

7-2001

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Recommended Citation

Signard, Jeanne (2001) "Man and Woman God Created Them," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 45 : No. 4 , Article 16.
Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol45/iss4/16>

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“Man and Woman God Created Them”

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Congregation of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit
17-VII-2001

Preliminary Remarks

1. A double polarity

Every human person has a masculine pole and a feminine pole: a duality of ying and yang, *animus et anima*. This duality is made known to us by God from the beginning of Genesis. “*God created man in his image. In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them*” (Gn 1:27).

The uniqueness does not go without the distinction. Does this not mean that **each of us, in the image of God, is at the same time masculine and feminine?** Numerous biblical texts and Fathers of the Church remind us that God has a mother’s womb and that the God of Jesus Christ is “father-mother” (“pater-maternel”).¹

To speak of feminine psychology to men, is therefore to talk about a part of themselves. Do we not say “the woman, half of the man,” not in the sense that she would be only half of a man, but that man also has his feminine side. Depending on whether one is man or woman, it is a question of the dominant not the exclusive character. That is why I will speak often of the masculine and feminine rather than man and woman.

2. Nature and culture are indissociable

We admit that it is **difficult to distinguish** what is specifically feminine, what comes from the very nature of the woman and what comes from the culture, the history of civilizations and social roles with their symbolisms, including the domination-submission relationship. The feminine pole, usually considered inferior, is traditionally found to be depreciated in favor of the masculine pole, with some exceptions, such as the Aztecs and the Celts.

The newness of the gospel, the example of Jesus himself and the practice of the first Christian communities should have caused a radical conversion in this area for Christians.² Thus the Church fell in behind patriarchal societies. In its defense,

¹ Albert Samuel, *Les Femmes et les religions*, Ed. de l’Atelier, 1995.

² Daniel Marguerat, *Le Dieu des premiers chrétiens*, Chapter 7, Ed. Labor et Fides, 1993.

we say that this is the price of its incarnation, or today we would say of its inculturation.

In a multicultural context, it is impossible in a few hours to touch on all the nuances of the feminine situation from continent to continent and country to country. We will content ourselves then by pointing out some general characteristics of feminine psychology, leaving to each one the care to apply it to his particular area.

There is, however, a domain where the distinction is clear. It is the biological and **sexual differentiation**: no man has ever carried a baby in his womb. The psychological roots itself in the biological. Inevitably there is a difference between man and woman in the way of approaching reality, in relation to themselves, to others, and to God and in the way of living religious life.

3. Equal does not mean identical

Here I will use the term “identical” not as synonymous with equal, but in the context of the identity of a person. Every human person identifies himself/herself in differentiating himself/herself from another. We are in agreement in saying that **the woman is equal to the man, but in a relationship of complementarity**, that respects and values the differences. Otherwise we risk an unending struggle, where the loser will always want revenge. At this moment, it is the woman who is seeking revenge. It would be a shame if she becomes lost in wanting to imitate man. **Let us leave to man the domains where he is incomparable and let woman distinguish herself in the domains where she excels.** And if today the positions formerly held by men are accessible to her, she will fill them all the better in that she will bring them the feminine mark which was lacking. Writers, men and women, will not write the same thing; philosophers, do not give the same explanation of good; theologians do not use the same language in speaking of God. The “real presence” resonates differently for a man than for a woman who has the capacity to bear another being within herself.

When a man and a woman contemplate the face of Jesus who chose to become man, born of a woman, do they not have their own way of looking at Christ? Before getting into a fight, as in politics, on the question of if there are enough women in positions of responsibility in the Church, we need to think, more fundamentally, about the masculine and feminine ways of living faith (and religious life).

What we have in common is this creative ability in the image of God, which is not the ability to do the same things in the same way, but **the ability to do different things in different ways.** It is in this way that the creative power of God is reflected, shared and specified.

4. Choice of a behavioral approach: Transactional Analysis

We are going to set aside Freudian psychoanalytical analysis which relies on Oedipus complexes and castration (read on this subject *Les enfants de Jocaste*³) as well as cultural, theological and historical approaches, to focus ourselves on **a more behavioral approach**. For this I take my inspiration from transactional analysis, a methodology among others. This grid of analysis will allow us to see how feminine psychology colors the personal experiences of the woman in general and that of the religious in particular.

This cannot be done without women religious being in contact with men religious in their own manner of living the same realities.

1. Personal Development according to Transactional Analysis

Transactional analysis teaches us that our personality develops in three stages and give us three levels of expression and action. We share these three levels; it is the way we behave that differentiates us.

1. Our “Parent state,” which varies according to culture and education, has integrated the principles, values and norms, and fruits of education. It gives structure to our judgement, gives us reference points in our discernment and choices. These are all our “must...,” “should...,” “what is important in life...,” this is normal, or not normal.”

The “parent state” **can manifest itself in two ways**. If it is fairly centered on laws, norms and rules to remember and respect, it is called the “**Critical Parent.**” Rather masculine, it favors socialization.

If it centers on help, support, advice, it is called the “**Nurturing Parent.**” It provides the means, advice and stimulation to “be as one should be,” that which is usually considered relevant to the feminine pole.

2. Our “Adult state” looks for objectivity. It calls on reason, disregarding emotions. It endeavors to look at situations with realism. It likes clarity and logic at the risk of becoming cold and impersonal.

3. Our “Child state” is the seat of our impulses, our emotions, our feelings, our pleasures and our sufferings, our enthusiasm. It also makes us dream, desire, and imagine. It is the source of our intuition and our **creativity**, of our ability to **adapt**. In front of the “Critical Parent,” it can become **submissive** or **rebellious**.

³ Christiane Olivier, *Les enfants de Jocaste*, Ed. Denoël-Gonthier, 1980.

Imagine a team assembled to find a solution to a problem. The **“Creative Child”** has an ingenious idea right away: “I feel, he/she says, that if we do such and such, we can manage!” The others around the table look at him/her with an air of scepticism, all the more as he/she is well known for outlandish ideas. A sensible **“Adult state”** will immediately ask “tell me how you see this working.” – “I can’t explain it, but I just feel...” – “well, when you can see it more clearly, we’ll come back to it!” Around the table, there will also be a **“Critical Parent”** who will recall “that we do not have the right, that that will never be accepted, that it is not customary” and a **“Nurturing Parent”** will look for ways to manage without moving. **“The Submissive Child”** will be in agreement with the “Critical,” the **“Rebel”** automatically against. And it is thus that the “Creative Child” is quickly stifled by duty and reason. If it is a mixed group, you probably will have thought that depending on whether one is a man or woman; one will have the tendency to appeal to a certain “state” more than another. Note that a personality is all the richer when its “states” are alive and when it appeals to the “state” that is suitable to the circumstance.

Now let us look at how our manner of being and acting in each of **these “states” is marked by the fact of being man or woman**. We will point out the effects on feminine religious life as we go along.

This distinction does not aim to value one over another. It is a question of exploring the underdeveloped possibilities within each, which, if left to their own devices, risk becoming one-sided and imbalanced.

II. Living in the masculine and feminine “Parent state”

If we look at a man and a woman in their “Parent state,” that is recalling the “principles, values, and norms,” we readily recognize a masculine and a feminine style.

1. Masculine pole

Centered on the law, it first of all appeals to our **“Critical Parent state.”** It is the father who **represents the law**. It is the father, who “castrates,” separates, differentiates, helps to get out of merging and confusion, who forbids or allows, who structures, who marks out the road, **maintaining consistency** on the personal level as well as the institutional level. It is the masculine that defines and makes statutes, roles, and functions respected. The “political” dimension of power is more familiar to the masculine pole.

In the exercise of authority, man appreciates more all that is on the side of strictness, straightforwardness, clarity, precision, justice, the law for all. Listening

too much to each, it is difficult to keep the consistency of what has been established of which he feels responsible.

In order not to become drunk with power, slide into rigidity, **authoritarianism, impersonality**, the masculine pole must appeal to its “Nurturing Parent,” the more feminine.

The “Nurturing Parent” humanizes the “Critical”

Transactional analysis mentions five conditions for a rule to be humane and we could find the same conditions in the Bible and the Gospel. It must be:

Applicable

The one responsible for remembering the rule could believe it is applicable, while for the one who must apply it, it is inapplicable or perceives as such. The capacity to listen, the reluctance to demand without support from the heart, characteristics from our feminine pole, render us more able to **dialogue in a authority-obedience relationship**.

“For this Law that I enjoin on you is not beyond your strength...” (Dt 30:11-13; Mt 23:4).

Useful for life

It is once again our feminine pole that dares call into question certain practices that are maintained by habit or laziness, practices that were vital in the past or in other places but today encumber and arrest creativity. This **feminine calling into question** is made less in the name of freedom as in the name of life: to save that which is vital, by love, a woman is capable of bending herself to the craziest demands as well as contesting them.

Note again that woman has a sense of the useful, which coexists very well with what is gratuitous and gracious. *“It is useful because it is pretty”* (Saint-Exupéry). She embellishes the looks of anything a bit useless which makes it charming; the walls, the dishes are decorated. Why are there so many women in **Churches and present at Liturgies**, places where the rules of efficacy are not in vogue? There where the masculine sees a waste of time, the feminine believes that the patience of a slow gestation is part of true life and all relationship.

Protector

Allergic to the arbitrary, the woman will look for the sense of what is required, which will make the one who is on the side of the obvious say that she is sometimes

complicated. If the request is in the sense of protecting life, she will be obedient in the least detail. Perhaps she learned the hard way that the forbidden is protective: *“If you eat of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you will die”* (Gn 2:16).

Contractual

The three previous conditions are indispensable for the fourth to be respected, the most important for woman: the “yes” from the heart. It is this “yes” of love that renders the “yoke light” and makes the woman happy even in the worst of trials. The only law for her: “you will love,” “Love and do as you please.” A very feminine moral, which made some say that woman is naturally **immoral**. *“In the way of your decrees lies my joy”* (Ps 119:14).

Adaptable

At Babel, where everyone was building with bricks (assured efficiency!) and dreamed of a single language, our feminine pole prefers the babble of Pentecost where each one heard the other speaking in his native language. Differences and exceptions are part of life. Is it not the feminine pole of Jesus that led him to practice the very perplexing form of justice that paid as much to the workers of the last hour, that went after the one lost sheep, that celebrated the return of the prodigal son, that authorized the apostles to pull off the heads of wheat on the Sabbath to satisfy their hunger?

2. Feminine Pole

The “Nurturing Parent” state is more developed in women. Power struggles between women are just as strong as with men, but more diffuse, concealed, sometimes disguised as service. In the exercise of responsibility, woman prefers to help, advise, seek concrete means for obtaining support without too much force. This makes her ingenious, shrewd, good at explaining, for requiring everything while avoiding displeasing.

Her gift as a **mediator**, her allergy to violence, makes her particularly skillful in resolving conflicts among persons. It is the mother of the family that achieves by sweetness what the father could not get by force. In a parish team, it is the sister who will make a decision accepted while the priest only succeeded in waking up the “rebellious child.” But be careful! Her power of seduction can appear at times as **manipulation** and risks arousing the suspicion of the speaker.

The manner in which Catherine of Sienna counselled and even admonished Pope Urban VI is a marvel of this type.

“Most holy and most gentle Father in Christ, the gentle Jesus, I, Catherine, the servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, write with the desire to see you, the true and legitimate shepherd and chief of your sheep.

“Yes, most Holy Father, when you have to place shepherds in the garden of the holy Church, may they be people searching for God, and not honor; and may the path they choose to get there be one of truth, and not of lies.

“O most Holy Father, be patient when we tell you these things for they are only said for the honor of God and your salvation, as a son must do who tenderly loves his father: he cannot support that one does something which would be a mistake or disgrace for his father, and always watches over his honor, because he knows that a father who governs a large family cannot see more than a man, and then, if his legitimate children do not watch out for his honor and his interests, he will often be deceived. It is this way for you, most Holy Father: you are the father and lord of all Christianity. We are all under the wings of your holiness. Your authority extends to all; but your vision is limited like that of man, and it is necessary that your children see and do, in the sincerity of their heart and without any servile fear, all that is useful to the honor of God, to yours, and to the salvation of the flock that is under your guidance.

“I know that your Holiness ardently desires to have helpers who are able to serve you, but for this it is necessary to listen to them with patience.”⁴

The woman in charge of community

More maternal, the woman will feel responsible for each person (for a mother, each child is unique). She will have the tendency to consider each as a case, to be more listening, more understanding. She will try to soften, personalize, and develop the rule. Looking from the outside, one might think of a lack of authority or a laissez-faire attitude.

When she is at ease, she willingly practices **co-responsibility**, consultation and negotiation down to the smallest detail. This interest brought to personal life can lead women to give themselves to **having a say** in the activities of everyone. Support, without a doubt, but also at times gossip, jealousy. Envy and jealousy play a more considerable role in the life of a woman than of a man. Freud attributes this difference to the ancient penis envy of which the importance is undeniable.

The “critical” protects the “nurturer” from the tendency to mix

⁴ Michel Scouarnec, *Deux mille ans d'Église par les textes*, Ed. Atelier, 2000

Transactional analysis equally draws our attention to five conditions so that our feminine pole, centered on help and support, does not become too stifled in trying to take on so much. It is the critical parent representing the masculine pole which, during discernment, helps to ask certain questions:

-Is this your role? The nurturer is always ready to go to the rescue of all distress without caring about institutional authority. It is thus that a sister, assessing that the directress of novices lacked know how with a novice, felt obliged to make up for it.

-Are you competent? One does not improvise helping. A kind heart is not enough.

-Do you not overdo it? Is it really the best way to help?

Wait until the angel passes before plunging the sick person into the pool, or inviting him, like Jesus, to take up his mat and walk? (Jn 5:8).

-Do you respond to a request? “What do you want me to do for you?”, “If you wish.” Imposing one’s help, thinking oneself indispensable, not knowing when to withdraw, refusing someone the space needed to get up and walk alone – many feminine devices that can stop growth and stifle life.

-Are you honest about the sentiments of your heart?

If the heart has its reasons that reason does not know, the heart without reason can lead to passionate deviations under the guise of charity.

And if we replace “or” with “and.”

The masculine, more concerned about the law, and the feminine, more concerned about life, must **hold fast together well**. A law, a moral that has the purity and rigidity of crystal also will have the fragility. Our feminine pole, recalling that “the Sabbath is made for man,” prevents life from being stifled by norms, even if it means changing them if it is vital. But it is also good that our masculine pole reminds us that there is a Sabbath to respect and that a life without law would lead straight to disorder.

It is in the Beatitudes that we find the strongest invitation to gentleness, humility, poverty of spirit, peace, mercy..., virtues usually recognized as feminine. But it was the man Jesus who proclaimed them!

Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac learned from each other not to make visits to the poor and sick but to care for their bodies and souls. It was Vincent de Paul who freed Louise from her torments and opened for her the royal road of charity. But without Louise de Marillac, would Vincent have had such an influence? Today, the Church still has to bear the distress and anguish of our contemporaries, like a woman carries and cradles a suffering child. No doubt, in

the way of approaching certain questions relative to ethical rights, the Church needs to listen more to the thoughts of women who, without forgetting the law, are often first on the side of understanding and compassion.

III. Living in the masculine and feminine “adult state”

When we appeal to our “adult state,” which is the part of ourselves centered on reflection and action, we find this same difference and this same complementarity. Here is how Karl Rahner, German theologian, expressed these usual characteristics of the masculine temperament, at the time of a gathering of Catholic men in Cologne:

“Man is turned towards the outer world. He is more concerned with the carrying out than with the intention. He likes to see himself in the work. He is less centered on the persons than the things. He willingly looks for the principles; he fears the reproach of letting “personal” elements get into his deed. He wants to be “just”: to recognize this quality in him is to render him a compliment to which he is almost more sensitive than that of being kind. It is easier for him than woman to distinguish between the thing and the person (it is not an advantage in every respect). He withstands solitude better. He is prophet, while woman is mystic. He organizes and makes plans; he attaches his way of acting to rules and norms. He lives more by his head than his heart. He more easily falls out with himself than woman, who will accept quietly the mystery of her being. He opens himself to distant horizons while woman embodies the little corner of earth that forms the framework of her existence. He wants to be recognized in what he does: what he offers is his work, not his heart. He build systems, woman sees things imaginatively [...].”

1. Differences in the way of looking at a question

Even the way of looking at a question can have accents that are rather masculine or feminine.

The masculine mind likes things to fit logically, the linear development of ideas, long-term vision, reference to a system of thoughts. Consequently man stays easily convinced once he understands.

The feminine mind moves forward in a star shape or in a spiral, through the meanderings and complexities of everyday life, which says that women are complicated, confused, uncertain, and do not know what they want. That is because for them intuition often precedes understanding. To the “explain, I don’t see what you are trying to say,” she responds: “I can’t explain it, but I feel it.”

In brief, the masculine pole thinks with the head and will be convinced if he understands; the feminine sees with the heart and will be convinced if it has been touched. Their consistencies are far from being the same, each having its own logic. Does not the heart have its reasons that reason does not know? As some African novices said, “It was not explained because it has not entered our hearts. ‘Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart’” (Lk 2:19).

2. Differences in the way of transmitting the message

Men, they say, like to reason, analyse, discuss, and theorize. Great political discussions, debates and, in the world that concerns us, preaching, theology, and fundamental research are for them. (This needs to be qualified because it is in the midst of evolution, when will parity come?).

It is to women to capitalize on, to explain, to **popularize**, to **personalize**. They are found in teaching, in catechizing, in directing different groups. Consequently they are better placed to sense reluctance, difficulties, and **find the teaching methods that make the subject matter easily assimilated by all**. It is a safe bet that many misunderstandings could be avoided if, before making encyclicals and episcopal writings, or even sermons and conferences, public, women were asked to translate them into more up-to-date language and seek the teaching method for transmitting them.

Are they not there to **make the word “flesh”**? In a bipolar institution such as ours, do religious women find places to deliver the word made flesh, daily in contact with the sick, with children, with the poor, with those who are excluded? The masculine watches over the integrity of the message; but when it is about the actualization of a charism of mercy, are not women well placed to hear the new needs of the world and to invent new forms of presence? The root of the word mercy in Hebrew is “womb,” is it not?

3. Differences in the way of taking action:

The masculine pole in pursuit of fulfillment, efficiency, turns more towards the outer world. He plans and organizes, in avoiding confusion between projects and personal problems.

“He would like his life to be in accord with his ideas; this explains that in case of need he will mold his concept of the world on his way of acting, while woman more easily accommodates herself to a contradiction between theory and practice, as long as the theory remains within the range of ideas. He is easily convinced as long as he understands.” Again says Karl Rahner.

The feminine pole “works the little corner of the earth that forms her existence” in connivance with things and beings. Before beginning a project, women **first think about people** and their reactions. They are going to focus on how the message is received rather than how it is delivered (biological difference, perhaps!). This makes the elaboration of a precise, coherent structured and efficient project more difficult. “What is she trying to get at? And what a waste of time”!

In **community**, the possibility of living together, to get along, to share, in a word to be happy will count as much as the apostolic work. Unity happens more in the being than in the doing.

In **action**, if she is moved, woman will invest herself personally, totally and affectively in the task, with a preference for direct contact with people, which gives her extraordinary strength and **endurance**. The actions she shows and the sentiments she experiences are inextricably linked, as testifies this anecdote recounted by Watzlawick.⁵

“Tonight is John’s birthday, and Mary is lovingly making a cake for the party. She is a little worried because the cake is not rising. At that moment, John comes into the kitchen. Here is the dialogue between John and Mary:

Mary: John, I’m afraid this cake is not rising!

John: Maybe there is not enough yeast; what does the recipe say?

Mary: That’s just like you.

John: What do you mean that’s just like me?

Mary: You know well what I mean. You always do that and you know that bothers me.

John: For the love of heaven, what are you talking about? You said that the cake isn’t rising, I said that maybe there isn’t enough yeast and then all of a sudden, this has nothing to do with the yeast, it is now a fault I might have or God knows what...

Mary: Sure, to you the yeast is more important than me. That it could be the devilish yeast, I can doubt it myself. But for you, it is of no importance that I want to please you with this cake.

John: I don’t deny it for one moment and I am grateful to you for wanting to please me. But I was only talking about the yeast, not you.

Marie: It is surprising how you, men, you succeed in keeping things well separated. For us women, it makes us sick!

John: No, the problem is that you women, you confuse yeast and love.

To be of desire before all, woman will try **to bend reality to her dream**, especially if it is a good cause: “what woman wants, God wants.” Energized by her desire, otherwise discreet, fearful, lacking assurance, she becomes imaginative, creative, bold. The possibility of failure does not frighten her; in front of the

⁵ Paul Watzlawick, *Comment réussir à échouer*, Ed. Seuil, 1986.

hesitations of authority, she asks only to be allowed to try, certain, from within herself, that she will succeed. This attitude can lead her to place herself on the fringes of the institution or become a **foundress** when her charism is too personal like Mother Teresa or Sr. Emmanuel. The other side of the coin is that she risks closing herself in on her personal problems and desires. Fortunately the masculine is there to contain and regulate the ardour of desire, recalling the law that balances the ways of grace.

Within the assessment, the masculine, which tends to want life to be in accord with ideas, will seek instead in what way the reality may differ from the plan. To him, the feminine is not a close contradiction between theory and practice. **To the “you must,” woman prefers “how do you.”** Is not this what the Daughters of Charity knew how to do with Monsieur Vincent when others wanted to cloister them?

4. In the face of problems to be resolved

In the case of difficulties, thanks to feminine intuition, **woman moves ahead**; she sees them coming, guessing the early warning signs, anticipates. At all times and in all cultures there have been women prophets, fortune-tellers.

In the gospel, women are the first to perceive the meaning of the events. Thus, Mary, mother of Jesus, is the first to know that the time was accomplished, that the hour of Jesus had arrived at Cana. The elderly Elizabeth is the first to recognize him. The Samaritan Woman, Martha in front of Lazarus' tomb, Mary of Bethany who anoints Jesus' body in light of his burial, the Canaanite Woman, the women at the tomb: all were the first to have believed without having seen.

More centered on people, **where man sees problems, woman sees faces**. Her solicitude then changes itself into worry, which sometimes invades her field of consciousness and she becomes deaf to all reasonable arguments. Molehills can then become mountains and the atmosphere can easily turn tragic.

5. In looking for solutions

Our masculine pole will go towards solutions that are more in conformity with, more faithful to tradition. *Our feminine pole*, pushed more by the principle of economy (*Oikos*: house where one must live together), will go instinctively towards **vital solutions** through the route of dialogue.

In a family, in teams, on the personal or community level, women find solutions, because one must live, even survive, avoid breakdowns and dead ends. This aptitude, in connection with **giving, preserving, and renewing life**, would explain why congregations of women passionately rushed into the aggrornamento

(maybe they had to make up for lost time). More recently we have seen young sisters gathering in inter-communities to look for new solutions to their minority status within aging communities. It is regrettable that the men's congregations only timidly responded to their invitation.

The methods may be different, but in all parts of the world, **women find unexpected solutions**, perform ingenious feats, to protect and save life. Was not Moses saved by the complicity of three women: his mother, his sister and the daughter of Pharaoh? All the women of the Bible and the Gospel from Eve to Mary have something to do with giving life, making it increase, protecting it, and giving it again indefinitely.

Mary, the mother of Jesus is always present at the important moments, at the beginnings: at the announcement of the angel, at the birth, at Cana, at the cross, when the Church prepared itself to be born through the breath of the Spirit. Mary's hope is an insistent, persevering, persistent hope. At Cana she was not discouraged by the refusal of Jesus: "*Do whatever he tells you.*" Also as insistent, is the hope of the Canaanite Woman who, in a way, introduces Jesus to his ministry with the pagans. It is she who makes him hear their cries, their appeals for help. She too insisted in her prayer for her daughter, to the point of accepting being compared to a dog. "*May it be done as you want, as you hoped for.*"

To be a mother is a charism given to all women and is a part of her very being. In the African culture, it is the first duty of a woman. A girl becomes an adult when she brings her first child into the world. "If by our celibacy we cannot become a mother, we are not credible" said an African woman religious.

Giving life is also protecting life. It is preferring love over hate, peace over war. It is saving the infant and the poor from the claws of the powerful and strong. The last ones to remain at the foot of the cross are the first at the tomb, persistent companions of life. The angel at the Resurrection terrorized the soldiers, but reassured the women.

In summary, man is more on the side of the map while woman is on the side of the territory. **For man the view from the plane indicates the direction while for woman it's a search for "a new way"** that allows moving forward in spite of the unexpected and stumbling blocks appearing suddenly on the road. The one who looks at the map does not see the little bumps to which the one with her nose to the ground is very sensitive. It is true that she can get lost in the details.

IV. Living in the masculine and feminine "Child state"

1. Managing emotions

Our “Child state” is the seat of **our drives, our emotions**, of our potential for pleasure and suffering. Our “Parent state,” charged with making us sociable, and our “Adult state” charged with drawing us to reality, both contribute in regulating our emotions, in controlling the expression of our feelings. But what remains of our “spontaneous child”?

Transactional analysis recognizes **four fundamental feelings**: joy, sadness, fear and anger. In the concern for identity distinction, upbringing permits or forbids the expression of certain feelings, according to whether we are born a girl or a boy.

An **expression of aggressiveness** is more tolerated coming from a boy; aggressiveness coming from a girl would label her as being naughty. This repressed aggressiveness can change a woman into being melancholic with depressive tendencies. The obligation to please and to not show annoyance, her need to seduce, drives her to restrain her “rebellious child.” But this repressed energy might work its way out in other ways: physical problems, suddenly and unexpectedly letting off steam, transference.

On the other hand, **tears**, considered as a sign of weakness, can be for a woman an indisputable weapon to defuse masculine aggressiveness and get what she wants. As a threat, she would prefer to blackmail with tears.

But does not this capacity to interiorly understand things and beings, to be tuned into the mysteries of life render woman more vulnerable? “*God counts the tears of women*”, says the Kabbale. “*Because women better understand the world than men, they cry more often.*” On the other hand, a big boy must not cry and not be afraid. He will hide his fear in playing hard and his tears in showing aggressiveness or in retreating.

The fact that expressed emotion does not correspond with the feeling normally experienced gives rise to misunderstandings: for example, sending someone off who tries to console you during an ordeal (rather masculine) or bursting into tears when attacked instead of defending oneself or trying to explain (rather feminine!). The best way to react is to **continue the communication as if the sentiment normally expected was expressed**: for example instead of being inhibited in front of tears, calmly reformulate the problem and take up the conversation later.

2. Expressions of feelings

Here we are approaching a personal domain, if there is one. Listen to what Karl Rahner tells us on this topic in speaking about man:

“Love is a part, not the all of his life. He has restraint and an uncertain attitude facing the world with his feelings. He is capable of self-scorn and

he finds it uncalled for to give it importance. If there is contradiction between theoretical points of view and his own thoughts, he finds it normal; he mistrusts ideas that are in too much agreement with his feelings.”

Women like to talk about their feelings, something more difficult for men. They are willing to give their opinions, but without stating their sensitivities. They hesitate to lift the veil from their impressions, for lack of knowing how to convey and communicate them.

Feminine Communities will talk more easily about personal experience. In the rereading of life, one attaches more importance to the way in which each person is being challenged by the situation. If the climate is one of trust, Gospel sharings, spontaneous prayers will be more involved. Men have some reticence about venturing onto this terrain. **For the feminine, faith is a matter of taste and not only truths to believe.**⁶

It is all religious life that will be the beneficiary of research where men and women take the time to realize what there is in common and what there is specific in their way of living as men and as women, their relation with God, and their love of Jesus. On the other hand, distrust can drive women into an absolute silence.

3. The woman religious, spouse of Christ

The woman religious lives her response to God's call, like a pair of lovers, as a wife responds to her husband. John Paul II thanks her for being the indicator that reminds the Church and humanity to turn to the Spouse.

*“The Church's vocation, of all the Church, men and women, is to celebrate the mystical wedding with her Savior. And who, better than woman, can help the Church to be fully spouse? Founded by men, the apostles, the Church becomes, in the last book of the New Testament, the Apocalypse, the spouse of Christ.”*⁷

Like the Samaritan Woman, the meeting of Jesus makes living water well up in the heart of woman which will make her run to draw others to the source. As a young woman awaits the coming of her spouse, the intensity of her desire keeps her awake, even in the middle of the night. Like the woman who buries the leaven in the dough, she knows to place the totality of desire in the small and the everyday.

⁶ Michel Scouarnec, *La foi, une affaire de goût*, Ed. Atelier, 2000.

⁷ Lucienne Sallé, *Femme pour l'aimer*, Ed. Siloë, 2000, et *femme au Vatican*.

Albéric de Palmaert, *Le sexe ignoré*, Ed. Desclée De Brouwer, 1994.

Christian Ducoq, *La femme le clerc et le laïc*, Ed. Labor et Fides, 1989.

La revue *Christus*: “femmes en Église, enjeux et différence” No. 170, April 1996.

L'encyclopédia Universalis: “Femme.”

Mystical enthusiasm has led some women into trances of the love relationship often lived out in transference. But a strong evangelical sense and an enlightened piety, and often a good counselor can guide her to meet the Spouse in the place where He is given to love: in the person of the poor, the lowly, the sick.

Vincent de Paul knew how to recognize the interior inspiration of Louise de Marillac: “Why not since God gave you this **feeling?**” From then on the organizational qualities of Louise began to be revealed. It was she who managed and directed, restarted the work, and fostered harmony in the hospitals. But it was the spouse that she longed for, she and the Daughters of Charity when Monsieur Vincent asked them to receive the abandoned infants. It is still of him that they think today in caring for the wounds of a traumatized society contemplating there the wounds of Christ.

In conclusion:

The examples of women traditionally put forth to men are already obsolete. Young women who today are entering religious life appear very little like protective mothers, dangerous seductresses or submissive children. Having lived within a coeducational system before entering the convent, they are able to make close and brotherly friends with priests. These fraternal relationships, replacing little by little the dependant relationships must provoke some profound changes within the face of the Church and religious life. And mixed institutes like yours, contribute to this renewal providing that the masculine and feminine double presence is present at all levels. The problem is that the absence of entrances within recent decades makes new practices more difficult, in this domain as in others and this as much on the masculine side as on the feminine side.

“At present when humanity is experiencing such a profound transformation, women, imbued with the spirit of the Gospel, can do so much to help humanity not be inhumane ... Likewise as modern man freed the energy that was enclosed within matter, it must be that one day we will come to liberate the explosive energy that is enclosed within the heart of women” (Paul VI).

(Translation: Translation Center – Daughters of Charity, Paris)