

TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
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TITLE: EMPTY FOR GOD
A STUDY OF DETACHMENT IN ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS
AND IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

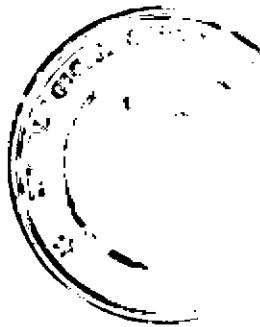
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STUDENTS DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for Academic Credit to any other Institution: All sources have been cited in full.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pinto', written in a cursive style.

Signed: Ivan C. Pinto OCD

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INTRODUCTION

In the religious life we are often taught about detachment from all things. The reformer of my Carmelite Order, St. John of the Cross, was a doctor of detachment. In his famous philosophy of detachment, or nothingness, he says that *to possess everything desire nothing. When you turn towards something you cease to cast yourself upon the all. For to go from the all to the all you must leave yourself in all. And when you come to the possession of all you must possess it without wanting anything.* If I desire everything I get nothing. Added to my spirituality as a Carmelite, the culture from which I come, Indian culture, has a similar tone. In Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, we find a lot of emphasis on detachment. According to these religions, desire is the cause of every evil. The book of Ecclesiastes is not very far from these ideas.

While I was in Tanzania during my summer holidays last year, a Sister was supposed to go to India on the 24th. of July; some of our members went on the 20th. to give her some letters that had to be taken to India the same month. But surprisingly these people came back bringing the news that the sister was dead! She was a medical doctor by profession. It made me think that in life it is useless to be exhausted by many things. At the end we do not know what will happen to us. When death invites us we cannot refuse the invitation no matter who we are, or what we are. All learning, skill, fame, or whatever we have will go with us to the tomb. But this does not mean that we must be pessimistic about the life we live. What is needed is a detached interest in life. This is what the Book of Qoheleth says.

During my study of the book of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) I found much similarity between the thoughts of Qoheleth, John of the Cross, Carmelite spirituality, and the culture from where I come; all of these emphasise detachment. My daily experiences too taught me that, my life is not authentic and strong if it is not attached to the Corner Stone, the foundation life - Jesus. Jesus said if your life is not build on me, it is like building a house on the sand, when the storms of life and floods of trials come, your house, will not stand erect (*Luke 6:46-49*). If we build our life on pleasure, pride and possessions, they will not prevent our house falling apart when the winds of destruction blow against us. To build our life on Jesus we must *let go* that which is not God and *hold on* to that which never perishes. That is why, Our Lord himself said, 'go and sell everything' (*Luke 12:33: Matthew 19:21.*) So I thought of making a further study of Qoheleth and St. John of the Cross, to get more

light on detachment.

Many think that John of the Cross and Qoheleth are cynics or defeatists or anti life. They are not pessimists nor skeptics. Qoheleth was suspicious of possessions, pride and pleasure. His daily experiences taught him the lessons of life. Pleasure comes and goes, and leaves a person empty and void. The pride of life which takes satisfaction in domination and doing ones own will. This pride too comes to an end. And as for possessions they give tension rather than relief. St. Paul said there are only three things that last *faith, love and hope (I Cor. 13:13)*. John, fell in love with God the giver of life. It was in union with God that he saw how fleeting are the things of the world and how vain are our struggles to attain them. It is said there are three kinds of people who tell the truth, wise men, poets and mystics. Qoheleth is a wise man and John is a poet and mystic. John made the Wisdom of God, Jesus Christ the giver of life as his constant companion, his pleasure, pride and possession. John possessed God and God possessed John. Qoheleth and John bring out their practical knowledge from their own personal experiences. To the materialistic world of today Qoheleth and John offer a suitable answer.

Some one was asked, what do you read? I read the bible and the religious constitutions was his answer. The Bible for my Christian life and the constitutions for my religious life. So I have taken Qoheleth for the scriptural part and St. John of the Cross for the religious life. The word of God finds expression in the life of the people. Religious life is one of the ways where the word of God is lived. That is the reason for taking Qoheleth and St. John of the Cross for my study of detachment.

Qoheleth is not a systematic man who puts his writings on a logical basis. As he reflected on his experience, he put it on paper. Since he says so much about the futility of human life, I took only a few passages from his book. John is systematic. John wrote extensively on different things, but for me it is impossible to summarize the teachings of Qoheleth or John of the Cross. For most people life seems to consist in *pleasure, pride and possessions*. People dedicate the whole of their life trying to attain pleasure, pride or things (material or non-material). So I have limited my research only to these three areas.

The first letter of John states that "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is the world *I John 2:16*. The world here is the one who deliberately rejects Jesus and therefore God. Pleasure belongs to the concupiscence of the flesh, possessions comes under the lust of the eyes, and pride

comes under the sphere of pride of life. Therefore my study will be concentrated on the detachment of pleasure, possessions and pride. I have taken very few passages from Qoheleth and St. John of the Cross in my study of detachment. Here I am not making a summary of their teaching on these subjects but how they are relevant to us today.

The reason I narrow down my research and concentrate on pleasure, pride and possessions is this: religious make three vows, namely chastity, obedience and poverty. St. Thomas Aquinas said that in the vow of chastity we promise to give up goods of the body and thereby we keep ourselves free to love each and everyone. To love each and every one we have to make some sacrifices. Pleasure is one of the goods of the body. Therefore there is no room for self-centered pleasure. By the vow of obedience we give up the goods of the will i.e. the need for power; pride is put to rest. And by the vow of poverty we renounce the goods of the world i.e. the urge for possessions. Therefore the study of John of the Cross' and Qoheleth's thoughts will help us to be detached and reinforce within us our commitment to God.

The goal of John of the Cross is to reach God or union with God. We attain this union through the way of faith, love and hope. This way is blocked by our attachment to the creatures of this world. Pride perverts faith, pleasure perverts love and possession perverts hope. Therefore our inordinate desire for these three "p's" has to be eliminated. These alienate us from loving union with God. For Qoheleth all things are vanity and chasing after the wind, because the enemy death comes and puts an end to all that we have and possess. But for John of the Cross total negation is necessary to empty the self from our inordinate craving for the things of the world. St. John of the Cross clearly states:

Hence, we call this nakedness a night for the soul. For we are not discussing the mere lack of things; this lack will not divest the soul, if it craves for all these objects. We are dealing with the denudation of the soul's appetites and gratifications; this is what leaves it free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them. Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul. They are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it; rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within it that causes the damage. (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book I, Chapter 3*).

So Qoheleth and John of the Cross are good masters who say we get nothing by wanting every thing. I hope my research will enlighten the reader. And help every one to appreciate the thoughts of Qoheleth and St. John of the Cross, so that the people may live a life of sharing and love.

1 PUTTING QOHELETH AND ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS IN CONTEXT

To understand a person, his/her behaviour or thought, we need to know his/her background; the culture, the 'way' a person was brought up, the external and internal influences that shaped his/her personality or character are very important. No person is an island. We are the product of our environment and heredity. We are influenced and shaped by the history of others. We create a history of our own, by attaching ourselves to the history of others. When it comes to understanding a person's thought it is much more complex. A person may involve himself/herself in their writings or keep away or hide his/her personality. In such situations the surroundings of the author will help us to understand him/her or his/her, writings better. It is particularly true when we come to Qoheleth and St. John of the Cross. Qoheleth, is shrouded in anonymity, and St. John of the Cross, writes as though the experiences are not his own. This brings us to the careful study of their background and environment.

The life situation, *sitz im leben* of a person is one of the ways to understand a person as I have stated earlier. Great people do not come out-of-the-blue. They were the product of a particular situation. History tells us that people responded to the callings of the Spirit and were moved to act in time. For example, prophets came up in Israel when the religious, moral and ethical values were disrupted. When true worship was forsaken and injustice prevailed prophets laboured to restore the situation and called people back to the covenant.

Qoheleth and St. John of the Cross are the products of their situation. To understand them and their thought it is quite appropriate to dig into the soil of their situation and then perhaps we might get some clue to understand their personalities and their thought. We get meaning in the context and in time. Let us put Qoheleth and John in their historical context.

1. 1 SITUATION OF THE AUTHORS

The name Ecclesiastes in Latin and *ekklesiasthes* in Greek is an inappropriate translation of the Hebrew word Qoheleth. Though the meaning of the word is uncertain it may signify *one who addresses an assembly or an official speaker in an assembly*. In the Hebrew bible Ecclesiastes stands in the third division of the canon among the *ketubim or hagiography*. In

reading the text, however, one does not get the impression that the speaker is addressing any particular assembly, as a result it might be preferable to derive the word from the root *qhl* with the meaning *to be contentious*. Therefore Qoheleth would then be the *contentious philosopher*¹

It was a poetic invention rather than an argument that formerly the book was dated within the Davidic-Solomonic era, since he introduces himself as Qoheleth son of David, king of Jerusalem 1:1. Because the foolish old king 4:13, has been identified as Antiochus II, while the young king before whom the whole people rejoice 4:14, would be Antiochus III. Qoheleth would thus be a contemporary of Antiochus III the great,² and would thus have written his book in the glorious period of Hellenism, about 200 BC. The book of Ben Sirach quotes Ecclesiastes 8:1, in chapter 13:24, and Qoh.12"13 in Si.43:27. If Ben Sirach was written about 180 - 175 BC, Qoheleth must have written at least twenty years earlier and we are thus brought to about the year 200 - 195 BC³. There are scholars who hold that the book was written during the Persian period while others hold the Greek period.

Qoheleth uses one of the rhetorical questions, a literary device that the author uses nearly 30 times, and which occurs only in arguably post exilic texts. This rhetorical question *who knows?* functions as a strong assertion equivalent to *no one knows*.⁴ Qoheleth saw that the days of great nationalism, conquest and independence were things of the past. The golden age of David and Solomon were unlikely to return as such, even though some of the prophets portrayed Israel's hope for the future. Judaism found itself under the harsh dominion of great world powers. There was no chance of the helpless little province of Judah throwing off Persian, Greek or any kind of foreign rule. The conventional wisdom and traditional views on reward and punishment are now questioned, like the book of Job refusing to accept the traditional views. The author who is called Qoheleth is unlike Job in many ways, but like him inasmuch as he fearlessly faces up to the facts of experience, the limitations of human nature and the complexity of the world which God has created.

¹ Claus S., *History of the Old Testament*, (New York: Alba House, 1971). Vol. 5. p.264.

² Ibid. p.265.

³ G. A. Barton, "The Book of Ecclesiastes", *The International Critical Commentary*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980), p. 60.

⁴ James L. C., "Ecclesiastes, Book of", *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), Vol. 2. p.275.

John of the Cross was born in a little town of Fontiveros in the year 1542. His parents were Gonzalo de Yepes and Catalina Alvarez. It is the opinion of present day historians that the de Yepes family was of Jewish origin; *conversos* as they were called. His young wife Catalina was not only poor, but also there is reason for believing that she was of Moorish (i.e. Arabic) decent⁵ A strange combination. What ever may be the facts, they were married in 1529, and straight away embarked on a life of hard work and privation. Three sons were born, John in 1542. From his earliest days John knew want and suffering. The sudden death of his father in 1550 left the family almost destitute. About 1551, they moved to Medina del Campo, which at the time was a thriving city, with trade limits reaching as far as the New World.

In 1563, when he was 21 years old, he entered the Carmelites who had a monastery in the city. St. John was one of the first to join St. Teresa in her reform of the Carmelite Order. As a result he was persecuted by its opponents. In 1577, he was seized and imprisoned by a reactionary group. During the eight months of his incarceration in Toledo, he was grossly ill-treated. But it was at this very time that he wrote his famous poems, *The Dark Night and The Spiritual Canticle*.

Towards the end of his life he was deprived of office and again treated with great harshness, this time by some of his own brethren of the reform. There was even question of expelling him from the Order. He deliberately chose Ubeda instead of Baeza "I will go to Ubeda, for at Baeza they know me very well and in Ubeda, nobody knows me." John was sick at the time when he left for Ubeda and the prior of Ubeda did not welcome the sick man. Fray John's sickness grew worse and on December 13 at the age of forty nine Fray John of the Cross died.

The other writings of John of the Cross are ; *The Ascent of Mount Carmel, and The Living Flame of Love*. The other minor works are: *The Sayings of Light and Love, and Precautions*. After his death, St. John's writings fell under suspicion in connection with the Quietist and Illuminist controversies. John of the Cross was beatified by Clement X in 1675, canonized by Benedict XIII, in 1726, and declared a doctor of the Church by Pius XI in 1926.

Perhaps this introduction to the life of St. John of the Cross serves as parallel between Qoheleth's life situation and St. John's. Both of them experienced a climate of uncertainty and dark night. It was an apt time for Qoheleth to question the traditional theory of rewards and

⁵ John Grennan, *Toward Greater Heights: Aspects of the Spirituality of St. John of the Cross*. The living flame series, (Dublin: Carmelite Centre of Spirituality, 1991), Vol. 34. p.12.

punishments. The unquestionable doctrine that the good are rewarded and the wicked are punished came in conflict with the life situation of Qoheleth. There were good people who were suffering and wicked people enjoying the pleasures of life. This understanding brought a head on collision with the life situation. Qoheleth could perceive that the material benefits are not the real reward for uprightness of life. Therefore the joys and pleasures that one gets through the acquisition of the things of the world really do not satisfy an individual. Through the failure of the reward and punishment theory, God wanted to bring people to himself who is the fullness of all joy and pleasure. Qoheleth failed to understand this because it was not clear to him about life after death. He just gives up his struggle to reason out why one shouldn't rest in the goods of the world. It was clear in the mind of John of the Cross that it was for God and to possess God that one has to give up and empty one self of everything that is not God. John gave the answer to the question why do we have to cling to the Creator and not to creatures. What made Qoheleth question the durability of the joy and pleasure that one gets from the 'things of the world', is that he saw that the good were not enjoying the good things of the world but on the contrary it was the evil doers who got the good things of the world. It was also clear that those who were rich once also lost their riches. Therefore it was not a good idea to over-work to accumulate things of the world and one day lose them without enjoying them.⁶

John also saw a disparity between the rich and the poor. It was the starting point for John of the Cross who suffered for what he thought to be the core of his being, i.e. an authentic life rooted on the Rock, Christ. When John was in prison the prior of the house promised him a golden cross and also an office in the order if he were willing to renounce the reform.⁷ The early life of John was engulfed in poverty, misery and humiliations. His father died when he was young and he was forced to work for the survival of the family. I think this made him cling to God rather than to the things of the world. Like Qoheleth we do not have as many facts as we would like concerning the events of his life. But we know of the bizarre sixteenth-century complexities in which he became involved as a reformer of the Carmelites.

⁶ Ecclesiastes 6: 1-6.

⁷ Richard P. Hardy, *Search for Nothing: The Life of St. John of the Cross*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992), p. 68-69.

1. 2 THE SOCIAL, HISTORIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION

The life and activity of Qoheleth belong to the Hellenistic era of the third century. Palestine was then enjoying a long period of peace under the sovereignty of the Egyptian Ptolemies who were mild rulers, and this political situation was bound to produce literary and artistic advances. The end of the third and the beginning of the second century BC form a fitting background for such a work as Ecclesiastes. The century which followed the death of Alexander was a trying century for the whole East, but especially for Palestine. Possessed by the Ptolemies, but claimed by the Seleucides, Palestine found herself in the precarious position as an apple of discord. The gratitude which Seleucus I, felt toward Ptolemy I for the aid rendered him in obtaining his empire, at first secured peace between Egypt and Syria. As the century advanced, however, the Seleucid claims were pressed and Palestine first had to pay taxes to both powers and then, toward its close, became the unhappy bone of contention between her two powerful neighbours, suffering severely. Then, too, her internal organization must have been such as to bear heavily upon the poor. Ptolemy III had deputed Joseph⁸ to collect the taxes of the country. Oppressed by the tax collectors, a prey to their rich and powerful neighbours, suffering increasingly as time went on from the ravages of war, oppressed during the later years of the century by the drunken favorites of a king who was a helpless child, what more fitting theater than the Palestine of this time could be sought for a book like Ecclesiastes ?

As we have seen both civil as well as religious men were striving for selfish and sordid ends to which the claims of justice and righteousness were compromised. It is evident in 3:16 where he tells that both in the court and in the temple wickedness reigned. The population generally groaned and wept under the oppression of the powerful, 4:1, and had no redress. This oppression was aggravated by the hierarchy of officials who, rising one above another, culminated in a far-off king. The land was controlled by an arbitrary despot who often put fools and slaves in offices, degrading the noble to subordinate places, but it was useless to oppose him 10:5-7.

It was the possession of all things, the enjoyment of all pleasures and the accumulation

⁸ Joseph son of Tobiaes, he grew rich by farming out the taxes to subordinates and founded a powerful house (Cf. G. A. Barton, "The Book of Ecclesiastes", *The International Critical Commentary*, (Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 1980), p.63.)

of power that brought frustration to Qolieleth. This temporality of things taught Qoheleth the spirit of detachment. But for John of the Cross, severe purifying trials, the experience of life, deep reflection and the fruit of his darkness moved him to the ultimate. There was so much inequality between the rich and the poor. His own father being a rich man was deprived of wealth because he married Catalina who was from a poor background. This deprived them of financial security, and forced his father to adapt to his wife's surroundings of poverty and hard work, and to learn her lowly trade of silk weaving.

Politically Spain was adventuring in the New World. There was a lot of wealth and material prosperity looming in the society of Spain. Spain was divided between the noble and ordinary people: this society was one of noisy contrasts. The prevailing ideal was to belong to the nobility since this would assure one of respect and honour. The honored upper caste of old Christians and the outcasts of Jewish and Moorish descent. The rich could buy honour whatever their descent might be.

Politically Spain was divided between Castile and Aragon. Castile politically was a gigantic state. It was full of explorers, conquerors, and colonizers. America was looked on as another Castile. The life of the Castilians was one of horror. "To begin with, life was fragile; the medium age at the time of death was 27 years. Those who survived were continually pursued by epidemics; plagues depleted the population, and hunger."⁹ The roads of Spain were swarmed with the wandering poor.¹⁰ Shortly after John's birth, his father died. The family was without a father. His mother ended up in the most populous Medina del - Campo, the richest, most active city in Old Castile, where there were more opportunities for receiving alms. Juan de Yepes (St. John of the Cross) became accustomed from the time of his birth to misery, death, and to the "nadas" (nothings).¹¹

1. 3 THE RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS

The post-exilic period led to a crisis in wisdom literature. The theocentric world of the

⁹ Kieran Kavanaugh, *God Speaks in the Night: The Life, Times, and Teaching of St. John of the Cross*, (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), p. 28.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.27.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 28.

prophets and the priests was turned into an anthropocentric world by the wisdom authors. Now there is no longer mention of temple, worship, covenant or idolatry. But much about man; his character, his conduct, his feelings and the good life claim the center of the stage. There was a revolt against the Deuteronomic theory of reward and punishment. For this revolt, we can state two reasons; one, God punished the wicked by means of physical ailments and an early death, and rewarded the good by means of a long and happy life on earth; this was accepted generally and rarely questioned. It could explain the generality of men's lives, for many of the good did prosper, and many of the wicked were indeed cut off by death. But when applied to every individual case, it was found sadly inadequate. It could not explain the death of so good and pious a king as Josiah (640 - 609 BC). Josiah was known for his reforms. He condemned idolatry, renewed the covenant and the passover feast; this good monarch was killed in an accidental way in 609 BC at Megiddo while trying to block pharaoh Neco II from helping the last remnant of the Assyrian empire against the rising power of Babylonia. Josiah was considered as the hero of the religious reforms. His reign was characterized by justice; such a king's ill fated and sudden death was one of the causes of the revolt against the traditional theory.

Secondly, the exile is another reason for the revolt against the Deuteronomist theory. The exile brought to an end all hope in the Yahwist ideology. Among those who were taken to exile there were several good people who were faithful in observing the law and lived upright lives. With the unjust the whole nation suffered in the exile. Automatically people questioned why such things should happen. The traditional theory failed to give a satisfactory answer to this fundamental question. The wisdom literature makes a shift from the traditional understanding of suffering. Suffering cannot be explained in some retributational scheme. This great problem of retribution was initiated by the author of Job in the 6th - 5th century BC, and continued by Qoheleth in the 4th - 3rd centuries. Now the slow shift in the understanding of suffering was from retributory to vicarious suffering.

John was certainly not alien to the epoch in which he lived. He belonged wholly to the church of his time and took an active part in its life. He was part and parcel of the Church of his day. This brought him an abundance of pain and suffering. He became a part of religion and history in which human salvation and God's manifestation took place. John was involved in the trans-historical aspects of human life but he was not out of history. He was very much a Spaniard of sixteenth century Spain.

John illustrates very well the Spain of the time- a Spain possessed of a huge empire, steeped in religious faith, at odds with the Turks and Francis I of France, and deeply disturbed by the German Lutherans. The reconquest of Spain was completed in 1492. Arabic influence on the architecture and the language of the country was obviously still strong, as it was on philosophical thought, owing to the commentaries on Aristotle by various Arabic scholars. The Arabic occupation of Spain had lasted for about eight centuries, from 711 to 1492.¹²

Two events dominated the sixteenth century; one, the birth of the Reformation and the beginning of Protestantism. Martin Luther, when he died in 1546, had already been excommunicated for twenty-six years. John was then aged four. When Calvin died in 1564 John was aged twenty-two. Protestantism seems to have gained no ground in Spain due to the vigilance of the inquisition. Though the inquisition kept Protestantism out of Spain it had created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. So it was in this world that John's development took place. This anachronistic world did not spare him the preoccupation with quarrels over religious matters.¹³

The other event which affected John, together with other religious movements, was that of the 'enlightenment'. It was a kind of religious imagination and was commonly called mysticism. It was important for John to dissociate himself from these currents, for the battle waged by various theologians against the 'enlightened' could have given him anxiety. So he had to fight against the leanings towards 'illuminism' shown by some of the men and women under his direction.

When John was arrested on December 2, 1577, he was freed again and the following day he was allowed to celebrate the Eucharist. He used this opportunity to escape back to his hut. He ran down the steep hill and into his hut to destroy some letters and documents which would have hurt the reform had they fallen into the hands of the Calced... he had just enough time to destroy the last papers as they pounded violently on the door.¹⁴ The 'illuminati' were far less important than the Reformers, yet they forced John to define very precisely his attitude to these sects. Perhaps he would not have spoken so plainly about the importance of discipline

¹² Alain Cugno, *St. John of the Cross: The life and Thought of a Christian Mystic*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1982), p. 6.

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Richard P. Hardy, *Op Cit.* p. 64.

and renunciation, and about the way in which 'mystical' experiences should be distrusted, if his own epoch had not been drawn towards them. Therefore unlike St. Teresa of Jesus, John never spoke of his mystical experience.

With all its socio-economic problems the sixteenth century has been called "the golden age" of Spanish history. But what was most universally felt and cultivated throughout the century was the world of faith and spirituality. This world most intimately affected John of the Cross. There were moves for spiritual and social renewal in Spanish society. Initiatives were taken on all levels to reform the religious orders. The whole focus was on religion and God. The question was how to attain union with God. This is quite contrary in a way to the life situation of Qoheleth. Qoheleth moved away from God-centeredness. The focus was about humanity, life and destiny. There was no mention of temple, sacrifice, and law. But the Common themes preferred during St. John of the Cross' life were prayer, recollection, evangelization, rites, ceremonies, asceticism and mysticism.¹⁵ The move here was from anthropocentrism to theocentrism whereas, Qoheleth's direction was from theocentrism to anthropocentrism.

John's life was one of detachment, not through mortification, but through vitality and freedom. Things were a hindrance to him when they were not necessary.¹⁶ John was not a gloomy saint but joy was an ever-present fact of his spirit, behaviour, and leadership style. He knew how to create around himself a relaxed atmosphere of joy and freedom. God is the "deepest center" of the life and personality of John of the Cross¹⁷ John of the Cross refused to unveil the secret of his interiority or recount the incidents of his external life. He lived it all in silence for God alone. He speaks of God and the divine mysteries, about life and the transformation of human beings. With this glance at the religious conditions that affected John, we can be helped to judge how far they influenced his life, thought and writings.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 28.

¹⁶ In the introduction to the book, (Cf. Kieran Kavanaugh, *God Speaks in the Night: The Life, Times, and Teachings of St. John of the Cross*, (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), p.VI.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. X

2. CONTEMPORARIES OF QOHELETH AND JOHN

Today we are living in the so called 'Global village'. The globalization of human civilization did not come out of the blue. The globalization began when the sailors set their boats on the waters of the ocean. It has been enhanced when the cosmonauts and the astronauts set their legs on the moon. Today it has been carried on much further by the internet mass communication media. During the time of Qoheleth the constant takeovers of empires by different civilizations gave rise to a mixture of different cultures as well as varied ideas. Travel from place to place brought into contact different schools of thought. Qoheleth is not an exception to this reality. It is the inter-mingling of cultures and civilization that influenced the authors of scripture. Their thought and ideas were not absolutely original; in so far as they are original, they are the result of existing patterns.

It is also true of John of the Cross. His thought and life style were also influenced by the signs and the notions of the time. John lived in a time when the sailors had already discovered the new lands and the missionaries were returning from the proclamation of the Christian faith. The Christian faith which had taken its root in the new lands, influenced the new cultures and peoples, as well as their thinking patterns. It was not only Christianity that influences other cultures, but it also was influenced by other cultures. John lived in a situation where there was much inter-action between different people of high calibre. In this chapter we will see the different people and their products which might have influenced the thought pattern of Qoheleth and St. John of the Cross. This will shed light in understanding the concepts of Qoheleth and John of the Cross.

2. 1 QOHELETH AND THE BIBLE

The basic outlook of the wisdom movement is anthropocentric. It is preoccupied in its central thrust, with the human situation and with human destiny. Job and Qoheleth take God, and the meaning of God, for human existence very seriously. This is done in the context of understanding and deals with human problems. The outlook of the O.T. as a whole is theocentric. The anthropocentric outlook of wisdom can be illustrated in general ways. First of all,

there is a lack of interest in history, specially in the history of Israel. And the wisdom books ignore this completely. There is no reference to the stories of the patriarchs, the enslavement and Exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the wilderness, Sinai, or the inheriting of Canaan¹⁸

It has to be noted that the universalism of Israel's wisdom is in contrast to the communal particularity of her covenant faith rooted in a revelation in history. It is only the later wisdom books that exhibit more features of the particular institutions of Israel, like the book of Sirach.

THE BOOK OF JOB:

It has been stated that, what Job began, Qoheleth carried on without any questioning. Though there is no internal evidence that either was aware of the work of the other, their concerns are intimate. There are many similarities between Qoheleth and Job. Qoheleth and Job have an analytical tendency. There is an appeal to reason and the empirical facts of general human experience rather than a reference to cultic traditions. Job and Qoheleth criticized the largely accepted values. Qoheleth seems to land in a rational skepticism, while avoiding a through-going nihilism; all values are relativized, history loses its meaning, and faith in the eschatological purpose of God is destroyed. But in Job, the crisis does not end in such skepticism, but in faith.

Job challenges the conventional views about the relation between virtue and reward defended by the friends. 'The doctrine of rewards' - the virtuous are rewarded and the wicked are punished, is under attack in the dialogue of Job with his friends. In Ecclesiastes the issue is fundamentally the same as it was in Job; i.e. it is impossible to document the moral authority of God by an empirical examination of what happens in history. Whereas Job questions the availability of the moral norm, Qoheleth seems to be sceptical about the action of God itself.¹⁹

The aim of the book of Job is to answer the common problem why do the righteous endure so much frustration and pain, while in a world allegedly ruled by a God of right, the wicked 'have more than the heart can wish'. For the book is a defense of the ways of God to man. Every age, every individual, must deal with the problem of suffering. Job's comforters

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 387.

¹⁹ J. C. Rylaarsdam, "Hebrew Wisdom", *Peaks's commentary of the Bible*, (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), p.389.

have their age-old answers based on *retributive justice*. Misfortune in life was seen as divine punishment for crime, hidden or unknown. A secondary notion is that of a testing by God. Job refuses both answers and does not accept God as a torturer.

QOHELETH AND THE PSALMS: By their form and content those psalms, which are grouped as 'wisdom psalms', show connections with Old Testament wisdom literature. Some of the characteristics, like the "better sayings", the fear of God, the address of a tutor to the pupil, which occur in the psalms, indicate similarity with the wisdom literature. The most noteworthy point is the 'content', of the psalms which is in line with the wisdom books. Several major wisdom themes such as practical advice on the conduct of ordinary life, "fear of Yahweh", concern about the problem of retribution appear constantly in these psalms. If we take psalm 49 as an example we can draw some parallel with Qoheleth. The theme of the success and prosperity of the wicked, the fate of death awaiting wise and foolish alike, are in line with what Qoheleth says in 2: 12-16, where he compares wisdom with folly, the wise man with the fool, and he states "How the wise man dies just like the fool".

The wisdom teachers were concerned with discovering and affirming the order of the created world, and a central characteristic of this order was a theology of just retribution. But when the righteous suffered and the wicked prospered, voices of protest like that of Job were raised.²⁰ The problem of the suffering of the godly is also not answered in these wisdom and didactic poems. Ps. 1, stresses the law of retribution, but no solution is offered. The purpose of the wisdom psalms is educational.

BEN SIRACH: The study of Ecclesiastes proved that the book was known to Ben Sirach and influenced him to such a degree that the book of Ecclesiasticus clearly betrays its dependence upon Qoheleth's work.²¹ Sirach knew the work of Qoheleth and used his words

²⁰ John S. K. and Michael L. B., "Psalm", *The New Jerome biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1992), p. 526.

²¹ The proof of the priority of Qoheleth is of three kinds: (1) Passages extant in the Hebrew text of Ecclesiastics, which show dependence upon the Hebrew of Qoheleth; (2) Passages not yet covered in the Hebrew, but the Greek of which is clearly a translation of Hebrew is practically identical with that of

as a modern writer might weave into his work the words of some well known author. Qoheleth 1:4 *a generation comes and a generation goes, but the world forever stands*, is identical with Ben Sirach 14:18, *as leaves grow upon a green tree, of which one withers and another springs up, so the generations of flesh and blood, one perishes and another ripens*.

BOOK OF WISDOM: The book of Qoheleth was known to the author of the book of Wisdom, as Ben Sirach knew it, but he did not approve of it. In Chapter 2:1-9 he sets himself to correct various sayings of the ungodly, for example Wisdom 2:6 *Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth* is a correction of Qoheleth 2:24, *there is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil*²²

2. 2 QOHELETH AND NON-BIBLICAL NEIGHBOURS

The author of the book of Qoheleth uses Aramaizing Hebrew but occasional Persian loan words appear, for example *pardes*, 'park', and *medina*, 'province'. There is a most striking verbal similarity which occurs in a Mesopotamian text, the Gilgamesh Epic. The alewife Siduri's advice to Gilgamesh that he enjoy his wife, fine clothes, and tasty food finds an echo in Qoheleth's positive advice. Qoheleth omits one significant thing, the allusion to the pleasure that Gilgamesh would receive from his child. The Gilgamesh Epic also deals with the themes of death, life, morality, the importance of one's name, and the memory of a person after death, on which Qoheleth too reflects .

GREEK THOUGHT: There are scholars who claim evidence of Greek linguistic influence as well as traces both of Stoic and Epicurean thought in Qoheleth. There are some who say that the Sadducees represented Epicurean influence and the Pharisees Stoic. We can also think that the Book of Ecclesiastes is the natural product of Semitic, or more specifically,

Qoheleth, and (3) Passages in which Ben Sirach has paraphrased the thought of Qoheleth, though clearly dependent upon it (For further clarification Cf. G. A. Barton, "The Book of Ecclesiastes", *The International Critical Commentary*, (Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 1980), p.58.

²² Ibid. p. 58.

of Jewish thought, in the conditions which prevailed in the late post-exilic times, that this thought resembles Stoicism in a general way, because, Stoicism was a similar product of Semitic thought. As we know Zeno the founder of the Stoics, being a Phoenician, was born at Kittim (Cyprus). Therefore we see Phoenician influence in Qoheleth too.²³

BHAGVAD GITA: The *Bhagvad gita*²⁴ forms part of the Great Epic Mahabharata, which claims to be the "fifth Veda" which was written around the fourth Century AD. According to *Bhagvad Gita* all things are inter-connected to the Timeless Reality and all things are cohering in the 'Great Self' (Brahman) and therefore also the individual 'self' (atman) when a person is involved. The teachings of gita can be paraphrased in Qoheleth. It can give an apt solution to the problem of Qoheleth. *Gita* does not present the active life as against the contemplative, both have values of their own, and it is possible and desirable to pursue the life of contemplation while still engaged in an active life. Detachment is the *sine qua non* of liberation. Here to achieve liberation one must transcend all the opposites, including good and evil. A person must be the one who neither hates nor loves.

It was *Bhagvad-Gita* that set in motion the transformation of Hinduism from a mystical technique based on the ascetic virtues of renunciation and self-forgetfulness, into the impassioned religion of self-abandonment to God. The religious impulse derived from *Gita* gave momentum to the whole *bhakti* movement,²⁵ which can be compared with the teachings of John of the Cross. *Gita* states that not by abstention from work does a person attain freedom from action; nor by mere renunciation does he attain to his perfection. Every action has its natural reaction and so is a source of bondage and thus prevents union with the Supreme through the transcendence of one's personality. What is required is not abstention from works, but renunciation of selfish desire. In Qoheleth, work, some times translated as toil has some negative connotations, something intrinsically unpleasant. But what it means is the result of

²³ Claus Schedl, *History of the Old Testament*, (New York : Alba House, 1971), Vol. 5. Pp.265-266.

²⁴ *Bhagvad gita* ("Divine sang" or "song of the Lord") In its practical teaching, it stresses a middle course between the 'Path of Action' of the Vedic ritualism and the "Path of renunciation" of the Upanishadic Mysticism.

²⁵ R.C. Aachner, *Hinduism*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.134.

work, that is, the material wealth gained through work²⁶. Selfish work is always unpleasant. It only leads us to frustration and disappointment.

If a person delights in the self (self here understood as the Supreme Being.) alone, who is content with the Self, is satisfied with the Self, for him there exists no work that needs to be done. An attitude of self surrender is required in our attitude towards all kind of activities. One will be free from desire and egoism if the person is fully occupied with the Self. There is neither attachment nor aversion. It is the craving that leads one from bondage, while Buddha would say that desire leads to bondage. *Gita* stresses that it is not the renunciation of works, but their unselfish performance, that leads one to joy²⁷. Kant said "Duty for the sake of duty". *Gita* says that sages see with an equal eye, a learned and humble Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, or even a dog or an outcast which is similar to Qoheleth for whom there is no advantage for humans over beasts.

BUDDHISM: There are some scholars who declare that Buddhism (c.563 - 487 BC) is the only world religion in which such practical fruits as we see exhibited in Qoheleth are manifested.²⁸ Instead of going to Epicureanism to explain these, they accordingly declare that they are due to Buddhistic influence. King Ashoka (C.272 -232 BC) tells us in one of his inscriptions, that in the early part of the third century BC he had sent Buddhistic missionaries to the court of the Seleucidae in Antioch and the court of the Ptolemies in Alexandria.²⁹ Therefore by 250 BC Qoheleth, even if he lived in Jerusalem, might have known Buddhism. The precise domicile of Qoheleth whether Alexandria or Jerusalem, is a matter of scholarly dispute.

²⁶ R.N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), p. 72.

²⁷ Compare the saying of John: *You should never set your eyes upon the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the work at had as a motive for doing it or failing to do it, by upon doing it for God.* (Cf. Keiran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *The collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), p. 667).

²⁸ Ibid. p.27

²⁹ It is known that King Ashoka, (270 BC), who ruled India in the third century BC., sent missionaries as far west as the Mediterranean. This conjecture has certain merit as many Essene beliefs traditionally have been part of the Indian mind. For example, Indians typically associate meekness and holiness and have believed that pure persons contaminate themselves by association with lesser humans. Cf. Ward McAfee, *A History of the World's Great Religions*, (New York: University Press of America, 1983), p. 19-20.

Qoheleth's teachings are quite similar to that of Buddha. Buddha based his entire teaching on the fact of human suffering. He said that coveting only brings sorrow to him who covets. Covetousness or craving is essentially insatiable. Happiness is fleeting. The glow of a past accomplishment quickly fades as we set our goals higher still. There is no fear for a person who has no wants. Buddha taught that total acceptance of what has been, what is, and that which shall be will eliminate suffering. The Buddha taught that attachments to others (to mother, father, wife, husband, son and daughter) are to be avoided, for they breed sorrow³⁰

Existence is painful. The conditions that make an individual are precisely those that also give rise to suffering. Individuality implies limitation; limitation gives rise to desire, and inevitably desire causes suffering, since what is desired is transitory, changing and perishing. It is the impermanence of the object of craving that causes disappointment and sorrow. Ignorance perpetuates this suffering. Living amid the impermanence of everything and being themselves temporary, human beings search for the way of deliverance, for that which shines beyond the fleetingness of human existence - in short, for enlightenment. There is nothing permanent, except the self. Life is a stream of becoming, a series of manifestations and extinctions.

The concept of the individual ego is a popular delusion; the objects with which people identify themselves - fortune, social position, family, body, and even mind - are not their true selves. Buddha is famous for his four noble truths; they are: *1. There is suffering, 2. Suffering is caused by craving, 3. Suffering can be ended, 4. Suffering can be ended through the eight-fold path..* The eight-fold path of Buddha comes close to the good way of life and conduct of Qoheleth. These are: *right views, right conduct, right aspirations, right speech, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditations.*³¹

It is interesting to note that Buddha rejected the Jain extreme asceticism, because for six years, he mortified his flesh, only to find himself no closer to enlightenment than when he began. One day he heard the following words "the string overstretched breaks, and the music flies; the string over slack is dumb and music dies; tune us the sitar neither low nor high'. Thus Buddha concluded neither self-mortification nor self-indulgence leads to enlightenment. Therefore he advocated the middle path. This moderate system would allow the seeker

³⁰ Ibid. p.101.

³¹ *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1991, Vol. 15. p. 269.

sufficient energy to pursue truth while avoiding the snares of a pleasure-filled life.

Pope John Paul II in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* writes, "when Saint John of the Cross, in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and in the *Dark Night of the Soul*, speaks of the need for purification, for detachment from the world of the senses, he does not conceive of that detachment as an end in itself." Pope John Paul II was comparing the Buddhist spirit of detachment and the Carmelite notion of negation. Further, the pope writes. "Carmelite mysticism begins at the point where the reflections of Buddha end."³²

To conclude a word has to be said about Jainism, and Confucianism. Jainism was founded by an older contemporary of Gautama Buddha, named Vardhamana Mahavira. He was raised in luxury in a royal family. Like Gautama, he had renounced pleasure and sought enlightenment, which he found after practicing severe asceticism for 12 years. He was proclaimed to be a Jina, or "conqueror", as he had conquered ignorance and death. Both the Jains and the Buddhists held this world to be a place of terror and pain. Pleasure was short-lived and illusory.

Confucius was born around 551 BC. Among other things Confucius taught about the mean, or the middle between un-workable extremes, with nothing in excess. This notion is a counterpart to the golden mean of Aristotle. The mean balances a sensitive temperament against overdose and indulgence. Pleasure should not be carried to excess.

The teachings of the Biblical author and his contemporaries like Buddha, Mahavira, and Confucius and so on, are very similar. Though we do not possess historical documents as to whether there was any interaction between these persons, or their doctrine, but we can conclude that the basic human aspirations are the same. This will help us to build the global village more truly and lovingly.

2. 3 JOHN OF THE CROSS AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

When the Portuguese Navigator Vasco Da Gama landed at Calicut in 1498, he was restoring a link between Europe and the East that had existed many centuries previously. The first known connection between the two regions had been Alexander the Great's invasion of the

³² John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed., Vittorio M., (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 87.

Punjab 327-325³³BC. There was a trade link between India and Europe through Muslim Arabs. When constantinople fell into the hands of the Turks, they cut the trade route which forced Europe to search for a sea-trade route to India. There was also a link between Spain and India. The Spanish rulers Philip II, Philip III, and Philip IV,(1580-1640) gave government support to the missionaries.³⁴ It was the desire of Christopher Columbus to reach India When he reached the Bahamas in 1492 he thought he has reached India³⁵ The Portuguese came to India much earlier in 1500, and we know that John of the Cross travelled to Lisbon often .

But we are not sure whether John came into contact with Indian literature and Mysticism. Some are inclined to believe that the theory of fervent faith in the Godhead was derived from Christianity³⁶ It is significant that the Shiva and Vaishnava missionaries came from the South and West of the peninsula, where Arab, Jewish, and Christian communities first settled³⁷.

In Spain the marriage Between Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon in 1469 led to the unification of Spain. The unification of two kingdoms brought economic and military stability. There was forced conversion of Muslims and Jews³⁸. On the other hand the Protestant Reformation started by Luther in Germany also had an effect on Spain and on John too. A psychosis against the threat of Protestant infiltration developed and reached its height under Philip II (1556-98) whose religious policy was modeled completely on the counter reformation.³⁹ There were mass conversions to establish a unified faith and kingdom. John was born in this context.

³³ *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1971, Vol 21. p. 77.

³⁴ J. Wicki, "India", *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1968, Vol.7. p. 436.

³⁵ Alvi M.J., "American Indians", *Coller's Encyclopedia*, 1964, Vol.12. p. 643.

³⁶ *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1981, Vol. 6. p. 704.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Many Jews and Moors(Muslims) became Christians. For example St. Teresa's grandfather, a Toledan merchant, a Jewish converso (Christianized Jew), victim of the use of religion for the sake of political unity, had to accuse himself before the inquisition of Judaizing and as a penance was compelled to wear in procession for seven Fridays the humiliating Sanbenito. After his reconciliation , out of necessity, he moved with his family to Avila where he was able to continue in his profession as a cloth merchant Cf. J. F. Alonso, "Spain", *New Catholic encyclopedia*, 1968, vol. 13. p. 510.

³⁹ Ibid.

If in Spain the merger was through conversion, in India it was through the birth of the Bhakti movement and by the birth of sects which resulted in the polarization of Hinduism and Islam. Hereby we can conclude that both in Spain and in India there was an urge for merger, a desire for unity, a love for unification. In Spain forced conversion to Christianity and in India forced conversion to Islam⁴⁰ The contact of these two great religions profoundly affected the evolution of both, and at this time, also, Christian and Jewish teaching began to affect Hinduism⁴¹, leading to an ocean of spiritual leaders who became the beacons of true unification, not with the sword, but by leading people to experience the One and the unmoved mover.

JOHN OF THE CROSS AND THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT : The Bhakti

Marga is a general name given to those sects of Modern Hinduism, which, lay stress on the importance of bhakti, or devotional faith, as a means of salvation, as opposed, to the 'works-path'(Karma-Marga), and the 'knowledge-path (Jnana Marga). As a religious term *bhakti*, is defined as 'an affection fixed upon the Lord'. It also means love directed to God. Devotional faith implies not only a personal God, but one God. This word *bhakti* as a religious technical term can be traced to a period as early as the 4th cent. BC. The question as to how far Christianity has influenced the *bhakti Marga* has been much discussed. It was in Southern India that the lamp of *Bhakti Marga* was kept burning by Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbaditya and Visnusvamin. They revived the *bhakti Marga* in the 12th and following centuries. We can trace some facts about the contact of Christianity with *bhakti* movement of India. Large colonies of Nestorian Christians and Jews migrated to the Malabar coast in the 6th cent. AD, and settled in Southern India. Not only was there in the early centuries of our era free and regular

⁴⁰ Forced conversion were carried out and many temples were destroyed by the more fanatical rulers. Conversion to Islam was more common in areas where Buddhism had once been strongest- modern Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir.

⁴¹ W. Crooke, "Hinduism", ed., James H., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, (New York: T&T. Clark, 1981), Vol 6. P. 704.

communication between India and the west, both by sea and overland⁴², even a Hindu king who followed the path of devotion (*bhakti Marga*) received a party of Syrian Christians in the year AD. 639⁴³.

The *Bhakti* movement has its origin in *Bhagvad Gita* which was revived in Southern India. Nammalvar, (first half of the Ninth century) one of the propagators of the *bhakti* says that soul is eternal and utterly dependent on God, and to God it should aspire with every atom of its being.⁴⁴ Through the cessation of all inclination to other things and the increase of longing for God in a timeless and spaceless manner, one attains to God. This is similar to What *Gita* calls *tyaga*- renunciation, and *Vairagya* - passionlessness of the *Gita*. This view is similar to Qoheleth who said "fear God", and that of John of the Cross who said 'without God man is nothing, nor can he of himself benefit the Lord's Creatures. Nammalvar developed a passionate spirituality similar to St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila when they called the spiritual growth a mystical marriage. This mysticism, says R.C. Zaehner⁴⁵, in its frank sexuality, is really comparable to that of the great Christian mystics like St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila⁴⁶.

The *Bhakti* movement was originated as a result of politico-religious imbalance which led to the polarization of Hinduism with Islam. There were many people who combined both religions and developed a religion of their own. During the time of John there was social disparity, a deep valley between rich and poor; the search after wealth and pleasure at the time

⁴² Jeronimo Gracian, who favoured the mission, gives an example: "A little after they had entered the high seas, it happened that in the middle of the night while the sailors were sleeping and cooling off, a ship from India called the chagas ran into the ship in which the friars were, which named the San Anto'n and it sank without anyone being saved except one or two of the sailors who told about the shipwreck" (Cf. Kieran Kavanaugh, *God Speaks in the Night: The life, Times, and Teaching of St. John of The Cross*, (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), p. 262.)

⁴³ George A. G., "Bhakti Marga", ed , James H., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, (New York: T & T. Clark, 1981), Vol 2. p. 548.

⁴⁴ R.C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, (London: Oxford University press, 1972), p. 128.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.129.

⁴⁶ Nammalvar says that until the soul had made itself 'female', it cannot receive the love of God. The flood of passionate spirituality induced by Nammalvar is worth noting, Cf. R. C. Zaehner, Op Cit. p. 129. And for Caitanya, the soul must play the woman in its dealing with God, Cf. R.C. Zaehner, Op Cit. p.145. This view is most interesting in the imagery of "Bride" and the "Bridegroom", used by St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila Cf. Mauei R., "The imagery of the "Bride" and the "Bridegroom" in the writings of St. John of the Cross, Justin P., ed., *St. John of the Cross: Studies on His life, Doctrine and Time*, (Kalamassery: Jyothir Dhara Publications, 1991), Pp.81-93.

developed nausea in John of the Cross. The *Bhakti* movement was against the division of the society on the caste basis.

Huston Smith, Says, that "all the basic principles of *bhakti yoga*⁴⁷ are richly exemplified in Christianity. Indeed, for the Hindu point of view, Christianity is one great brilliant *bhakti*, highway toward God⁴⁸. All we have to do in this *bhakti* is to love God dearly not just claim such love, but love God in fact; love God only (other things being loved in relation to God), and love God for no ulterior reason (not even from the desire for liberation, or to be loved in return) but for love's sake alone. One of the elements of the *bhakti* approach is *japam* - the practice of repeating God's name. There are so many similarities between John and the *Bhakti* movement. John was a poet, reformer, founder, and he lived when religious unification was sought. Similarly *Bhakti* saints were poets⁴⁹, reformers and founders of sects, and they tried to unify people by a new kind of religion. The most outstanding of them were Ramanand(14th c., Kabir and Nanak(15th c.), Namdev (14th c.), Ekanath (16th c.), Caithnya (15 th c.).

JOHN AND SUFISM: Islam controlled an area stretching from Spain to India.⁵⁰ Worldly success brought hedonistic values. Early Islamic society forsook the simple ways of the prophet and indulged in displays of regal luxury. To protest this drift from authentic Islam, a few early Muslims donned clothing of a coarse woolen material (suf). In time, they became known as Sufis, Searching for a truer expression of Islam, the Sufis practiced asceticism learned from the Christian monks of Syria. To this they added the rich heritage of Middle-Eastern Gnosticism; with these materials, the early Sufis fashioned a mystical religious

⁴⁷ The word *Yoga*, etymologically is derived from the Sanskrit root, 'yuj' which means 'to bind together, 'hold fast', 'yoke'. In general, it means any ascetical technique and method of meditation or means of re-integration. It has mainly a two fold significance. It mean union with God, or the union of the conscious mind with the deeper levels of super-consciousness, resulting in the integration of ones personality. It can also mean the methods and disciplines adopted for achieving self-integration or union with God. Cf. Gregory D'Souza, *Teresian Mysticism and Yoga*, (Mangalore: Divan Jyothi Publication, 1981), Pp. 183-84.

⁴⁸ Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), p. 53.

⁴⁹ The *Bhakti* movement found its expression in kirtan or rhythmical songs of hymns. The most outstanding characteristic of all the *bhakti* sects is self-abandonment to a personal God. Cf. R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, (London: oxford university press, 1972), p.173 ff.

⁵⁰ Ward McAfee, *A History of the World's Great Religions*, (New York: University press of America, 1983), p.197.

experience. Later, Sufism would intermingle with the mystical traditions of India. Sikhism⁵¹, a blend of Sufism and *Bhakti* Hinduism, would thereupon emerge as separate faiths⁵² I must also state that in the 13th Century scholastics were caught up in a ferment of thought as their cultural horizon was suddenly broadened and their allegiance to the past was deeply challenged through the influx of a vast philosophical and scientific literature translated from the Greek and Arabic.⁵³

To conclude there was much interaction between different cultures and patterns of thought. But we do not know whether John of the Cross came into contact with any of this literature.

JOHN OF THE CROSS AND IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA (1491-1556):

Ignatius was one of the contemporaries of St. John of the Cross, who like John, was a founder, reformer and a mystic. For my subject I take only the *Spiritual exercises*⁵⁴ for understanding John. Ignatius writes "The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created. Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him".⁵⁵ By other things Ignatius understands everything between myself and God. In the state of perfection there is an integration of all things into the service of God. For us the union of God and creation is a mystery. In my day to day life I identify myself with other things, e.g. I am good, I am beautiful, and so on. When a person move towards the ultimate goal- union with God, that person has to separate himself from them. One has to

⁵¹ Gurunanak is the founder of the Sikhism, Sikhs seek salvation through union with God by realizing, through love, the person of God, who dwells in the depths of their own being. Union with God is the ultimate goal. Apart from God life has no meaning; it is separation from God that causes human suffering. In the words of Nanak, 'what terrible separation it is to be separated from God and what blissful union to be united with God'. Cf. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), p.77.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1968, vol. 12. p. 1155.

⁵⁴ *The Spiritual Exercises* is beyond doubt the best known among Ignatius's books. The small book, begun in 1522, contains the marrow of his spiritual outlook Cf. George E.G., *Ignatius of Loyola*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), Pp. 10-60.

⁵⁵ Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), p. 18.

understand that the person is different from them.

Karl Rahner commenting on the Spiritual Exercises says that the other things are not only material possessions, time, friends, but also my activity, my abilities, even my nature that has been formed by my own free decisions, health, and sickness, honour and dis-honour, thoughts and desires, and so forth.⁵⁶ This process of freeing the self from the self includes everything that belongs to the other things. What John states as total negation.

JOHN AND ST. TERESA OF AVILA: St. Teresa who was born in 1515 in Spain not only an contemporary of John but an associate in the reform of the Order. They are the two faces of the same coin⁵⁷. For my discussion here I take only the aspect of detachment which is relevant to our subject here. In her book *The Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa states "One of these is love for each other; the second, detachment from all created things; the third, true humility."⁵⁸ According to her detachment is necessary to possess freedom of spirit. She states "It will be a great help towards this if we keep constantly in our thoughts the vanity of all things and the rapidity with which they pass away."⁵⁹

Teresa some times calls the spirit of freedom and detachment from self as forgetfulness. She writes to her sisters that the detachment from all things is necessary for a life of prayer which leads to union with God. Detachment is necessary even to attain authentic love and true humility. "I cannot understand how humility exists, or can exist, without love, or love without humility, and it is impossible for these two virtues to exist save where there is great detachment from all created things."⁶⁰ She also writes about detaching oneself from relatives. Anyone who aspires to a life of prayer must cultivate detachment in order to free our mind and heart for God.

Detachment is an unconditional love rooted in the love of God and Neighbour.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p.19.

⁵⁷ Cf. Mary A.H., *Spirituality of St. Teresa of Avila*, Boston: St. Paul Edition, 1983), Pp. 61-98.

⁵⁸ Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1946, Vol.2. p. 16.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.42.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.63.

"Detachment, says St. Teresa, consists not so much in bodily separation as in the soul resolutely embracing the Good Jesus, Our Lord, and forgetting all else since it possesses all things in Him."⁶¹ It is not a negative attitude, just like John it is a positive attitude, the freeing of hearts from all that holds us back from reaching our goal-God. Tearing ourselves away from creatures for the sake of the Creator.

There were several saints like Francis Borgia, the Duke of Gandia, who renounced all and entered the Jesuits; and Peter of Alcantara, the Franciscan Penitent and reformer during the time of St. John of the Cross, who also preached and wrote about detachment .

To conclude like Qoheleth, John did not write something new. There were so many spiritual leaders as we have seen above who wrote at length about the vanity of pride, possessions, and pleasure. Alain Cugno says that "John had no aim of teaching anything new. Rather, he repeated the ancient assertions of faith. But in repeating them he aimed at giving them fresh life, making them new, scouring and polishing them to give them back their brightness."⁶² That is exactly what Qoheleth said "There is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, "see, this is new"? It has been already, in the ages before us."⁶³

⁶¹ Tadgh Tierney, ed., *Meditations on the Way of Perfection*, Vineyard Series, Vol. 5. (Dublin: Teresian Press ,1983), p.29.

⁶² Alain Cugno, *Op Cit.* p. 16.

⁶³ *Ecclesiastes* 1: 9-10.

3 KENOSIS FOR GOD

St. Paul says "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." (1 Cor. 9: 25.) We are athletes for Christ. All athletes undergo strict discipline. We all have to run the race. We are called to win the race, and the prize is eternal life, what John of the Cross calls union with God. We are all winners. Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward in their book *Born to win* say that : "Winners have a zest for life, enjoying work, play, food, other people, sex, and the world of nature. Without guilt they enjoy their own accomplishments. Without envy they enjoy the accomplishments of others. Although winners can freely enjoy themselves, they can also postpone enjoyment, can discipline themselves in the present to enhance their enjoyment in the future. Winners are not afraid to go after what they want, but they do so in appropriate ways. Winners do not get security by controlling others. They do not set themselves up to lose"⁶⁴

This is a good introduction to begin a discussion on the subject of detachment. Qoheleth and John of the Cross speak about detachment. For Qoheleth all is vanity because there are so many contradictions in the life we live in this world. Qoheleth wrote a series of reflections on particular subjects, not always in agreement with one another, or even internally logically consistent. Qoheleth uses the word *hebel* - *a striving after wind*, which has been translated as 'vanity', 'nothingness', 'worthlessness', 'futility', 'absurdity', 'mystery', 'impermanence'.⁶⁵ We do not know what exactly Qoheleth meant by the word *hebel*. The things of this world do not give a person ultimate satisfaction. Therefore *a striving after wind* was something which was fundamentally unsatisfactory and was the cause of a sense of deep frustration.⁶⁶

John of the Cross was the doctor of detachment. For him it is not the vanity of this world that frustrates the human kind, but the desire for God, possession of God, union with God is the starting point to conclude that all creatures empty and nothingness. When

⁶⁴ Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward, *Born to Win*, (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1978), p.3.

⁶⁵ R.N. Whybray, ed., *Ecclesiastes*, (Sheffield: JOST Press, 1989), p. 64.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Thomas Aquinas got the vision he said that what ever he wrote was straw. It is union with God that brings ultimate joy and pleasure. The joy and the pleasure we get through creatures and the enjoyment we possess in union with God are incomparable. That is the reason to be empty.

It is not the futility in life but the proprietorship of God that demands of me to make place for him. Simple physics teaches us that we cannot fill something if it is already full. We have to empty the container, to make room for the new content. We cannot fill the new wine in the old skins. For new wine, new skins. We cannot make place for God in our old selves, new selves for new wine. The old Adam has to be eliminated. That is the rationality behind the motive of denudation.

The winner is an integral person. He does not depend on outside things. He moves from dependency to self-sufficiency, from authoritarian outer support to authentic inner support. Such a person is no longer compelled to depend on a spouse, an academic degrees, a job, a title, a therapist, a bank account, and so forth for support. Instead, he or she discovers that the needed capacities are internal and that they can be depended on"⁶⁷. We have already said that winners can postpone enjoyment, can discipline themselves in the present to enhance their enjoyment in the future. That is what we are speaking of here, giving up something for the sake of higher things. Otherwise there is no meaning to giving up the things of this world.

We do not depend on the things which give us temporary satisfaction. Pleasure, pride and possessions give us momentary contentment. Therefore we have to look for that which furnishes us with durable delight. It is our inordinate desire for the things of this world says St. John of the Cross, that draws us back in attaining our enduring bliss. For Qoheleth there is no sense in fixing our mind and toiling day and night while we cannot enjoy things in the present. God gives all gifts. Human psychology tells us that gifts are given so that we may draw closer to the giver and not concentrate on the gifts. But what sense does it make if we cling to the creatures and not to the creator?

For John of the Cross the purpose of humans is clear; it is union with God. The goal of humankind is to be united in God, to participate in the life of God that is call and goal. John

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Cf. Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward, *Op Cit.* p. 7.

states " Faith is that amiable means of advancing to God, our goal."⁶⁸ and again in his book, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Ch. 2 John says. "In all things, both high and low, let God be your goal, for in no other way you will grow in merit and perfection."⁶⁹ Let us use an example here; if I want to go to New Delhi from New York I have to leave New York first. Unless I leave New York I will never reach New Delhi. Similarly If I have to reach God I have to leave all pride, pleasure and possessions. It is not kenosis for the sake of kenosis but for the attainment of God. Our goal is God and the way to this goal is detachment from all excessive desires. All the created things are like a spring board which give an impetus. We have to use them as a stimulus only and not rest on them, and not make them the centre of our lives.

3. 1 THE AIM OF KENOSIS

St. John of the Cross in his book *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book one Chapter 13, writes:

To reach satisfaction in all
 desire its possession in nothing.
 To come to possess all
 desire the possession of nothing.
 To arrive at being all
 desire to be nothing.
 To come to the knowledge of all
 desire the knowledge of nothing.
 To come to the pleasure you have not
 you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.
 To come to the knowledge you have not
 you must go by a way in which you know not.
 To come to the possession you have not
 you must go by a way in which you possess not.
 To come to be what you are not
 you must go by a way in which you are not.
 When you turn toward something
 you cease to cast yourself upon the all.
 For to go from all to the all
 you must deny yourself of all in all.

⁶⁸ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), p.109.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.680.

And when you come to the possession of the all
 you must possess it without wanting anything.
 Because if you desire to have something in all
 your treasure in God is not purely your all.
 In this nakedness the spirit finds
 its quietude and rest.
 For in coveting nothing.
 nothing raises it up
 and nothing weighs it down,
 because it is in the center of its humility.
 When it covets something
 in this very desire it is wearied.⁷⁰

John of the Cross has stated his case, the aim is to possess every thing. Then what is the means? John again writes:

not to the easiest, but to the most difficult;
 not to the most delightful, but to the harshest;
 not to the most gratifying, but to the less pleasant;
 not to what means rest for you, but to hard work;
 not to the consoling, but to the unconsoling;
 not to the most, but to the least;
 not to the highest and most precious, but to the lowest and most despise;
 not to wanting something, but to wanting nothing;
 do not go about looking for the best of temporal things, but for the worst,
 and desire to enter for Christ into complete nudity, emptiness, and poverty in everything
 in the world.⁷¹

We have already seen that union with God is the goal for John of the Cross. And it is this aim that draws humankind to move towards God. Qoheleth was not aware of the union of creatures with God. The disappointments of life have discouraged him from putting trust in material benefits. At his best Qoheleth would seem to be promoting the image of the supremely free human being, the person who enters into life's joys and sorrows without ever making either joy or sorrow absolute. Neither wealth, nor knowledge, nor pleasure, nor power, nor success nor failure should totally capture a person. The enjoyment of the ordinary things of life, food, drink, love, work, should be enough to make life worth living, and even these are transient things, not absolutes.

Qoheleth has uncluttered the world of all that is beneath the dignity of humans; he

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 103-104.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 102-103.

leaves us with nothing in the world to cling to with all our might. He shows us the vacuum in which we live and move and only tells us that moderate pleasure, dispassionate possessions and restricted pride makes life worth living. We would like to have him say that only God himself can satisfy the human heart, but this he does not say. This he has left for John to say. That is why John in *the Dark night, Book II, Chapter 4*, states, *This was great happiness and a sheer grace for me, because through the annihilation and calming of my faculties, passions, appetites, and affection, by which my experience and satisfaction in God was based, I went out from my human operation and way of acting to God's operation and way of acting.*⁷²

Qoheleth does not say that only God himself can satisfy the human heart because as a man of reason, a philosopher, he knows only the God of reason--- the aloof manipulator of all things whose ways are beyond understanding and with whom there can be no true personal relationship. Qoheleth and John of the Cross come closer when they remark that the pleasure, pride of life and the possessions of things do not satisfy human beings. But John of the Cross goes a step further and differs with Qoheleth by stating that union with God is possible. God is not a remote monarch but the object of human yearning and desire. St Augustine said that our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

The concept of God in Qoheleth is mysterious, he was effected by the notion of God that the Israelites had at that time. The awareness of God as 'a devouring fire' a Jealous God(Dt. 4:24). God for Qoheleth is the giver of life. One of the most frequent verbs used by Qoheleth to describe God's relationship to men is the verb "to give". God gives to man the gift of life, though in the end he takes it back (12:7). He gives wisdom, knowledge and joy. (2:26), he also gives wealth, possessions and the power to enjoy them (5:19; 6:27). All the gifts, however, are not pleasant ones. The relationship between man and God is not an authentic relationship. God is looked on as a giver of "things", and man is a passive receiver.

So union with God is possible and that is the main concern of John of the Cross. Therefore we have to empty ourselves from all desires, or attachments. Desire here is understood as resting in inordinate, unnecessary, unwanted attachments or appetites. Since the goal is God other things are left behind. Pride, possessions and pleasure are to be given up, the inordinate desire to rest in them has to be thrown out. We experience an emptiness in pride, pleasure and possessions, because they cannot enter within our souls. Only God can enter into

our souls. The emptiness in these things reveal a thirst for God.⁷³ The principle of *emptiness* is one of the reasons to leave pleasure, pride and possessions. Emptiness creates a space for God. Emptiness creates a desire or a longing.

The emptiness creates desire and desire creates need and need urges the will for action. When the will perceives an emptiness it moves to other "things" to fill the vacuum that has been created by the emptiness. If the emptiness thereof is hunger for God, then the will moves toward God. For if the will's concern is for pride, pleasure and possessions, then the will cannot direct its actions to God. John says the soul must remain like an empty vessel waiting to be filled, or like a hungry man craving for food, or like a sick person moaning for health, or like one suspended in the air with nothing to lean on. Such is the truly loving heart.⁷⁴ Emptiness for John is a complete emptiness, to the stage where the soul perceives the absence of God. There the soul experiences the horrible groaning emptiness, the infinite death, the absence of God in man, and therefore the means by which man is in touch with God.⁷⁵ It is not only an absence of creatures on the way to God but the absence of God which is a crucial part of the relations - the dark night of faith. Here comes the faith when the soul feels the absence of God. For John emptiness is a kind of death. Therefore faith is an necessary condition for detaching the self from all inordinate desires.

Furthermore, the principle of desire is at work on the way to union. Desire is the first step in establishing a relationship. Only when the person desires something does he move to action. This desire establishes a relationship with the object desired. A person has the capacity to desire a higher or lower thing. When we have established that the person is capable of uniting him/her self to God then only can we move to make space for God. "A man" says John " makes room for God by wiping away all the smudges and smears of creatures, by uniting his will perfectly to God's; for to love is to labour to divest and deprive oneself for God, of all that is not God."⁷⁶ Therefore the soul has the capacity for God. Qoheleth is not aware that humans can desire God. He made an experiment by fulfilling his wild desires for pleasure, power and possessions. This created an emptiness in himself, a vanity and chasing

⁷³ Alian Cugno, *Op Cit.* p. 39.

⁷⁴ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *Op cit.*, p.444.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* p.40.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 117.

after wind. With utter disappointment he concludes "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."⁷⁷

In John's teaching the principle of love takes the ultimate consideration. Love is the principle of equation. John writes:

it ought to be kept in mind that an attachment to a creature makes a person equal to that creature; the firmer the attachment, the closer is the likeness to the creature, and the greater the equality. For love effects a likeness between the lover and the object loved.... He who loves a creature, then, is as low as that creature, and is in some way even lower, because love not only equates, but even subjects the lover to the loved object.⁷⁸

Qoheleth was not aware of the principle of love. All things are vain because they bring frustration. and disappointment. we unite with God through faith in love . Love is the necessary means for union. Love ends in union. Therefore from John of the Cross it was clear if one loves creatures he will become like them. If he loves God he will be like God. We have to keep in mind that the relation between God and creation is a mystery.

Attachment to creatures blocks pure union and transformation in God. What John calls 'soul ' and we can call 'person' is infinitely superior to the creatures. "Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and does crown him with glory and honour. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.(Ps. 8:5-6.). All creatures are external to the person. We cannot go to the creatures but we are called to take all creation to God and not become the slaves of creation. We are custodians and stewards of creation.

There is a purpose in letting go of creatures, because attachment to them would preclude something else - union with God, the theme of John's whole work.⁷⁹ Those who have found the pearl have to sell all that they treasured or possessed in order to buy the pearl (*Mt. 13: 44*). That is the reason we have to detach ourselves from all creatures in order to possess God. We have to let go of pride, pleasure, and possessions in order to own the new pearl.

What is attachment? Attachment for John is inordinate desire. Attachment in the spiritual sense is a fixation upon a creature. In the current psychological insight attachment can

⁷⁷ Ecclesiastes 12:13.

⁷⁸ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *Op Cit.*, p. 78.

⁷⁹ Alian Cugno, *Op Cit.*, p.52.

be called addiction and codependency⁸⁰ It is a distorted relationship, with life - damaging effects. Attachment is to cling possessively to the desired person or object. In addiction, in codependency and attachment the person uses someone or something to evade pain and to replace it with pleasure, pride or possession. They fix on a creature in order to escape a feeling of powerlessness and to create a sense of control.⁸¹

The attachment leads one to pre-occupation. Then obsession prevents him focusing on the work at hand. The goal of human beings is the union with God through love. For the attainment of the divine union with God arises from the fact that all of man's attachments to creatures are pure darkness in God's sight. When a person is enslaved with the affection to pleasure, pride and possessions he is incapable of attaining the goal. All creatures are infinite and God is infinite. All things pass away and only God remains. St. Teresa of Jesus says "Let nothing disturb you, let nothing trouble you; all things pass away, God alone remains. Patience overcomes everything, He who has God has everything; God alone suffices"⁸²

What is the necessity of complete detachment from all excessive attachments? The reason is simple. John writes: *it makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord. For even if tied by thread, the bird will be prevented from taking off just as surely as if it were tied by cord - that is, it will be impeded from flight as long as it does not break the thread.*⁸³ The one who steals an egg is a thief just like one who steals an elephant. So any little desire for any thing prevents union. Therefore there should be total stripping of our attachments. We have to strip until we are totally naked. "Sell everything you have. Then come and follow me. (Mk. 10: 21).

John wants to relieve us from the tyranny of ego. We tend to make persons or things the ultimate source of pleasure or possession. They become idols or ends in themselves⁸⁴.

Who takes the initiative? John insists that the project of union begins from God. We

⁸⁰ Francis K. N. and Marie T. C., *O Blessed Night*, (New York: Alba House, 1991), p. 9.

⁸¹ Ibid. p.10

⁸² E. Allison Peers, *Mother of Carmel, A Portrait of St. Teresa of Jesus*, (New York: More House Gorham Co., 1946), p.96.

⁸³ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *Op Cit.*, p. 97.

⁸⁴ Susan Muto, *The Ascent, John of the Cross Today*, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1990), p.20.

are not the initiators, God takes the initiative "The project of liberation is impossible without God's love leading the way and transforming the heart".⁸⁵ All attachments to this world are dark in comparison with the light of God. Attachment to creatures and a relationship with God are contraries, hence one excludes the other. A person who is attached to something or someone becomes like that attachment. All the goodness of creatures in the world compared with the infinite goodness of God is nothing.

John makes clear that when he is speaking about an attachment to something or someone he is always assuming it as an *inordinate* relationship. Therefore a person has to relate to a creature in a manner which is only appropriate for a relationship with God. Creatures cannot usurp the place of God. Our inordinate appetite for the things of this world like, pleasure, pride, and possession is overcome by an habitual desire to imitate Christ in all our deeds, by bringing our life into conformity with His. The inordinate appetite brings about torment, fatigue weariness, blindness, and weakness; as Qoheleth said they bring frustration.

1 Jn 2:12-17 John singles out three aspects of the world's enticing promises: "the lust of the flesh" -- this is the invitation to enjoy the PLEASURES and comforts of the body, and luxurious living; "the lust of the eyes" -- this is the temptation to give in to what attracts the eye, the glitter of wealth, the seduction of pomography; "the PRIDE of life" -- the world's attempt to lure people into thinking that material POSSESSIONS are all-important: it wants people to yield to the temptation to become self-sufficient, needing no one; to the temptation to show off the things they own. But all these promises will lead to nothing, for the world is coming to an end. Only those who obey the will of God, who truly love him, will live forever (*1 Jn 2:17*).

3. 2 DETACHMENT FORM PRIDE

St. Paul had said that only three things last forever; faith, love and hope. All other things will pass away. Therefore faith, love and hope are the only means that carry us to God. That is why John of the Cross says, we reach to the union by the use of the path of faith, love and hope. The first letter of John says among three other things, pride of life belongs to the world and not to the Father (Cf. *1 John 2:16*). This pride of life that creates name, fame,

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John Welch, *When Gods Die*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p.70.

power, prestige, office, bossing, and so on. Pride expresses itself in power and refusing to do the will of God. This is an over developed ego. For John faith is the path that leads to God in the dark night of detachment. Pride perverts faith by duping us into thinking we can master mystery as we might a mathematical problem⁸⁶. Pride takes different forms. It expresses itself in power, arrogance, an attitude that I know everything, I do not need any help. Pride looks down on others and thinks I am right.

Qoheleth does not write about pride, but he is well aware that the proud and the powerful were causing injustice to the people. Qoheleth 4:1, indicates the deep emotion, and the tears of the oppressed. It is evident that Qoheleth had profound sympathies towards the lower classes. People showed their power by inflicting violence on the weak: an oppressive use of power and the helplessness of the oppressed. This clearly shows the situation and times of Qoheleth. The sight of oppression makes Qoheleth to conclude in 4:2 that dead persons are the only happy people. But he goes a step further in 4:3, to say that better are those who have never been born than the dead ones. These sentiments are similar to Job 3:13-16. Qoheleth 4:4 shows how people envy each other. Thirst for power ends up in jealousy, envy and rivalry. The inhumanity of oppressors and the inhumanity of competition are the main points of his discovery.

John too takes a critical look at those who have authority and power. In referring to men of extensive learning and high repute, living yonder with the world, anxious about their pretensions and rank⁸⁷, John says they are not friends of Christ and their lives are bitter.

There is conflict between our self and our desire to have power, name, fame and prestige. Pride takes a leading role to prevent the will from travelling on the road of humility. Humility is the mother of all virtues said St. Augustine. And St. Teresa of Avila said that among other things humility is the necessary condition for the life of prayer. We cannot reach God if we are not detached from the pride of life. Pride gives a false notion of self-sufficiency. It takes the person from dependence on God to self-complacency. Union with God is a pure gift from God. Pride tells the person that he can do it all by himself. Pride takes pleasure in showing off one's own achievements in front of others.

John of the Cross dedicates himself with all the generosity he can muster to the

⁸⁶ Susan Muto, *Op Cit.* p.45.

⁸⁷ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *Op. Cit.*, p.125.

recording and purifying of his vital powers of pride and to seeking out a new and appreciative understanding of the ways of God in Christ⁸⁸. We often experience the conflict between us and our desire. St Paul experienced this tension within himself. The fulfillment to our endless longing is not achieved through our achievements, but as pure gift. There is a desire to control, possess, to find a place in society. This we can call ego. It is not the things of the world that ensnare and injure the soul but the desire, our ego which always tries to dominate, and therefore abuses and destroys.⁸⁹

Pride blocks the path of faith. Faith is perfect obedience, a perfect response to the call of love, loyalty to our transcendence. Faith can only develop as long as we impose night on pride, that ego-desire to be for oneself, to have for oneself, to control, to possess, to be self-centered, not other centered. The appetite for self-gratification must be replaced with an appetite for Christ. My will has to be replaced by the will of God. 'Not as I will, but as thou wilt.' (Mt. 26: 39). We must allow God take control of us. St. Therese of Lisieux said "I ignored myself and sought myself in nothing." Pride attracts the will in its own direction, but the will is free to follow or refuse to follow the attraction of pride. It may listen to the call of pride or follow the light of reason, which clarifies the hierarchy of values and dictates what is good, better and best.

Pride refuses to obey human or divine authority. We obey authority by obedience. Obedience does not mean being under someone's power or dominion or will but free obedience to another's will. I obey when I give myself in freedom. I then in a sense give myself in freedom. I am in control when I give myself in freedom. I am then in a sense the master of the will I serve. The process by which I accept the command of others and respond to what the other wants, bringing my will into the realm of the other's freedom. Only my freedom can set me to serve another's freedom. So respect for his freedom guarantees mine. Pride blocks my freedom because it does not want to do the will of anyone other than the self: since pride looks down on others then there is no respect for the other. By looking on the other as free, I give myself the freedom to decide that the other wants of me. That is why the vow of obedience is one of freedom, not slavery.

⁸⁸ Cf. Ross Collings, *John of the Cross: The way of the Christian Mystics*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p.85

⁸⁹ Ruth Burrows, *Ascent to Love: The Spiritual Teaching of St. John of the Cross*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), p.21.

Obedience requires two conditions: there should be command or demand and there should be a person who carries it out. There is a kind of relationship in obedience. Pride blocks this relationship by asking the will to have its way.

In 5:8, Qoheleth saw a misuse of power by the officials of his time. Each squeezing the other to get money. The poor were suffering under the yoke of the proud and powerful. Therefore Qoheleth concluded power is useless if it is used in the service of selfishness and egotism.

Jesus, though in the form of God, emptied himself taking the form of a servant and humbled himself unto death upon a Cross (Cf. Phi. 2: 6-11). This idea of obedience as an act of freedom can throw light on obedience and the power of God. When the person has established a right relationship with God by the stripping off of all his selfish desires then, God moves downwards, it is God who offers his obedience to the believer without any loss of his divinity.⁹⁰ But the believer does not give an order to God. God makes himself humble and takes the human will into his sovereignty.

Though God offers his obedience to the believer, we can not bring God down to the human level. The surrender of the human will to God's will, the meaning of the phrase "to do the will of God", can then be taken in the human sense of will.⁹¹ So when the will renounces itself it becomes open to the possibility of being taken up by another. Then our pride comes to an end and we become like Jesus the humble servant. Then we can say like St. Paul "it not I who live but Christ lives through me." (Cf. Gal: 2:20).

The principle of love once again bounces back in the matter of obedience. I only obey when I love. Love is the necessary condition of obedience, and obedience is the effect of love. The act of obedience demands taking into account the will of another. It is in love I give my will and my power to do the will of the one who commands. Without love obedience is impossible and becomes a struggle for power. Pride does not take pleasure in love. The food of pride is power. Jesus said "my food is to do the will of my father" (Cf. Jn. 4:34.) If we do not detach ourselves from our selfish pride we will develop the counterfeit forms of concupiscence and pride.

The danger of pride is that it leads to complacency, competitiveness and comparison

⁹⁰ Alian Cugno, Op Cit., p.133.

⁹¹ Ibid. p.137.

with others. The proud look for those who agree with them and look for those who congratulate them. This pride which is manifested in rank, position and so on says St. John of the Cross, is detrimental to union with God. It might reject the benefits given by God. St. John says: "You will add that we must not throw away pearls and that it is a kind of pride to refuse God's gifts, as though we are self-sufficient without them."⁹² The tower of Babel is the best example, by which the people tried to reach God by their own efforts. In the pure negation one does not meddle with exterior attachments or human respect.⁹³ Pride moves to act at once when there is danger to the ego. The action of pride is to prevent the will making sense out of God's will.

The action of the will is to find a meaning in the will of God. Pride does not see any meaning in the will of God. Through pride we can put obstacles in God's way. God does not act against human freedom. "Grace perfects nature" says St. Thomas Aquinas.

In the process of detachment pride comes to the surface. Under the guise of mortification and self abnegation pride takes its seat in the ego of the person. John of the Cross is very clear on this matter. He write: "Some, attracted by the delight they feel in their spiritual exercises, will kill themselves with penances, and others will weaken themselves by fasts and, without the counsel or command of another, overtax their weakness; indeed they try to hide these penances from the one to whom they owe obedience in such matters. Some will even dare perform these penances contrary to obedience. Such individuals are unreasonable and most imperfect. They subordinate submissiveness and obedience. ...But corporal penance without obedience is no more than a penance of beasts. And like beasts, they are motivated in these penances by an appetite for the pleasure they find in them."⁹⁴

God does not take pleasure in our mortifications. It is love of God that takes precedence. The sin of Saul was pride that was manifested in a false notion of worship. "Obedience is better then sacrifices" (*1 Sam. 14:22*). God desires that least degree of obedience and submissiveness more than all those services you think of rendering him. God knows that in obedience the pride is eliminated. And the tempter uses pride to turn our will from God.

To conclude, doing God's will means knowing and wanting one's will to be used by

⁹² Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *Op Cit.*, p. 231.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p.669.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 307

God as he wishes. We have to continuously strip pride so that we reach God in a short time.

3. 3 DENUDATION OF PLEASURE

Qoheleth and John of the Cross strongly recommend to their readers a total negation of pleasure. For Qoheleth, concentrating on pleasure is a waste of time. In 2:1-12, Qoheleth goes for the trial and error method concerning pleasure. He tries material pleasures: he gets *joy and laughter* and pleasure, they are derived from the excitements of sensual pleasure. Unrestrained merriment is represented by laughter and pleasure; in general 'joy'.⁹⁵ V. 2, is an anticipated judgement of his experiment. In v. 3, Qoheleth goes out to search. The word search is used for intellectual effort. *What is best*: here he is not testing whether to be religious or not, he is testing various postures of life available to the believer. In verse 4, Qoheleth moves from the excitements of wine to the more healthy pleasure of a country gentleman's enterprises. *I did things on a grand scale*; acts, referred to here, from the activities of the historical Solomon (I Kings, 9, 10). V. 6, in Palestine, where the rainfall of the winter has to be stored for the long drought of summer, rock-cut reservoirs or cisterns are of such importance that their structure was a worthy boast for a king.⁹⁶

In v. 7 slaves formed a large percentage of the population in all the civilized countries of antiquity. The purchase of new slaves was probably an experience in the life of every wealthy man. Slaves were associated with flocks and herds as evidence of wealth. In v. 8, to the delights of rural possessions, Qoheleth added the revenues of a monarch who controls the taxes of large provinces, and the luxuries of sensual gratification, parallel to Solomon 1Kg. 9:28, 10:14. In v. 9, he claims to have surpassed in wealth all other kings. In spite of his folly in the pursuit of wealth and sensual delights his wisdom remained with him. In v.10 still drawing on the accounts of Solomon's splendor, Qoheleth himself is able to gratify every desire. He denied himself no material possessions or pleasure, he obtained enjoyment of real good - for a time. The passage was suggested by the statements of Solomon's wealth in 1Kg. 4: 26ff. V.11 deals with his active material labours and his sensual pleasures; he wants to consider the meaning of them all, and finds that, like the delights of wisdom, the delights of

⁹⁵ G.A. Barton, Op Cit. p.79.

⁹⁶ Cf. Ibid. p.80

possession are but vanity. From v. 3 to this point a cycle is completed - an experiment has been carried through and a result reached. The confessions of a conspicuous consumer are over.

Qoheleth obtained pleasure from all means; from wine, building houses, planting vineyards, gardens, parks, fruit trees, digging pools, by business of male and female slaves, pleasure from huge flocks and herds, pleasure from gathering silver and gold. Pleasure from dance and singing, sexual pleasure with many concubines. He gets, whatever pleasure by whatever means possible; then he looks behind and sees everything is useless.

The senses, are the instruments of pleasure. These senses weaken day by day, one by one. At last indignity accompanies death --hired mourners walk around faking sorrow. The man returns to the dust from which he came; the life which God gave him returns to God. Death for Qoheleth is the ultimate expression of the emptiness of human life: "*vanity of vanities all things are vanity*".

But for John of the Cross pleasures were not rejected for themselves nor is there a narcissistic dwelling on the renunciation of pleasures. For John the goal is union with God as we have said earlier. We become one with God through the proper renunciation of pleasures. We have to control the pleasure principle. Pleasure perverts love by binding enjoyment to temporal delights, with no orientation to the transcendent⁹⁷. St. John of the Cross calls us to mortify, control and pacify the concupiscence of the flesh: the instinctual drive and craving in us for food, drink, sleep, rest, sex and sensual pleasures that may lead us to sensuality and not to God⁹⁸

John in his *Precautions* writes: The first is that you should have an equal love for and an equal forgetfulness of all persons, whether relatives or not, and withdraw your heart from relatives as much as from others⁹⁹ This is exactly what St. Teresa of Avila said: I can not tell what it is that we leave in this world, we who say we leave all for God, if we do not forego the chief thing of all - the society of our relatives.¹⁰⁰ We have to strip off all pleasures we get thorough relatives. Relatives and friends were an obstacle for St. Teresa of Avila in her prayer life. *If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and*

⁹⁷ Susan Mulo, Op Cit., p.45

⁹⁸ Cf. John Grennan, Op Cit . p.129.

⁹⁹ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Op Cit., P.656.

¹⁰⁰ Tadgh Tierney, ed., Op Cit. P. 29.

children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Lk. 14: 26. We have to deny the pleasures we get through the attachment to our near and dear ones. It is only God who deserves the highest love from us.

Qoheleth often states that running after pleasure like a mad dog is useless. People spend the whole energy of their lives wanting to get pleasure. He also says in a sarcastic way "enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your *vain* life which he has given you under the sun. (Ecc. 9:9). For John of the Cross is quite clear that all pleasures block our loving union with God. Our urge for pleasure overcomes our love for God. "Do not love", say John of the Cross "one person than another, for you will err; he is worthy of more love whom God loves more, and you do not know who this is."¹⁰¹ By stating this John makes God the final referring point. God is our centre of life and not pleasure, or the amount of pleasure one gets from life. Some times people care for one another because of the thrill or pleasure they get from them. When the clouds of pleasure pass away the heat of hate begins to blow into the relationship.

Jesus said one will receive a hundredfold only if one gives up that which he had held so dear to him in this life (*Mk. 10:29-31*). John did not try to gloss over the gospel texts. It is not a false asceticism. It is based on the time factor: a man rejects a pleasure in the knowledge that a hundred others will come to him, on some other occasion, at some other moment in his life, and not at all because he wants to reject this particular pleasure.

Though pleasure is good and might come from God yet repeatedly rejecting it, might lead to a greater good. It might seem a selfish idea that I reject all things now so as to receive more hereafter. That is the fact. But at the same time one is not sure whether one will get what he has sacrificed. It is faith that leads to the road of repeated rejection of pleasure. Allowing to let my ownership be taken from me now, by an upheaval of events within time, is more than renouncing a series of particular things, of pleasures and so on. Thus to renounce pleasures is to renounce myself by consenting to the flow of time.

In his daily life John loved people. He enjoyed the company of his brother "the treasure on earth". But what John says here is that our inordinate desire for pleasure in people or things decreases our love for God. That is why in the gospel we read that when the relatives of Jesus came to see him. Jesus said: "who are my brother, sister, and mother, they are those who do

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Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *Op Cit.*, p. 657.

the will of God. (*Mt. 12: 50*). God is first others next.

In his book *The Ascent to Mount Carmel* John says: "A love of pleasure, and attachment to it, usually fires the will toward the enjoyment of things that give pleasure. A more intense enkindling of another, better love (love of one's heavenly Bridegroom) is necessary for the vanquishing of the appetites and the denial of these pleasures"¹⁰² When a person finds a satisfaction and strength in this love, he will have the courage and constancy to deny freely all other appetites. One pleasure is overcome by another pleasure. Pleasures come and go, they leave us empty and dejected. Man is not a being of pleasure or appetites. "Do not work for the food that perishes but work for the food which endures to eternal life" (*Jn. 6: 27*). And again "life is more than food" (*Lk. 12: 23*.)

Man must be taught to avoid living as a being of appetite. Appetite is not man's truth but his first error.¹⁰³ The drive for pleasure leads man astray. He should clothe himself in an active rejection of pleasure. The body is the seat of pleasure. The experience of frustration and destruction in pleasure leads us to pain. Pleasure and pain alternate. Pleasure offers a vision, but it is in fact illusion. So in relation to pleasure and pain, satisfaction is the opposite of suffering. Suffering opens the curtain of the body to see the reality- the vulnerability of the Body.

The desire to enjoy pleasure must be controlled. One who has moved towards God no longer feeds upon the pastures of pleasure¹⁰⁴ The infantile narcissism craves its own pleasure and satisfaction and is ever ready to use and abuse the good and beautiful things God has given to enjoy properly¹⁰⁵.

The erotic lust for some pleasure leads us to the nothingness of hell. Pleasure is not permanent. Only three things last says St. Paul faith, love and hope and greatest among these is love. Pleasure desecrates pure love. We reach to God through pure love. By its very nature our weak, sensual, instinctual and effective energy is inclined to rest in pleasure.¹⁰⁶

Pleasure darkens the eyes of reality. Pleasure presents everything good. Suffering clears

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 105.

¹⁰³ Alian Cugno, Op Cit., p. 54.

¹⁰⁴ John Grennan, Op Cit. p. 113.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Ibid. p.115.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Ibid. p.127.

the fog that had covered the person and created a situation of illusion. The person sees the fragility of pleasure. Pleasure is limited to time and space. If a person put his value in pleasure, while God alone is worth our consideration, then that person is in error. We err when we do not have clear knowledge. Knowledge has been covered by the desire for pleasure. Mortification of pleasure is pedagogical and preparatory. It makes no sense to mortify the pleasures of life if they do not point to another reality. Thus mortifications are not an end in themselves, they point us to God¹⁰⁷

The masochists find pleasure in pain and fear, and enjoy inflicting pain and fear on others. It is not the masochist tendencies drawing us from filthy attraction of pleasure but the urgent calling of love. John of the Cross says that, the less one takes of things and pleasures the further one advances along the way, and then he urges us to detach ourselves from all things and move from all that is not God. Do not seek pleasure in any temporal things.

It is the satisfaction and fixation in pleasure that make us the Centre. A person becomes the centre of the world and everything has to be directed towards him. In the world many activities are presented to us as attractive, accompanied by the pleasure and satisfaction that entice us to fulfill them. How many actions do we perform for pleasure so that we forget God altogether¹⁰⁸ But it is not easy to renounce pleasure continuously, except by the grace of God. It is a dark night to the person. St. John of the Cross is aware of this night; he says *In the denial of the concupiscence of the eyes the person is depriving himself of the pleasure of seeing things, he lives in darkness and poverty in the faculty of sight.*¹⁰⁹

To conclude, the total stripping of all pleasure in humility is the sure way to union with God.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Eulogio Pacho, *The Art of Reaching God According to St. John of the Cross*, (Kalamassery: Jyothi Dhara Publications), p. 166.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, *Union with God According to St. John of the Cross*, (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1990), p.34.

¹⁰⁹ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *Op Cit.*, p.76.

3. 4 DETACHMENT FROM POSSESSIONS

It is purposeless to have all possessions if it is impossible to enjoy them says Qoheleth in 5:10. What one can really enjoy is a limited amount of wealth. He who has more, has only the pleasure of seeing others consume it. The storage of money, wealth and goods does not give real happiness to a person, v.11. Real joy may be noticeable in a peasant which money cannot buy. The more money, the more worry. Wealth needs to be guarded at the expense of anxiety and sleeplessness. Wealth leads to trading or business and attracts robbers. It is an adventurous business to amass riches which are like a caravan in the hands of robbers. After all these anxieties what use is such wealth which is lost in a day and leaves nothing to one's children. V.15 is parallel to Job 1:21, Ps.49:10 and 1 Tim 6:7, we carry nothing with us when we die so it is useless to have riches. They don't help us when we die. Vs.16,17 refer to the frustrations and mental distress of those who are bent upon the accumulation of wealth. Here we can quote *1 Tim 6:9 "those who desire to be rich fall into a temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction."*

Vs. 18-20 tell us that enjoyment is a gift of God and unfortunately some do not have the ability or opportunity to enjoy; in their case it would be better not to have lived. Then he concludes that human appetites are never satisfied and no one has an advantage in this regard. Therefore, to find true joy is to be content with what one has; longing for the unattainable is vanity.

Chapter 6 explains how those people who want to possess more and more material things end up in the greatest misfortunes. In the hard process of obtaining wealth one loses the power of enjoyment. Then he has no heirs and someone else has to enjoy what he has stored. For the individualist, each man is a stranger, even to the members of his own family. There is a distinctly modern implication here of the essential loneliness of the individual personality.¹¹⁰ Vv. 3,4 reflect that to the ancient Hebrew numerous offspring was an object of great desire, and its possession regarded as a great blessing, *Gen.24:60*. A hundred is a round number. Long life was also regarded as one of the most desirable blessings *Ex.20:12*. No proper burial is a shame. The ancient Semites, like the ancient Greeks, attached great

¹¹⁰ Robert Gordis, *Koheleth the man and his world a study of Ecclesiastes*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 257.

importance to proper burial, *Tobit 1:18, 2:4-5*. As in *Job 3:16* an untimely birth is an example of something which leaves no memory behind it. It can be conscious of no loss or suffering, hence in comparison the lifeless foetus is better than the one who possess things and dies without enjoying them..

The life of a person mentioned in v.3 is quite worthless in comparison to the untimely born child(foetus) which is free from the toil and worries of life. Rest is an oriental ideal, and Qoheleth in this expression approaches the Buddhist appreciation of Nirvana¹¹¹. In v. 6 according to Qoheleth both the lifeless foetus and the man whose life has been long but wretched, are destined to Sheol, and the lifeless foetus is to be congratulated because it reaches the goal by a shorter and less agonizing way. V.7 is a repetition of v. 6. V. 8 is a comparison between the wise and poor, with the long lived man and the lifeless foetus. He ends everything saying with his famous words 'this also is vanity and a striving after wind. *The actual enjoyment of life is better than longing for pleasures and possessions. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*

John of the Cross in his Precautions writes:

The second precaution against the world concerns temporal goods. To free yourself truly of the harm stemming from this kind of good and to moderate the excess of your appetite, you should abhor all manner of possession and have no concern for these goods, neither for food, nor for clothing, nor for any other created thing, nor for tomorrow, and direct this care to something higher - to seeking the kingdom of God."¹¹²

Possessiveness perverts hope by creating the illusion that we will be fulfilled only if our pre-planned expectations are met; This perversion is tragic, for it is only via faith, hope, and love that we can be united with God in this life¹¹³. Our satisfaction from things has no end. For John possessions or inordinate love for goods is an obstacle to union with God. The possession of any thing of this world is a detriment for our relationship with God. Goods in themselves are not bad. But our over-consciousness of them is an obstacle.¹¹⁴ To seek the goods

¹¹¹ G.A. Barton, Op Cit. p.130.

¹¹² Keiran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Op Cit., p. 657.

¹¹³ Susan Muto, Op Cit., p.45

¹¹⁴ Eulogio Pacho, Op Cit., p.145.

of the world, and the passionate search for satisfaction in them prevents us from reaching God¹¹⁵

All possessions are useless because they do not lead a person to God. For Qoheleth all possessions are useless because they do not give satisfaction at the end. "A man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honour, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them; this is vanity; it is a sore affliction. If a man begets a hundred children, and lives many years...but he does not enjoy life's good things it is better the untimely birth than he" (6:2-3). It quite similar what John of the cross says about possessions¹¹⁶. Possessions of goods temporal or spiritual are a hinderance on the path to union with God. Possession of goods like riches, status, positions, and other dignities, and children, relatives, and marriages etc. can make a person to rejoice over them and to fix his attention over these possessions and forget God.

Qoheleth says "all the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. (Ecc. 6:7)." Man feels empty after having all possessions. John was quite aware of this fact. All possessions draw man away from God, then leave him empty. John states: Even though all things smile upon a man and he succeeds prosperously, he should have misgivings rather than joy, since the occasion and danger of forgetting God thereby increases¹¹⁷. This is the crucial moment in life. When God is not in the life of man life becomes meaningless. We have to act before time catches us. In this emptiness people often commit suicide.

If we take human desire for the possession of money as an example we can conclude how possession can be a detriment not only in the spiritual life but also our day to day life. Desire for the possession of money causes more anxiety and disappointment. Jesus said *you cannot serve two masters... you cannot serve God and money Lk. 16:13*. St Paul warns Timothy saying *love of money is the root of all evil. I Tim. 6:10*. Qoheleth says *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money; nor he who loves wealth, with gain: this also is vanity. In 5:10; and in 10:19 money answers everything*. John writes *Out there in the world, their reason darkened through covetousness in spiritual matters, they serve money and not God, and they are motivated by money rather than by God, and they have first consideration to the*

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p.147.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, p. 240

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p.241.

*temporal price and not to the divine value and reward. In countless ways they make money their principle god and goal and give it precedence to God, their ultimate end.*¹¹⁸ What is true of love of money is true of any other earthly or spiritual good, possession or talent. If we desire to possess anything other than God, we are not on the way to God.

We can enjoy the things of this world only when we purify our soul of attachment to and desire for things. Humans are never satisfied. We are never content with what we have, but are consumed by the restless desire for more. Finally this endless desire is put to rest by death. Death awakens humans about the fragility of their trust in possessions. We live in this superficial world, which occupies us to such a point that it makes us forget that a more profound life can be lived.

In the story of the rich young man we see the effects of having inordinate desires for possessions. The rich young man in the gospel left Jesus with a sad note in his heart and face. He could not follow Jesus even though we are told Jesus loved him. (*Mk. 10:17-22*). That is the reason for detaching oneself from all inordinate desires for possessions. Possessions cannot enter within us. And our attachment to creatures is pure darkness in God's sight. The concupiscence of the eyes causes us to desire to show off through wealth, prestige, possessions, knowledge, boasting.¹¹⁹ This leads us to pride, greed, envy, jealousy and so on. John calls the spiritual journey towards God a dark night. The reason to call it a dark night is because the individual must deprive himself of his appetite for all worldly possessions.¹²⁰ In the process of detaching oneself from possession, the soul might seek consolation in something else. John of the Cross says such a thing is spiritual gluttony. "They think a denial of self in worldly matters is sufficient without an annihilation and purification of spiritual possessions."¹²¹ Susan Muto says "Only when faith darkens egocentric understanding, can one advance toward God in hope and love. As faith obscures what the human intellect can grasp, it readies the soul for divine communications. As hope empties the memory of past hurts, disappointments, and failures as well as future plans, projects, and expectations, it readies the seeker to receive that which is not yet possessed. As charity deprives one of inordinate

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p.245

¹¹⁹ John Grennan, Op Cit. p.129.

¹²⁰ Keiran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Op Cit. p.74.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.122.

affection for all that is not God or of God, it encourages a leap of love toward the Trinity with one mind, with one heart."¹²²

The human being is not a being of possession. *Store up treasure for yourself in heaven* Mt. 6:20. and again Jesus says *for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* Mt. 6:21. If we make God our possession and treasure, then our heart will be there where God is. If our treasures are our possessions our heart will be there.

The person has to learn to escape from the spirit of possession, even from the possession of spiritual things not less than material things. By detaching itself from all possessions the spirit becomes transparent. Man has to strip himself to the point of becoming transparent and let God take possession of him. It is not enough to strip oneself of possessions, one has strip oneself of oneself. The fact that God can take possession of him shows that man is made for God and not to be possessed by the things of this world.

The benefit of this detachment from all possessions is the virtue of liberty and freedom. "Moreover he acquires liberty of spirit, clarity of reason, rest, tranquility, peaceful confidence in God, and, in his will, the true cult and homage of God".¹²³ Man will find greater joy and recreation in creatures, through his detachment from them, for he cannot rejoice in them if he looks upon them with possessiveness and with attachment to them as to his own¹²⁴. The reason which was distorted by alienation from God by his inordinate desires is restored to its original purity and clarity. Man can now distinguish clearly God from creatures with his reason.

Happiness is restored and man is really himself when denuded by the act of detachment. "The rejection of possessions brings man a lucidity that lies at the source of joy and enables him to perceive a multiplicity of realities. But the 'recreation of creatures' brings a unique joy. Indeed there is but one joy- the joy that God exists. Everything, down to the humblest creatures, speak of God to the man who has melted his own hard heart through the possession of nothing."¹²⁵

To conclude it is impossible for us to tear our hearts from what brings us satisfaction in our day to day lives, unless we have another deeper satisfaction. We have to

¹²² Susan Muo, Op Cit. p. 46.

¹²³ Keiran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Op Cit. p. 247.

¹²⁴ Cf. Ibid.

¹²⁵ Alian Cugno, Op Cit. p.58

discern our true self in order to find out the false gods that are inhabiting our innermost self. Sometimes, people, possessions, concerns, pride, and pleasure take the place of God in the life of the individual. A deeper desire for God is to loosen the cord of egocentric cravings.

John's approach was to establish a right relationship with God and creation. We have to tear down, pluck up, and root out the wrong relationship we have established. Qoheleth has no illusions about the facts: the good suffer, the evil prosper, at least as often as not. This principle (8:12b-13) just does not work out in practice. There is no sense making one's life miserable, because God's ways in human affairs cannot be understood. The disordered relationship with creation and the creator has broken our peace, unity, love and justice. The egocentric desires of certain people and countries have resulted in misery and injustice, war and hatred. The total negation of egocentric behaviour would bring peace upon earth. For this we have to be ready to strip off our selfishness. It might cause panic and uncertainty. But unless a wheat of grain falls into the soil and dies it will not have life (*Jn. 12: 24*). We are to make this world a better place. There is no other way to make this world a better place to live in than to leave all our inordinate desires to manipulate creation.

I would like to finish this discussion by quoting St. John of the Cross:

With what procrastinations do you wait, since from this very moment you can love God in your heart? Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth. Mine are the nations, the just are mine, and mine the sinners. The angels are mine, and the Mother of God, and all things are mine; and God Himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me. What do you ask, then, and seek my soul? Yours is all of this, and all is for you. Do not engage yourself in something less, nor pay heed to the crumbs which fall from your Father's table. Go forth and exult in your Glory! Hide yourself in It and rejoice, and you will obtain the supplications of your heart.¹²⁶

4 A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The book of Ecclesiastes and the teachings of John of the Cross have frequently been described as pessimistic or skeptical. But it is quite the opposite. Qoheleth is the first one who starts to think on the basis of observation which is distinct from the traditional wisdom. The post-exilic period led to a crisis in wisdom literature such as we find in Ecclesiastes as well as in Job. The use of common sense was inevitable. Man's striving after security leads him nowhere. Man might claim to stand upon a secure foundation; but according to Qoheleth all his securities prove to be vanity and nothingness, illusion and evaporation. Qoheleth ranges through all the possibilities that can provide inner satisfaction for a man. Everything, that the human heart desires was possible for him: power, riches, enjoyment, women, wisdom and knowledge, but the end of it all is death and vanity. This mention of the final inevitability of death is and remains the fundamental presupposition of the entire book.

As for John of the Cross, his authentic longing for God urged him to say good bye to all that hinders him from reaching his desired goal. God is not, because God is not this or God is not that. Therefore we have to follow the path of nothing. This negative aspect of mysticism is a pointer to the extremely positive aspect of the Absolute to which it aspires. John's whole thought is extremely rigorous, a whole strand in his spirituality that belongs to the desert and the night. There is nothing to expect but the night, the desert, privation and suffering. God is himself a principle of frustration.¹²⁷ But beyond that frustration; there are texts that speak of great plenitude, which show an overflowing joy, freedom and abundance.

'Man is dust and into dust he will return'. The enjoyment of food, drink and sex, all of which are among the good things acceptable to the wise man, is welcome as far as it goes but it does not go far enough. When death is near, a person is likely to wonder if all his work was worth while. So make the most of the present, the here and now, and accept life as a gift of God. Life is an empty thing, but there it is, take it and enjoy it. The everyday realities of human life, birth and death, planting and harvesting, weeping and laughing, war and peace, love and hate, are realities which seem to be there in a more or less constant form somehow, but Qoheleth admits he doesn't know how.

¹²⁷

Cf. Alian Cugno, *Op Cit.* p.27.

Though John spoke about complete detachment from all creatures "He loved the country and loved nature, and got some woodland and pools allotted to him where he could walk and meditate. he often took a brother with him and teased him affectionately if he became tired or sleepy or bored. He granted the monks whole days of recreation when they could picnic out of hours -though he himself abstained; he was happy for them."¹²⁸

The things are not an obstacle between God and the person; when a person is totally free, then that person has mastery over all other things. Take them or leave them, order them or form them, and through total detachment from other things one finds God, who is the fullness of all being. A point has to be made that John of the Cross and Qoheleth taught that earthly things are meaningless. And some times we too are tempted to think that earthly things are shallow and of little value. But for our relationship to God the creatures are absolutely necessary - they are the place of our service and worship.¹²⁹ Under the influence of sin and selfishness the order of things has been effected and relationships have been destroyed. Therefore Karl Rahner commenting on the Spiritual Exercises says that "Even a man who lives according to the evangelical counsels, who gives up many things and must give up many things, can only have a positive relationship to things, and must experience them in their finiteness as good and desirable. And it is only after this positive experience of them that he can properly give them up without resentment."¹³⁰

Human injustice which often brings grief to the helpless, loneliness, which often endangers a man's life and uncertainty about the competence of those in authority - these are some of the things that disturb the mind of a wise man and make him all the more aware of the vanity of human life. But the unjust man will be punished somehow. So be patient. Qoheleth's thought long and hard about the probable prosperity of the sinner and the misery of the just man. Experience shows the limitations of the teaching that prosperity is God's reward for moral uprightness and misery God's punishment for sin. It is even difficult to know who is upright and who is sinful. Like Job, Qoheleth asks questions that are agitating men's minds today. Questions about justice, human misery, happiness, work, money, pleasure, death and it's meaning. He asks these questions in a way calculated to disturb the reader into

¹²⁸ Alian Cugno, *Op. Cit.* p.30-31

¹²⁹ Cf. Karl Rahner, *Op Cit.* p.20.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

worthwhile reflection and action. It is a book very much concerned with action. It cares more about what men do than about they think. It is a book that reflects a weariness with books. Qoheleth like Job shows that critical thought has a place in theology; that one's position about man's life in relation to God may not be the whole story. In his restless search for meaning in current situations and problems the writer of Qoheleth stands close to many men today.

Qoheleth's central message is : *'eat, drink, and find contentment in work, since this is from the hand of God.* (Ecc. 2:24-25). Qoheleth rejects the traditional teaching that the good are rewarded and the evil punished; this theory is nothing but emptiness (Ecc. 2:26). To Qoheleth it is a waste of precious time to seek satisfaction in life in terms of rewards for virtue. Since God does what he pleases and what he does seldom makes any human sense, there is something which expresses the will of God-- the enjoyment of the ordinary things of life. Food, wine, work are intended by God to give people pleasure. To rejoice in that pleasure is clearly the will of God.

For John it is not only a question of loving God-in-the-highest, God the almighty a remote Being. But being loved by God. *We love because he first loved us* (I Jn. 4:19). Here we have a fantastic reversal whereby the greater loves the lesser. It is a reversal of the Greek notion of friendship. For Aristotle friendship was possible only from the lesser to the greater, or between equals.

There are two freedoms for John God's freedom which must not be thwarted in its unfathomable designs on the individual, and the individual's freedom which must be left to him, with no one wishing to live or speak in his place. God loves humans in his own freedom. And the believer loves God in his freedom.

Life is a gift of God. For John the gift made by God to the soul is not an ordinary one but the gift of God himself. God gives himself wholly to the believer, that is his highest gift. and not life alone. Life is not frustration but fullness of joy, because God dwells within us. *if a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.* Jn. 14:23.

In John's view God is present to man in two ways, as his creator and as the object of his love. Union is possible in the second way. When the believer is divinized by God's indwelling with humans, humans divinize the creation. That is why St. Paul writes. *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* Rom. 8:19. The creation wants us to be revealed as sons of God. So that the purity of the creation might be

restored. The creation was distorted by selfish humans through sin. The attraction of pride, pleasure and lure for possessions darkened the human reason. The communion between God and humans was broken. Now in the total negation of the seduction of pride, pleasure and possessions the human reason is cleared. The original peace and justice is restored. The serpent who deceived Eve through the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (Cf. Gen. 3:6) was overcome by rejecting the seductions and by the path of mortification. Jesus too overcame the temptations of this kind by constantly rejecting the seductions of the devil. (Cf. Lk. 4: 1-13). Nature which was distorted by humans now asks us to behave like children of God.

When the inordinate desires for creatures is purified in union with God and our goal is achieved then there is reversal, the world comes back into our life, but strangely purified and now creatures are going to appear in God's emptiness in man. They reappear in all their goodness. That is why John shows great tenderness for created things.

Creation takes an active part in the life of a person who has set his will on God. The soul seeing the absence of God sets out on an unexpected venture. In its despair, it sets out to meet the world, to meet creation, and creation reflects the creator and so increases the soul's love. Thus the Beloved's absence produces a yearning for God inspired by the beauty of the world. Each and every created thing takes on a value. In the *Spiritual Canticle* John writes:

My Beloved is the mountains,
And lonely wooded valley,
Strange Islands,
And resounding river,
The whistling of love - stirring breezes.¹³¹

The modern world has been prostituted by selfish people, by ill-use and misuse of the resources of creation. The spirit of Qoheleth and especially of John of the Cross is a beacon to all who work for the restoration of creation in God.¹³²

The denudation is not a contempt for any created thing. Taking pleasure in self-contempt is worse still. This is a form of neurosis. The misunderstanding of John's teaching on pain has some times contributed to it. Suffering in itself has no value. It is not

¹³¹ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Op Cit. p.412.

¹³² For further clarification on creation and John of the Cross please refer Ross Collings, *John of the Cross: the way of the Christian Mystic*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), Vol. 10. Pp. 26-60.

masochism¹³³. God wants us to take to resurrection but through the cross. John's view is clear, we do not ascend from creatures up to God, but it is possible to descend from God down to creatures. Creatures only point us to God. We cannot allow creatures to carry us around but allow God to guide us. Only when total denudation takes place then God gently leads the soul to the pastures of joy and satisfaction. When this total denudation takes place, total freedom comes and God guides the person and man makes God his centre.

Kenosis takes place when the person begins to see the emptiness. Death reveals the emptiness. Therefore death is not something negative. We must also try to see death not as something to be undergone but as an act of contemplation.¹³⁴ Our self-renunciation leads us to suffering and death. We die because we have a body and since there is death what ever we possess has to be left behind. No power can hold back the invitation of death. Neither can we buy life nor avoid coming into the grave says the Psalmist. *Lord where shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.* Jn. 6:68. Death shows the nudity of worldly things. Death strips man naked. Qohemoth says *As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil, which he may carry away in his hand.* (Ecc. 5:15; Job 1:21.).

Man has been defined as: composed of soul and body, a creature of appetite, transparent, empty, silent, dispossessed, not self-sufficient, not valuing himself, a 'yes' being, a being in love. And as a being of desire, one who also has needs. Man has needs. Man is a social being. Therefore he has a need for relationship - a relationship with God. Man also has need because he has a body. Need is a part of desire and desire is a part of the body. Desire prepares the body for action. Man can desire God. But God is neither the aim nor the end of desire, but the beginning.

Why do we act? We act because the Kingdom inspires us to act. *Seek the kingdom of God first and all things will follow you,* Lk.12:31. Through the Incarnation the kingdom has come into the world. It is the Kingdom of God that inspires us to transform ourselves in God. This transformation of the self takes place in the body. There is a respectful place for the body in John when the soul intoxicated with the Beloved, thinks that it must escape from the body,

¹³³ John McGowan., *A fresh approach to St. John of the Cross: Growth through pain & sexuality*, (Maynooth: ST. Paul's, 1993), p. 130.

¹³⁴ Alian Cugno, Op Cit. p.63.

but is recalled to its true home, the body.¹³⁵ The body is vulnerable. The body is fragile since it can be struck by death. But we cannot hate the body. To mortify the body is not a *means* of reaching God, it is a *consequence* of the relationship with God.¹³⁶ That is why there is no mention of the benefits of the hair shirt or the scourge in John's writings.

The writings of Qoheleth reveal an secret of joy in life while apparently looking like a negative attitude. If a person makes happiness depend on achieving a thorough understanding of reality, that person will never find joy. The fact that humans can know so very little with certitude should not lead them to ignore what joy there is in this life. (Ecc. (:7-10). All the pleasure of planning and accomplishing work is also a joy given to be enjoyed on this earth; it should not be despised or ignored simply because the whole meaning and purpose of life has not been discovered.

The real joy for John of the Cross is rooted in union with God. We are called to perfect union with God, but before that can be fully realized, our hearts need to be cleansed and purified. That cleansing has to take place in our emotions, and in our spiritual faculties the intellect, memory and will. We are not created for death, negation and penance. We are created in the image of the living God, created for life, light, joy, love, and glory. We have to allow the old self to die and the New self to be born. The old self constantly opposes the new self, (Gal. 5:17). The old Adam has to undergo death in order to enter into the kingdom of the New Adam you cannot belong to Christ unless you crucify self-indulgent passions and desires (Cf. Gal. 5:24). Jesus said 'my kingdom is not of this world' (Cf. Jn. 18:36.)"I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:16)

There is a temptation to escape from the realities of life, by a round of evasion, diversions, addiction -the seductive love of superficial gratification. John recognizes that we become as big or as small as what we set our heart on¹³⁷. The Holy Spirit purifies our desires, transforming our lust into love. This is done in utter tenderness, gentleness, and kindness. The Divine lover is gentle and tender. He does not demand terrible penances.¹³⁸ Jesus does not want us to worry about our future or about our mortification. If we are concerned too much

¹³⁵ Ibid. p.109.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p.126

¹³⁷ John McGowan, Op Cit. p.115.

¹³⁸ John Grennan, Op. Cit. p.106

about our own pride, pleasure and possessions we will not have time for God. And if we are too much concerned with mortification then there is danger of rejoicing over the penances and forgetting God altogether. We have to conquer our distorted desires or appetites for things which may lead us to sin, for sin is an alienation from God. God wants us to be fully alive and give glory to him. But when we have driven ourselves to sickness and neurosis through false asceticism, how can we give glory to God!¹³⁹

What Qoheleth and John teach us is that humans are totally dependent on God. If any one tries to seek his refuge in anything other than God it will lead him to lose eternal life. There is no happiness apart from God. Those who are entrapped by addiction, codependency and attachments, try to force the creatures in their lives to supply them with more happiness and completeness than creation can offer. They use creatures narcissistically. They abuse them¹⁴⁰

In spite of the incompleteness of his thought, Qoheleth is a tonic for many of the weaknesses of people and an antidote for many of the poisons which can harm the devout. There is healthy advice for those inclined to depression caused by the apparent meaninglessness of life. To these Qoheleth would recommend focusing on the ordinary joys and pleasures of daily life. There is a meaning in these joys, though it may not satisfy the proud. For those who are diseased by distorted hope, looking only to the future for joy, he points to the present moment and what it holds of promise. To those sickened by the proud desire to find logical explanations for life, he offers the humbling mystery that surrounds all that is, even the most common of things such as love and hate. For those who have put their trust in pleasure and possession Qoheleth and John of the Cross offer an right answer.

Some commentators say that the recommendation of Qoheleth to enjoy life is out of despair. Life is cruel, frustrating and without hope for either the present or the future, and because death comes to every one and often without warning, one should snatch at every opportunity for pleasure which presents itself. But Ecc. 2:1-11 show that Qoheleth in fact deprecated the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake and rated it as mere folly, and secondly that in emphasizing so strongly that all true enjoyment comes from God as his gift, he was implicitly affirming that life does have some positive qualities after all: that God has not simply

¹³⁹ Ibid. P.111.

¹⁴⁰ Francis, K. Nemeck. and Marie T. Coombs, *Op Cit.*, p.47.

abandoned his creatures to despair.¹⁴¹

As for John, bodily life is a privation of the spiritual life. The soul longs to detach itself from this bodily life and be united in the life of God¹⁴² When a soul makes creatures the object of this activity, it lives the life of the world, a natural life, the life of the "old man". When it centers its operation on God, it lives the life of God, a divine life, the life of the "new man."¹⁴³ The Spiritual life is the perfect life, the possession of God through the union of love. This is acquired through complete mortification of all the vices and appetites of one's own nature. Qoheleth assesses all human endeavor as useless because he is pre-occupied with human death. It is not because of fear of death. He valued life. Life has to be enjoyed. Qoheleth tells us to take life as it comes. The thought of death impelled Qoheleth to value life above all else, despite its very evident frustrations, miseries and uncertainties¹⁴⁴ In 9:1-6 he has stated the uncertainties of the future, nevertheless far better to be alive than dead: even the despised dog while it lives and breaths has the advantage over the dead lion, because where there is life, there is hope.

Psalm 16 states *O precious in the eyes of the Lord, is the death of his saints*. St. Paul calls all Christians saints. Death for John of the Cross hastens the moment of union. It is precious because death is the final reminder of the futility of human strength.

Death is a negation of all that is worth while. After all his efforts to understand life through pleasure, laughter, great work, power, and possessions Qoheleth concludes this too guarantees nothing.¹⁴⁵ Qoheleth does not view death as a consequence of God's anger as Psalms 90 states, but human life is brief and short. Death brings an end to all and death does not discriminate. It strikes rich and poor, wise and fool alike. "How the wise man dies just like the fool." Death brings an end to what one has possessed. That is the effect of mortality on material possessions. Before the fact of death all the worries of life are rendered meaningless. Qoheleth demands the conquest of death.

¹⁴¹ R. N. Whybray, *Op Cit.* p.65.

¹⁴² Kieran Kavanaugh And Otilio Rodriguez, *Op Cit.* p.441.

¹⁴³ *Ibid* p.58.

¹⁴⁴ R. N. Whybray, *Op Cit.* p.70.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Patrick O'Brien, "Casting Bread on Water", *The furrow*. Vol. 45, No. 12, (December 1994), 690.

Seeing our life in the context of our relationship with God, death, detachment, life, creation make sense. Among many gifts life itself is referred to by Qoheleth as a gift. He never directly speaks of God's gifts as deserving man's gratitude. He simply states as a fact that God is the source of everything which pertains to man, including life itself.¹⁴⁶ The thought about God as giver is emphasized in the relationship with humans because man is totally dependent on God. Not only are we nothing apart from him; we are dependent on him at every moment. John thought that life without God is empty. A person is awakened to reality, begins to understand something of what life is all about, when he begins to look for God and, under the influence of grace, decides to seek him in earnest.¹⁴⁷

The prophet Isaiah said *all the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness*. Is. 40:17. If nations are empty and nothing before God what about a tiny human being? Jesus said *apart from me you can do nothing*, Jn.15:5. It is Jesus calling us. It is the love of Jesus that draws me *and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God; who loved me and gave himself for me*, Gal. 2:20. In the fully transformed person it is no longer the person that lives but Jesus. But first one must crucify all that is not Jesus. *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*, Gal. 2:20. But when we are not ready to give up our inordinate desires then we deny the transcendence of our being. It is the denial of transcendence, a refusal to recognize fundamental, total dependance on God, that pulls us to the things of this world.¹⁴⁸

It is on the Cross that Christ, Qoheleth and John meet together. It is startling to observe how close was John's life to that of the crucified. Like him, John was betrayed by those who should have defended his cause. like him, John was attacked mainly by religious hierarchies, subjected to ecclesiastical proceedings and threatened with excommunication. He was betrayed at the heart of what served him as his support - in the Church; and thus he was absolutely abandoned - except by God. But God was absent. There is the total detachment, total self emptying, total kenosis. Thus the Son of the living God suffers and dies to whatever he had, even his life! If Christ the son of God detached himself unto death, then we too are called to

¹⁴⁶ R. N. Whybray, *Op Cit.* p.80.

¹⁴⁷ Ruth Burrows, *Ascent to Love: Spiritual teachings of St. John of the Cross*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), p.18.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.22

be detached unto death, we are the witnesses to the death of Jesus. We witness and participate in the death of Jesus by dying to our old self.

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly the thoughts of Qoheleth and John of the cross are disturbing. Nobody would be ruffled if the sacred writer confined his amused doubts to the petty striving of men or to the hollow platitudes which collapse before the experience of every day life. But he becomes particularly disconcerting when his skepticism touches, not the beliefs of the arrogant and the wicked, but the code of the simple and pious. The men of this age were instructed by the traditional wisdom of the sages, to seek after justice and wisdom; but here was a man, whose work was accepted in the sacred canon, telling us that our aspirations are futile, and recommending a rule of life which some modern commentators have not hesitated to call "hedonistic". It is clear that Qoheleth does not present a systematic philosophy in a grand manner like Aristotle. But what he said is quite philosophical and worth while. St. John of The Cross said *In the evening of our life we will be judged on love*. So our life does not consist in pleasure, power and possessions, but, what counts is love.

In the religious as well as civil circle we see people caring for pleasure, thirsting for power and thinking only of possessions. Jesus said *what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul ? Mt. 16:26*. Qoheleth and John do not say more than what Jesus said. Jesus warns; *take heed and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions, Lk. 12 15ff*, and also the parable of the rich fool Lk. 12:16-26. Jesus is also quite clear about anxiety Lk. 22 -31. What Qoheleth and John of the Cross say is let us not put our trust in material things that pass way, but let us put our trust in God who knows all our needs. Let me use again here the famous words of St. Teresa of Avila *Let nothing disturb you; let nothing trouble you; all things pass away, God alone remains; patient endurance overcomes everything. He who possesses God has everything; God alone suffices*.

Jesus even warns against the desire for pride of life, which consists in seeking the places of honour. When James and John came to ask for the seat Mk. 10:35-45, Jesus makes a comparison with the pagan rulers who lord it over others; but the disciple of Jesus must be the servant of all. There is nothing new here. Qoheleth actually can be named as a precursor of the gospel writers and also of modern existentialism.

By leaving or giving up things and our attachments to them, in the biblical or Christian

way, we bring them into the relationship with ourselves as God desires, and therefore, we establish a valid relationship with God and creation. What we give up for God is never lost. Jesus said: *He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters* Mt. 12:30. and again *If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life ?* Mt. 16:24-26.

John of the Cross taught us to give up our attachment to things for Christ; then they will come back to us in a glorious manner. It might sound selfish. But there is a lot of sacrifice and suffering; one has to risk his life. To be the disciple of Christ is to take risks, to deny oneself, to love less whatever we held dear in our whole career. *He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.* Mt. 10: 37-39. We need to experience the dark night of faith on the journey of love. To store up everything for God. "Store up treasure yourself in heaven" MT. 6:19-21 and again *so is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.* Lk. 12:21.

We have to make a choice, for Christ or for pride, for God or for possessions. This sounds easy. But in concrete circumstance it is difficult to carry out. We give up many things, or at least think or imagine that we do, because we think they are useless or a kind of block to the attainment of something else that we perceive as worth-while. Only when it comes to giving up something that is really worth-while do we realize what is meant by giving things give up for the sake of God.

In Christ, through the incarnation all things have been integrated. *I will draw all things to myself*, Jn. 12:32. But this integration has been done through the Cross. we have to die with Christ so as to rise with him in glory. Dying to our attachments. Anything we have stored will be taken away when the invitation of death approaches us. All that one has stored will become someone else's. (Cf. Ecc. 2:21 and Lk. 12:20). Death is the radical differentiating separation between the person and everything else that is not the person. In death pride perishes, pleasure vanishes and possessions decay. But at the same time the physical death re-integrates our being in the life of God.

Detachment is a kind of death. But John of the Cross was not so much for suffering

and pain, and in fact in one of the monasteries where he was appointed as prior, as soon as he arrived he moderated the rigorous penitential exercises and devoted himself to the development of a spirit of love and trust in the community. John was an extremely active man, warm-hearted and spreading good-will all around him. And on his travels, so it is said, he changed the lives of prostitutes and intervened to stop fights. True detachment brings one into the core of human life situations. A truly detached person is not a spectator in the stadium of life's struggle. John of the Cross was a busy man founding monasteries and reforming his order but all these activities were centered on the love of God.

Jesus Christ, the son of God and son of Mary, is the true model of union with God and authentic paradigm of detachment. All detachment is centered on the love of God. The mystic poet fell in love with a living, loving Christ and not with asceticism, legalism, dogmatism or rigid structures. It is important to note that darkness, pain and failure were not by any means passing phases in John's life. He had to carry his cross daily. Union with God brought no relief from tribulations. The journey was full of dark nights from start to finish. But we must also keep in mind that John also experienced the full realization of love. He was a man of absolute desire and of the success of desire.

John did not espouse a dead, distant ascetic deity. The real friends of Jesus are not the ascetics, moralists, legalists, rubricists, charismatic visionaries or builders of churches, but the few mystics who recline their heads on the shoulder of Jesus and rest there with their ears to his heart, listening, loving, trusting and contemplating. When we give our ear to the heart of Jesus we hear the cry of the poor and oppressed who are tied to the yoke of oppression and injustice. This situation is created by the inordinate desire of people who are craving power, possessions and pleasures. The Vatican Council echoes the teaching of St. John of the Cross and Qoheleth. *...on the other hand it cannot be denied that he is often turned away from the good and urged to evil by the social environment in which he lives and in which he is immersed since the day of his birth. Without doubt frequent upheavals in the social order are in part the result of economic, political and social tensions. But at a deeper level they come from selfishness and pride, two things which contaminate the atmosphere of society as well.* (G. S. 25).

The teaching of Qoheleth and John of the Cross show us the psychology of human desire. For example when we do not have a radio we need a radio; when we have a radio we need a video; when we have a video we need a bungalow and so on. The more we have the

more we want. In our society today a few people are hoarding the wealth of the nation. They amass more and more to increase their pride by the misuse of power. In Brazil it is said that 80% of the land is possessed by 5% of the population. The teachings of Qoheleth and John of the Cross are they not relevant to us today?

We cannot serve God and wealth. We have to empty the sanctuary of all false idols. There cannot be double mindedness. We are called to strip off all selfish interest. This is done by asceticism. An authentic asceticism has universal relevance. We have seen people who have spent life avoiding difficulties, seeking escapes and alleviations, trying to take control and power, making money their end they have seen trouble and disaster. (eg. one of the presidents of South Korea, got 600 million dollars from bribes and now he has ended up in prison).

This unhappy situation is created by our inordinate desire. The wars and battles that are fought, are they not because of the egocentric desires of people, to parade their pride and amass wealth? Man is unhappy because man has given the place of God to creatures. Again the Vatican Council states *To the question of how this unhappy situation can be overcome, Christians reply that all these human activities, which are daily endangered by pride and inordinate self-love, must be purified and perfected by the cross and resurrection of Christ. Redeemed by Christ and made a new creature by the Holy Spirit, man can, indeed he must, love the things of God's creation: it is from God that he has received them, and it is a flowing from God's hand that he looks upon them and reveres them.* (G.S. 37)

We have to see God's hand in creation. God has a plan for humanity; he wants us to live in his intimacy, share his table; God is intensely involved with every human being, independent of circumstances, religion or culture. This plan of God is not yet accomplished, it is in process. And we contribute to this process by our total detachment from all things.

John's writings are an inspiration and source for a spirituality of liberation and restoration, of ecology. The teachings of John of the Cross have been rightly applied by the Liberation theologians. The call to return to a renunciation and asceticism are a powerful critique of our human situation, both personal and social. Gustavo Gutierrez and Segundo Galilea have said that John's contemporary call to return to renunciation and asceticism will counteract a selfish consumerism and a life oblivious to the struggling poor. The *nadas* can be a path to solidarity with others in this world. Justice and asceticism go hand in hand.

The perverted self can corrupt the best realities if it remains perverted. St. Paul said *bad company ruins good morals* (1 Cor. 15:33). The selfish people have perverted the realities

of life, e.g. creation. Modern societies are enslaved by the pursuit of power, possessions and pleasure; John of the Cross and Qohleth act as a counter sign to this endless urge for perversion. Man has spoiled creation. The environmental disasters like global warming, the hole in the ozone layer etc. have been caused by the misuse of creation. Only when we heed the advice of John of the Cross, to be detached from all creatures will we be able to help restore creation. We build the kingdom on earth by losing ourselves for the sake of Christ; that is the real meaning of detachment.

Nothing grows except through the death and resurrection of what we are. We must continually die and rise again. Leave everything yet lose nothing. The words of Jesus continually strike us - *unless a wheat of grain falls in to the ground and dies it will not have life* (Cf. Jn. 12:24.). We gain everything by losing everything. In our day to day life we advance only by means of crisis - some times we emerge from them victorious, some other times we remain imprisoned, let down, incapable of coming out on the other side. In the eyes of faith it is Christ who works within us by his death and resurrection. Inordinate detachments are an obstacle to our dying in Christ. As "flesh" we can so easily and so completely centre our lives around persons, places, and things, around reputations, names, fame, and pleasures, that there is little room or time left for God. let us follow John's way to teach the *all* of God through the *nothing* of creation *Nada - Todo; Nothing - All*.

My research is not complete. There is so much in Qohleth and St. John of the Cross for the modern world. For the modern problems of poverty, hunger, war, exploitation and corruption Qohleth and John of the Cross offer the best solution. These problems are due to the greedy hungry selfish few who make everyone suffer. If only, they understood the uselessness of selfish gain then we would create a world of justice, peace, joy, love and brotherhood. This would be a heaven on earth.

Let me conclude by stating from my memory what Augustine said:

O poor man if you don't have any thing, but if you have God what have you not; O rich man if you have everything, but not God what do you have?

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