still identified literally and symbolically with the natural world, could be probed, subjugated and manipulated as well. Both were identified as objects.

This analysis does not imply that Ignatius himself intended to disparage women or that he demeaned the beauty of the earth; persons of the Middle Ages revered nature as a reflection of God. Rather, it attempts to make clear that cultural consciousness and prevailing scientific paradigms affect the way one articulates human experience and responds to questions of human meaning. Ignatius reflected his times in his views of heaven and earth, the human person, the origins of evil, even images of God.

**Toward a Paradigm Shift**

Science is often perceived as objective “hard” data that unambiguously defines reality. The way the universe has been investigated and interpreted for the past four hundred years has gained its credibility from this understanding of science. But philosophers of science recognize that, by itself, science cannot resolve the questions of meaning and purpose that lie behind the increasing mass of data and the theories developed to account for it. Science provides but one story among many elucidating the meaning of the universe.

Over the last century and a half, changes in science, especially quantum and information physics, thermodynamics and the physics of chaos have turned upside down and inside out not only medieval cosmology in the West but also the mechanistic determinism that succeeded it. The rise of women’s liberation and ecological movements also highlight the fact that divergent perspectives have replaced the worldview of Bacon, Descartes and Newton.

Humans are latecomers on the scene of an evolutionary process that began some fifteen billion years ago with the birth of the universe in the Big Bang.¹ An unfolding cosmology reveals an expanding universe that
has evolved through several eras of expansion, cooling and condensation. Eventually gravity condensed matter into galaxies and stars and Earth’s Sun ignited into being some five billion years ago. Several bands of stardust revolving around the Sun became the planets, moons, asteroids and other objects of our solar system. Earth is but one planet moving around one star, which itself is one of three hundred billion stars of the Milky Way galaxy, which in turn is one of a trillion galaxies in a breathtaking universe (Swimme 1996, 80).

Through a dynamic evolutionary process combining both chance and stability, the earth’s molecular structures became more and more complex. Life was awakened at primitive levels, fostering the eventual development of everything from cells to plants to animals and humans. This highly complex process, is, nonetheless, in some sense one process.

The majority of atoms that make up the bodies of all living things were created by supernovas. The Big Bang produced hydrogen and much of the helium in the universe while all other elements were forged in the furnace of the stars. Human genetic structure closely parallels the DNA of other creatures. Humans are literally made of stardust and therefore, in one sense, no different from a stately rose or a sleek jaguar. From the unity of an incredibly tiny bit of energy/matter has evolved lavish, organically connected and radically interdependent diversity.

This brief evolutionary story highlights an enormous paradigm shift in the way that we relate to ourselves, to others, to the cosmos and to God. Western culture, though, has barely begun to move from a static, ordered, hierarchical, dualistic, anthropocentric view of the universe to a process, evolutionary, dynamic, organic, interdependent, relational, biocentric one.

This era marks the beginning of a new revolution, a new narrative about the universe, humankind’s place in it and in relation to the

Creator. No longer can a human story be told apart from a universe story; the two are inextricably bound together. Because of the remarkable advance of science and technology, scholars are not at a loss for data, but it has not yet been sufficiently assimilated to bring about a wholly new awareness of the relationship between ourselves and the universe. As theologian Thomas Berry wisely surmises, we are “between stories.”

Implications for Theology and Spirituality

In the Principle and Foundation, Ignatius presented his view of God, world and self. An emerging new cosmology shifts the perspective on theological questions pertaining to that opening consideration. At least seven implications flow from the new cosmology in reference to the Principle and Foundation.

- Classical dualisms are no longer tenable. The hierarchical, patriarchal dualisms of humans over earth, men over women and spirit over matter are obsolete. Yet, current metaphors such as “the rape of the earth” and “virgin forests” highlight the continued tendency to identify women and nature as objects in relation to men’s experience. “[S]exism…has an ecological face” (Johnson 1996, 12).

- Human beings are radically interconnected with all other creatures. Quantum physics insists on the fundamental interrelationship of the world of matter. “Every living being of Earth is cousin to every other living being. Even beyond the realm of living we have a common origin in the primordial FLARING FORTH of the energies from which the universe in all its aspects is derived” (Berry and Swimme 1992, 5).
God is not distant from the universe but a sustaining presence in all of creation. God's presence is not inseparable from creatures (pantheistic) but present and involved with the universe while still being independent of it (panentheistic) (O'Murchu 1997, 50). The universe is pregnant with the presence of God whose creative action is at the heart of the evolutionary process. God acts as compassionate partner, as lure toward the future and as co-creator. Indeed, God labors on humans' behalf [236].

A human-centered norm of progress must give way to a biocentric focus. Humans are within the cosmos, not apart from or above it. The earth can flourish in the absence of humans, but humans cannot flourish in the absence of the earth. Humankind is dependent on earth, its larger body (Mcfague 1993), for existence. The poet Wendell Berry somewhere reflects that humans rely on creatures and survive by their deaths. In sustaining life, humans break the body and shed the blood of creation. When done respectfully and reverently, it is sacrament; when done destructively or greedily, it is desecration. The arrogance of human beings is destroying plant and animal species, each taking millions of years to evolve and each necessary for planetary ecology.

Cultivating a renewed sacramental vision is the richest way of recovering both a sense of reverence for and companionship with all of creation. Sacrament has a much broader context than usually imagined. An earlier genius of humankind saw nature as the primary source of revelation. The work of poets, artists and mystics has always drawn attention to the numinous quality of the ordinary, calling us to poet Gerard Manley Hopkins's realization that “the world is charged with the grandeur of God.”

Salvation is planetary and global as well as personal. A shift from other-worldly to this-worldly redemptive hope flows from this new paradigm. Persons no longer seek simply their own redemption but that of all creation, including the earth itself. The life and death of Jesus must be lived out salvifically by all Christians. The universe, the sacred body of God, also needs salvation (Rom 8:18–23).

Humans are called not to dominate nature, but to be co-creators within the evolutionary process. Humankind is not the center by means of which all is dominated, but the center through which all enter into kinship and communion. Women and men are called to become partners in mutuality and respectful companions of all creation.

The current paradigm shift invites us to recapitulate the wisdom of the previous epistemological shift from Ptolemaic to Copernican cosmology even as another takes place. The task calls for a return to nature with a second naiveté, reimagining and reparticipating in the mythical, poetic and religious, even as the struggle with the political, ecological, economic and technological realities continues.

Many persons' worldview remains largely unexamined, an unconscious frame of reference for living and relating to God, self and creation. Each person making the Spiritual Exercises needs to answer the implicit questions in the Principle and Foundation: How would you describe your world and how it influences you? How do you imagine God? What is your relationship to others and all of God’s creation? What is your part in creation? What are the dominant influences on your sense of God, humans, heaven and earth? What does it mean to exist in this vast unfolding universe?

In Ignatius's era people in the West making the Exercises operated out of a universally accepted cosmology. Today the cosmology of
the one guiding the Exercises can conflict with the one making them, or both can be operating out of an irreconcilable hybrid. It is incumbent on those giving the Exercises to ascertain what cultural, philosophical, theological and scientific assumptions they bring to the text. These presuppositions will affect how guides “hear into speech,” the one making the Exercises, to borrow author Nelle Morton’s (1985, 74) felicitous phrase.

**Reframing the Principle and Foundation**

In its essence, the opening line of the Principle and Foundation, “Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord,” seeks to uncover both who God is and our relationship to this Creative One. Paradoxically, many women may feel called to pay more attention to self as a prelude to paying attention to God, to discover for the first time—or all over again—the God present within the mystery of one’s self. To turn away from self is to turn away from God, despite inner voices chanting “Don’t be selfish.” As one woman said, “It was easier to use my gifts in an outward way, to share what I could with family and faith community than to try to look inside myself and cherish, nurture and enjoy my self as a gift from God to me.” Seeing oneself and all of creation as continually loved and desired into being by a passionate and solicitous God prompts an awe and still deeper reverence for God, self and the sacrament of creation. Such was the case with Ignatius at the river Cardoner. A sense of the diaphanous presence of God in everything undergirds the awareness of gift.

The second part of that goal, “by means of this to save their souls,” has been well discussed by Ganss (1991, 392) and others. Ignatius understood soul as the Hebrew equivalent of the “total self.” But the new cosmology puts a different spin on soteriology, for now salvation includes the universe. Furthermore, feminist theologians stress the relational, communitarian nature of salvation, seeing salvation as not only a single past event, but an ongoing reality in which humans participate. Like Jesus, women must call for responsibility—for themselves, for the powerless, for the earth, the greater body of God. It makes a great deal of difference if the one making the Exercises seeks life for self and others “beyond this world” or precisely in the messiness and beauty of ordinary experience.

The traditional “means” of the Principle and Foundation, “…other things on the face of the earth created for human beings…use these things to the extent that they help,” seems singularly anthropocentric in light of our dependence on the earth and the need for a compassionate relationship with it. As interdependent companions of all that exists, we must place much more focus on the welfare of all species, not just the human.

A closely related issue concerns the objectification and dismissal of other human beings as “means,” particularly women and children. Statistics fluctuate, but the continuing reality of a very small percentage of people using a vast amount of the world’s resources while millions die from starvation, water pollution or the loss of arable farm land is morally reprehensible. The U.S. bishops’ pastoral on the economy, “Economic Justice for All” (1986), admonishes all to reflect on how purchases affect the poor. The “poor” must also include the earth itself.

**Nonuse** may have as much importance as use. One can ignore gifts of nature, of the arts and sciences or of the person, such as self-expression through poetry, dance, journaling or potting. Everyone should have access to these gifts of God, not just the affluent. All things beautiful comprise important resources for spirituality and should be treasured as such.

The convoluted issue around “making myself indifferent to all created things” cannot be dealt with as simply a question of will power.
Indifference presumes passion. Women cannot act with indifference in any positive sense until they have identified their desires and passions. Indifference demands liberation. Detachment follows from attachment to Someone whose love empowers with blessed freedom.

Ignatius seems to suggest moving toward whatever gives fullness of life in the service of the world, while avoiding whatever ties down the spirit. Indifference does not so much seek this rather than that—health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty—but rather, entails a more receptive looking for, with and in God at whatever life circumstances are present, precisely because of a grounding relationship with God. Indifference means finding God who sustains, supports and lures toward the future in the process of life. While few people truly enjoy this degree of freedom, the desire for it remains essential.

After the named things one “ought not to seek,” (health, wealth, honor) comes a fascinating phrase, “and so on in other matters.” What might the “and so on” be for women in contemporary society? Cultural myths, certainly, including beauty, body shape, youthful appearance, dependence on external validation—especially from men—stylish dress, security and doing it “right.” Having the one making the Exercises list her own “and so ons” could prove helpful.

Desires also intimately relate to the Principle and Foundation because desires flow from a worldview and reveal how one wishes to be in relationship. Those guiding the Exercises do important work when they assist those making them to discover what they really want—their functional Principle and Foundation. Some women have little sense of the choices or options existing even within impossible situations. The difficulty might stem from a lack of imagination, but also, perhaps, from fear. “It’s risky to discover my own needs and desires because it leads me on a path away from the crowd and into the unknown,” said one woman. “I will have to take responsibility for my actions, and I may fail.”

Women may listen to exterior voices saying they are inferior, not “good enough,” or “different,” rather than listen to the God-self and their own deepest desires. Culture and church so program women to see themselves as inferior or “not enough” that they may not allow themselves the luxury of desires for fear of yet another disappointment. Women generally put the needs and desires of families, parents and coworkers first, leaving little room for self. In not a few cases, they face enormous conflict from spouses or partners when seeking to fulfill their God-given desires.10 Internalizing the core of the Principle and Foundation will give a sense of their dignity and uniqueness and elicit authentic desires and genuine indifference. One woman imaged the movement into healthy autonomy as “coming out of a coma.”

Psychological and sociological studies of women have indicated that many lack “voice,” a metaphor for growth in autonomy and maturity. Even a community of two, the one guiding and the one making the Exercises, can facilitate and encourage a woman’s movement toward greater freedom and delight in self and a healthy desire to serve others when affirmed or lovingly challenged. Those giving the Exercises cannot presume capacity for self-reflection, for tapping into and articulating one’s experience, feelings, desires and thoughts.

Strong and powerful women can also get caught in desires evoked by their very success, such as the desire to make more money, to associate oneself with what one earns, to look down on those less powerful or successful, to “do it myself.” Feminism itself can set up conflicting desires. For those women who have “found their voice,” how do they choose to use it?

The Principle and Foundation is intended to evoke a present or remembered experience, an awareness of how God continues to create and to cherish each individual moment by moment throughout
life. This realization must precede any consideration of sin, or else the First Week becomes painfully introspective. The Principle and Foundation "grounds" a person in graced self-awareness and God-awareness, which is food for the journey of life and ministry. The God of the Principle and Foundation loves women compassionately and asks them to trust themselves and act out of this deep, true sense of who they really are.

**Wisdom for the One Giving the Exercises**

An inductive, intuitive approach to the Principle and Foundation enables the guide to feel out where each woman enters the process in terms of cosmology and worldview. Moving from a macro to a micro level, a new paradigm generates not only cosmic but also personal questions for the one making the Exercises. What is my world? What is the center of my universe? What is my cosmology?

Discussing a faith autobiography or asking a series of informal questions offers clues to a woman’s desires and relationship to the Creative One. For example, the one giving the Exercises might ask penetrating questions, such as: Who are you? If you had a photo album of important people and events in your life, what would it look like? Who would be in it? What in your life do you feel most strongly and passionately about? What is the goal of your life? How do you experience God? How do you and God communicate? How do you image Jesus? Why are you choosing to make the Exercises?

Since each woman experiences the call to make the Exercises uniquely, the guide needs to begin with each individual’s experience, her story. Each person is, in effect, a living, breathing Principle and Foundation. It is perhaps more important to let the one making the Exercises articulate her own Principle and Foundation rather than reflecting on that of Ignatius. Articulating the end or goal of one’s life in relationship to God is a “luxury” some women have not had the opportunity to explore or have resisted because of the responsibility it might entail. Asking a woman what her “passions” are might elicit a variety of responses: “to raise my children to be good Christians,” “to seek intimacy with God in Jesus,” “to live a good life of service to others,” “to be a person of integrity and authenticity,” “to use my education,” “to satisfy my husband, parent or employer” and so on.

Probing these passions and not simply taking them at face value will yield a variety of rationales for making the Exercises: to meet others’ expectations, to be worthy of God, to be a vital contributing member of the faith community or world, to grow in faith, to find one’s life direction, to discover and use gifts for leadership or to discern a call to ordained ministry. The guide must listen carefully to the self-expression, worldview and theology of the woman making the Exercises. This dialogue over days, weeks or even months, such as Ignatius encouraged, will also reveal obstacles that need additional work or may prohibit moving beyond the Principle and Foundation at this time.

Humans develop and order experience through images. Granted that no image of God is adequate, it is important to discover how one relates to God. Naming God implies a corresponding self-image. If God is a tyrant, I am oppressed; if God is beneficent, I am gifted.

The two-tiered universe of an earlier cosmology easily lent itself to a theologically dualistic perspective. Western classical theology's understanding of God, almost exclusively shaped by men, presented God as male, as power and might. It experienced God predominantly "as noun, as transcendence, as order, as structure, as law, as rationality" (Nelson 1983, 13). This form of patriarchy physically and emotionally distances women, but also men, from God; it makes God wholly other, above and beyond, and relegates Divine Love to being measured through conformity to law and order—or at least conformity to church and society.
Images of God as judge, tyrant, beyond caring, oppressive and domineering are common among women, particularly those who have experienced psychological, physical or sexual abuse. On the other hand, and equally unhelpful, God can also be experienced only as comforting, allowing a sort of pseudodependent, immature relationship that never challenges one to assume responsibility. Both of these unhelpful and incomplete or even destructive extremes need to be recognized and challenged. The heart of the matter is God-image.

A growing body of work by developmental theorists highlights the fact that many women have been socialized to forget their own needs, desires or passions. One very intelligent woman remarked, “I can see that I arrived at the age of legal adulthood with only the barest acquaintance with my inner being. I knew myself as someone who existed to please, to serve, and especially to accommodate to others.” Another woman remarked: “I hide from myself by not listening to what I want and need, but by clinging to my dependencies on others, by blaming my family of origin. I live my fear as I crave things I don’t want and need and believe the cravings. I fear that I am not enough. There is anxiety that my not-enoughness will be discovered.”

In denying oneself, one denies the very image in which one is made. Failing to love self, one’s inmost being expressed in embodied spirit, means failing to love God. The guide can help by asking for clarification. What is it that makes you truly happy, that gives you joy? Who are you when you are most fully alive, most fully your true self? What gives you energy?

Other women find the traditional language of “surrender to God” both offensive and threatening. They equate surrender with obliterating themselves and relinquishing their lifetime of struggle for basic existence, much less for appropriate political power.11 Many women react to the subliminal message associated with military surrender, realizing the horrible ramifications for them and their children. To surrender to this God would be seen as an act of fear. As one woman declared, “I will have no God, if the only way to God is through the demise of the self that I have worked so hard to form.” On the other hand, to surrender the depressed and empty self women so often experience, as well as a false image of God, provides the way forward (Carr 1988, 212).

The most basic image necessary to the process of the Exercises consists of God as loving creator who calls us to full humanity, to identity and to collaboration (Sheldrake 1983, 95). Seeing oneself as a unique and precious creative act of God gives a joy that does not come from success or external validation. Freely and willingly handing oneself over to this God, to a relationship of mutuality that transforms and transcends what one knows about oneself, removes probably the single most difficult psychological obstacle to spiritual growth.

**Conclusion**

Ignatius added the Principle and Foundation to the Exercises after his initial work with both women and men. Although we cannot tell from the text of the Principle and Foundation how women influenced its formulation, its impact on women today is of great concern.

Because of the complexity of our era, reflecting on the assumptions inherent in the Principle and Foundation as articulated by Ignatius is as important now as it was for sixteenth-century Christians. At the core of the stated Principle and Foundation exists a way of perceiving reality that needs to resonate with the mystical experience of Ignatius, not by replicating his experience, but in one’s affective awareness and life direction. Ignatius’s experience of God as loving Creator allowed him to see others and the known world as an expression of that love and worthy of his own. The affective Principle and Foundation or Fundamentum constitutes the sine qua non, the
lens, the central theme that runs throughout and grounds each movement of the Exercises. This relationship with God both expresses and opens one to the continuing dynamic of the Exercises.

A new scientific paradigm that relocates humans in their relationships to God, others and the cosmos puts the Exercises and all of life into a whole new perspective, providing a liberating movement for women and nature and an expansiveness and numinous quality to all of creation. Theology and spirituality are deeply affected by a new scientific paradigm. A new understanding of cosmology radically shifts meanings of sin, salvation and sanctity from an individualistic soteriology to one of interrelationship, not just with God and others, but also with the planetary systems. Incarnation is no longer seen as an isolated event. The embodiment of God takes place in all of creation as it moves toward greater complexity and communion.

Two contemporary women offer a rendering of the Principle and Foundation that comes close to summarizing these rich insights:

Lord my God, when Your love spilled over
   into creation
   You thought of me.
   I am
from love of love for love.

   Let my heart, O God, always
   recognize,
   cherish,
   and enjoy Your goodness in all of creation.

   Direct all that is me toward Your praise.
   Teach me reverence for every person, all things.
   Energize me in your service.

Lord God
may nothing ever distract me from Your love...
neither health nor sickness
wealth nor poverty
honor nor dishonor
long life nor short life.

May I never seek nor choose to be other than You intend or wish.
Amen
(Bergan and Schwan 1985, 11).