

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
TANGAZA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

OJUKWU MAXWELL CHIBUEZE, OCD

11108T

**St. John of the Cross's Understanding of God as a
Hidden Lover and Its Relevance to the Issue of
Suffering**

Moderator

Rev. Fr. Steven Payne, OCD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts in Theology

NAIROBI 2015

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family, especially to my parents, who through their practical examples taught me how to endure suffering and how to love all those who suffer, and to my religious family, the Order of Discalced Carmelites, where I learnt about John of the Cross and the richness of his teachings.

EPIGRAPH

“Think nothing else but that God ordains all, and where there is no love, put love, and there you will draw out love” (John of the Cross).¹

“How do I tell people, reassure them, that God loves them? How do I show the people of my time and place, with all their problems, tics and defects, that God really does care for them, that God is not indifferent to their plight, the passion and the problems of daily living?” (John Sullivan, OCD).²

“The little friar from Castile who was willing to be known as John of the Cross and who shared in the demands of bearing the cross, willingly embraced the pain and suffering of this life because he knew that God's love never fails, that it is tenacious and really capable of turning everything to our good” (John Sullivan, OCD).³

¹ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Collected Works*, 760.

² J. SULLIVAN, “How Is It God Loves Us?”, *Carmelite Studies* VI, 1.

³ J. SULLIVAN, “How Is It God Loves Us?”, *Carmelite Studies* VI, 4.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My greatest gratitude goes to you, loving God, for journeying with me to this point. Without your grace and love, I would not have completed my theological studies here in Tangaza University College.

I am grateful to my Carmelite family who made it possible for me to do my studies here in Tangaza University College. Thanks to my Vicar and his Councilors for trusting me and giving me this opportunity.

I appreciate all who have contributed to the success of this work at various levels. Without your constant help I would not have done much. In a special way, I thank you again, my Moderator, Rev. Fr. Steven Payne, OCD, who worked tirelessly to help at any time to make sure that I came up with a quality paper. Special thanks to Fr. Remigius who took time to explain to me how I could proceed on my paper. Thanks to all the librarians and staff of Tangaza University College. To all my friends, I cannot fail to say thank you for your moral, spiritual and psychological support. Thank you Sr. Genevieve Ihenacho, SHCJ, Fr. Leon Houssou, Rev. Peter Orjiaku, O.S.A, and Sr. Theodora Chinasa Osita, CM. I am indeed grateful to all of you.

I cannot forget to say thank you to my family, I appreciate the faith and love you nurtured in me which have helped me to this point. I am grateful to you all. May God bless you most graciously!

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned declare that this thesis is my original work, through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master in Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed

Name of Student.....

Date

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college moderator.

Signed

Name of Moderator

Date

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college first reader.

Signed

Name of First Reader

Date

CONTENTS

Dedication.....	I
Epigraph.....	III
Acknowledgements.....	IV
Student’s Declaration.....	V
Abbreviations.....	VIII
Biblical Abbreviations Used.....	IIX
General Introduction	1
Chapter I: Understanding John of the Cross: Historical Background and Writings	11
1.1 Introduction.....	11
1.2 The Person of John of the Cross	12
1.3 John’s Entrance into the Carmelite Order	15
1.4 John Becomes Part of the Reform.....	17
1.5 Illness, Death and Canonization.....	222
1.6 Influences on John of the Cross	23
1.7 The Writings of St. John of the Cross	299
1.8 Conclusion	333
Chapter II: The Understanding of Suffering and God as a Hidden Lover in the Bible and in the Teaching of the Church	355
2.1 Introduction.....	355
2.2 God’s Hiddenness in the Scriptures	377
2.3 Understanding of Suffering in the Scriptures.....	399
2.4 Understanding of Suffering in the Teaching of the Church’s Magisterium.....	499
2.5 Conclusion	555
Chapter III: A Hidden God and the Theology of Love and Suffering	588
3.1 Introduction.....	588

3.2	God's Hiddenness in John's Writings.....	599
3.3	A God who Suffers on the Cross	677
3.4	Suffering as Unifying and Purifying	699
3.5	Suffering Borne in Love: A Path to Glory	77
3.6	John's Teaching is Reflected in his Life	80
3.7	Conclusion	81
Chapter IV: The Contemporary Relevance of John's Teaching		844
4.1	Introduction.....	844
4.2	Invitation to Have a Positive Attitude towards Suffering Today	866
4.3	Christian Suffering as an Invitation to Communion and Solidarity	944
4.4	Making Good Use of Our Suffering for Our Benefits	100
4.5	Conclusion	107107
General Conclusion.....		1088
Bibliography		111

ABBREVIATIONS

al.	<i>alii</i> – other persons
A	<i>Ascent of Mount Carmel</i>
AFB	African Bible
BCE	Before Common Era
C	<i>The Spiritual Canticle</i>
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
Cf.	Confer, compare
Ch	Chapter
Chs	Chapters
ed.	Edited by
Etc,	Etcetera
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
F	<i>The Living Flame of Love</i>
Fn	<i>The Book of Foundations</i>
IC	<i>The Interior Castle</i>
L	Letters of St. John of the Cross
Lf	<i>The Book of Her Life</i>
LT	Letter of St. Teresa
N	<i>The Dark Night</i>
P	<i>Precautions</i>
S	<i>Sayings of Light and Love</i>
Trans.	Translated by
Way	<i>The Way of Perfection</i>

BIBLICAL ABBREVIATIONS USED

Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Col	Colossians
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians
Eph	Ephesians
Ex	Exodus
Ez	Ezekiel
Gal	Galatians
Gn	Genesis
Heb	Hebrews
Is	Isaiah
Jas	James
Jb	Job
Jer	Jeremiah
Jn	John
Lk	Luke
Mk	Mark
Mt	Matthew
Phil	Philippians
Prv	Proverbs
Ps/Pss	one or more Psalms
Rom	Romans
Rv	Revelation
Sng	Song of Songs

General Introduction

The Christian religion is one that is centred on faith in a loving God, who Vatican II says has expressed his love in various ways to us. Jesus Christ is the climax of God's expression of his love for humanity (cf. *DV* 3-4). Various writers and Christian mystics have tried to express this love in various terms and symbols. John of the Cross, in line with Scripture and the teachings of the church, presents God as a loving God, who cares for his suffering children, turns their suffering to good and uses it to draw them closer to himself.

John presents God as a Hidden Lover who loves his children and purifies them for a life of communion with him. He leads them through various stages and dark moments with his hidden presence. Though we suffer at every moment, God is still with us as the life of John of the Cross testifies. Irrespective of our pains and sufferings, God is still the closest person to us and loves us. He is at the very centre of our being, though we don't seem to notice his presence because of our present painful condition.⁴

Background of the Study

Before I entered the religious life, I never heard of any saint named St. John of the Cross, neither did I come across any of his writings. But when I joined the

⁴ Cf. L. AROSTEGUI, *The Teresian Carmel Today*, 71-72.

Discalced Carmelite Order, and while a postulant and in the first half of my novitiate, I was told that John of the Cross's works are not for beginners or lay people, but for masters in the spiritual life or the older ones in the religious life. As a result, we were only introduced in a superficial to his works. We were taught about his life, how much he suffered for love of God, and were also made to memorize some of his poems. This made me to want to read and know more about St. John of the Cross. As a novice, I longed for more simplified books on John, and I made this known to my novice master, Fr. Daniel Ehigie, who gave me a book on John by Iain Matthew, titled *The Impact of God*. In this book, I realized that John of the Cross did not write for masters or gurus in the spiritual life, but for beginners and ordinary Christians.

Reflecting on the works of St. John of the Cross led me to want to consider the God that John of the Cross presents to us, and how relevant his message can be for us as Christians today who find ourselves in difficult and painful situations that John also experienced. A generous and loving God is fine when things are going on well with us. But when things are bad or not so smooth, we likely feel the absence of God. That is where John of the Cross comes in: at the threshold of uncertainty, and he gives us the assurance that what lies ahead is not simply chaos. John assures us that God may seem absent, yet he is closer to us and his beauty and presence is radiated in the people and things around us.⁵

Unfortunately, in our world today, even Christians are reluctant to recognize the Spirit and presence of Christ in their sufferings. And because they see a contradiction between their suffering and their idea of a loving God, they tend to lose their faith. But John of the Cross tells us, even in our sufferings and darkness, to

⁵ Cf. L. AROSTEGUI, *The Teresian Carmel Today*, 72.

move on with faith. Yet, most people do not believe in a loving God and they fail to accept God's love even in their sufferings.

A friend once said that Christians could be classified into two categories: the first category includes those who are convinced that they are loved by God even in their pain, just like a loving dad who allows his sick child to be injected so as to get well. They believe that no matter what they are undergoing, God will make good use of their suffering to transform and lead them to a happier state.

The second includes those who, as a result of their many suffering experiences in life, do not believe and trust in God's love for them. If God is love, why allow them to suffer? As a result of this, they live as though there is no God or they try to buy God's love by being overly pious; thus when they make mistakes, they think that God will punish them with suffering.

Each day, through various encounters with those who suffer, I realize that they are yearning for answers to their sufferings and a conviction that God still loves them. On the hand, I see the widespread inability of people, even Christians, to show God's authentic love and presence to them. This makes me wonder if as Christians we truly understand God's love for those who suffer. It is this same love of God that made his only Son to suffer and die on the cross for us. The experience of Christ's suffering and that of John of the Cross ought to transform us and widen our understanding.

John of the Cross strikes a balance between these two categories of people. He presents us with a God whose love is immeasurable. Through his own experience, he comes to recognize the unconditional, faithful, compassionate and transforming love of the "Beloved for his lover", as well as God's effort to pull us out, or to see us through our suffering and lead us to an abiding union with him. He

does this because he is madly in love with us. John reassures us of God's love even in our suffering. And this requires a strong faith on our part.

Statement of the Problem

The writings of St. John of the Cross, despite their richness in communicating God's love for humanity, are considered to be complex literary works. This is because of the high use of mystical expressions. It seems that mystics, unable to express their experiences in precise language, chose figurative expressions rather than rational explanations (cf. *Spiritual Canticle*, Prologue, 1). Thus unable to express his mystical experiences in ordinary words, John wrote in poetry, with figures, symbols, and images that are sometimes difficult to understand. And when his brothers asked him to explain these poems, John began with prologues in which he states that it is not really possible to accurately explain the message of his poems in prose or simple language (cf. *Ascent*, Prologue, 1; *Ascent*, Prologue, 2; *Living Flame*, Prologue, 1).

Even though John attempted to explain his poems by writing commentaries, his commentaries also contain a lot of "imagery and symbolism; his language is often elusive rather than descriptive, and in [certain] places, he even becomes carried away at the remembrance of previous experiences".⁶

As a result of these difficulties in John's language, many scholars and Christians have interpreted and reinterpreted the message of John differently in an attempt to unravel the complexity. Scholars disagree on certain interpretations while the ordinary Christians misquote and misrepresent John. A story was told of a Carmelite friar who told his friend that he was going off to Spain to do his further studies on John of the Cross. And the friend's remark was "Oh that horrible man!" It

⁶ L. DOOHAN, *Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross*, 43.

happened that some years back, his friend who lost her mother was crying, only to meet her novice mistress who said to her that she should not be crying, that there was no need for such emotional pains because St. John of the Cross says that “We should have an equal forgetfulness for everyone!”⁷ This certainly was a misrepresentation of John’s message for Christians and for those who suffer.

This prompted the friar to take the pains of explaining to her that her mistress did not use the entire quotation of John which reads “that you should have an equal love for and an equal forgetfulness of all persons” (*Precautions* 5).⁸ This passage speaks of equal love and equal forgetfulness of persons in the *Precautions* for the use of anyone who longs to be a faithful religious and reach spiritual perfection quickly. He explained further that to have an equal forgetfulness is easy especially when one is selfish, but “to be a good Christian, however, having an equal love for all, that is where the cross is”.⁹ This story is one clear instance of a misunderstanding of John’s message and an out-of-context quotation. This shows that some people don’t understand John at all; neither do they think that John has anything to say to them. Thomas Moore narrates how a priest once remarked: “St. John of the Cross? I cannot get anything out of him. Even at the Seminary we said ‘What is it that he is saying?’ Is he saying anything at all to us?”¹⁰ Sadly enough, that is the mentality of some ordinary Christians today. That is the reason why we need a careful reading and understanding of John of the Cross.

However, if we read and interpret the works of John of the Cross wrongly, we will lose the rich meaning he is trying to convey to us. We have the text of John’s works, it is the context that is not always clear and this becomes problematic

⁷ T. MOORE, “How to Read St. John of the Cross”, 1.

⁸ JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Collected Works*, 720.

⁹ T. MOORE, “How to Read St. John”, 1.

¹⁰ T. MOORE, “How to Read St. John”, 1.

and leads to a distortion of his work. I propose that John's writings have to be read as the work of a mystic communicating to his audience through symbolic and mystical language.

Motivation of the Study

Reflection on the life and works of John of the Cross led me to consider the God that he presents to us, and how relevant John's message can be for us as Christians today. God's love for us is the ultimate cause for our existence and salvation (cf. John 3:16). In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus summarizes all the Jewish commandments into two: Love of God and love of neighbour (cf. Mk 12:30-31; Matt 22:39; Luke 10:27). And in the Gospel of John, love becomes the condition for discipleship (cf. John 13:34-35). The implication of accepting God's love is that we also should love in return. And the greatest expression of love is to give up self for the other for there is no greater love than this (cf. John 15: 12-13). This also implies taking up one's cross and following Jesus, so that we love him and are willing to be his disciples always (cf. Matt 16:24; Luke 9:23). These actually are the implications of being his disciples and of accepting his love: taking up our crosses and loving others in return.

But the unfortunate thing is that most Christians are not ready to accept the implication of being his disciples. Some do not understand a relationship between discipleship and the cross which implies suffering for the sake of love – not suffering for the sake of suffering, but for the sake of love. As Christians, we must show our faith in God in our love for all creation and for the Creator of all. Through our love, we give clear evidence that we are indeed the followers and disciples of Christ, who is the embodiment of God's love. To love Christ implies loving others

in return and taking up my cross and following him as the life of John of the Cross shows. It is this that motivates me especially to choose this topic.

Purpose/Aim of the Study

The purpose and aim of the study is to highlight John of the Cross's understanding of God as a Hidden Lover and how it applies to Christians today who are undergoing sufferings and feel the absence of God in their lives. This study will answer the following questions: What informed or prompted John's knowledge of God as a Hidden Lover? Where is God hidden? Where can we find him? How does John help us to understand that God loves us even in our sufferings? What message can Christians learn from John in their relationship with God?

Objective of the Study

This essay seeks to come to a better understanding of God's love for us as experienced by John of the Cross, and to contribute to the literature that has been written on the life and works of John of the Cross.

Hypothesis of the Study

As a result of the nature of this work I will not be stating an experimental research hypothesis but a conceptual hypothesis because the studies in question cannot be directly tested since divine and mystical matters cannot be measured. However, the hypothesis of this essay is that: Suffering is not a suggestion of God's absence or punishment but rather a part of the package of being human and for being Christian.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it will add to the extensive works that have been done in relation to John's understanding of God and his love for suffering humanity. It will also show the importance of interpreting John's message in our contemporary context.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study will be on the theology and application of the message of John of the Cross to Christians. However, this study does not claim to be a comprehensive or exhaustive treatment of the theme of love and suffering in John's work.

Limitation of the Study

I limit myself to the perspective of John's idea of a hidden God, and his love for those who suffer in some selected works of John of the Cross. I also limit myself to resources available in Tangaza University College Library, Catholic University of Eastern Africa Library, the Carmelite Community Library, and the internet.

Source/Method of Study

This work will be based mostly on library research. I shall refer to various articles, journals, books and periodicals in order to make a systematic synthesis of what prominent scholars have said on related topics. I will also make use of other suitable electronic materials that will be relevant to this study. The study will also be the fruit of my personal, pastoral and theological reflection and critical discussion with my Carmelite brothers and with the Christian lay and religious faithful. I will

also give serious and keen consideration to the suggestions, guidelines and critiques of my moderator who himself is a good master on the study of John. Thus the study will be descriptive, comparative and exegetical in nature.

Structure and Content of the Study

This essay will be structured into four chapters. In chapter one, I will attempt to trace a historical background of St. John of the Cross and his writings and his experience on love and suffering, with the aim of understanding the man St. John of the Cross, the influences on him and his works.

The second chapter which is the exegetical part of this work will be devoted to the theology of love and suffering in the Bible and the teaching of the church. It will investigate the evolution of the theology of suffering in the Old Testament, its negative connotation and the positive outlook that was given to suffering in the New Testament. It will also consider the idea of suffering in the teaching of the church, mainly from the apostolic letter of John Paul II, *The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*. This chapter will also consider the idea of God's hiddenness in the Scriptures.

The third chapter will focus on the mystical theology of St. John of the Cross and his understanding of God as a Hidden Lover. It will consider the theme of suffering in St. John of the Cross, the place of the Cross in St. John of the Cross's teaching and then the Christian life as a synthesis of love and suffering.

In chapter four, I will devote our time in considering the relevance of St. John of the Cross's understanding of God as a Hidden Lover for our contemporary Christians who face suffering every day. This chapter will also consider the benefits of suffering and how God puts suffering to good use for our own good. I will then sum up the essay in the conclusion.

Throughout this study, all quotations of the works of John will be taken from the ICS publication of *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. K. KAVANAUGH – O. RODRIGUEZ. I will also follow the abbreviating method of Kieran Kavanaugh in referring to the major works of St. John of the Cross: A= *Ascent of Mount Carmel*; N= *The Dark Night*; C= *The Spiritual Canticle*; F= *The Living Flame of Love*. Next to the abbreviation, I will give the number of the book, the chapter or stanza, and the paragraph number.¹¹

The major commentaries of John are divided into books (in the case of the *Ascent* and *Night*), chapters or stanzas, and sections. Thus, for example, “A 2.22.10” would refer to the tenth section of chapter 22 in the second book of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, while “C 39.6” would refer to the sixth section in the commentary on the 39th stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle*. Similarly, the works of St. Teresa are divided into chapters and sections – and in the case of *The Interior Castle*, also into major divisions called “dwelling places”. Thus a reference to IC 6.5.4 would refer to the fourth section in the fifth chapter of her commentary on the sixth “dwelling place” of *The Interior Castle*.

For the Bible references, all quotations will be from *The African Bible*, and all abbreviations will be according to *The African Bible* as well. I will give the name of the book, then the number of the chapter, followed by the verse or verses.

¹¹Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, “General Introduction”, in *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. K. KAVANAUGH – O. RODRIGUEZ, 37.

Chapter I

Understanding John of the Cross: Historical Background and Writings

1.1 Introduction

One might wonder if John of the Cross knows what we are experiencing in the sufferings we go through in our daily lives. Has he been to that point of life where things break down? John's writings are interconnected enough in themselves, but their relations to his own life history or to our own experiences can at times be difficult to see since his writings do to not contain as much explicitly autobiographical material as Teresa's.¹²

Though his writings may appear to be impersonal and theoretical, the truth still remains that they are the fruit of his personal experience of love and suffering. they are the outcome of his experience, so when we come to him bearing our own experiences of sufferings, we can hope to be received well.¹³

The purpose of this chapter is to make the works of St. John of the Cross easier to understand, by exploring the historical context and experiences that shaped his life and writings. This chapter seeks to reveal the formative experiences that inspired John's

¹² Cf. I. MATTHEW, *The Impact of God: Soundings from St. John of the Cross*, 5.

¹³ Cf. I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 5.

understanding of God as a “Hidden Lover”, and further serve as a guide to an appropriate analogous application of the spiritual teachings of St. John in our contemporary context of suffering.

1.2 The Person of John of the Cross

John’s personality, like his writing, was forged by a combination of love and suffering. He was born in a superpower Spain afflicted by widespread poverty and deep discrimination between the poor and the rich, and between cultures. For the losers in the post-medieval world, existence was fragile, unhygienic, and sometimes brutal. If John lived as he did, it was not because he had been sheltered in his early years. He was exposed to life’s open wounds, pain and sufferings, and was shaped by that exposure right from his early life as we shall see.¹⁴

1.2.1 Early Life of John of the Cross

The early life of St. John of the Cross was a mixture of love and suffering. He was born in 1542 in Fontiveros, Spain, a small town located in the central plateau of Old Castile. His birth date was probably June 24, a date which is still being debated as some scholars are of the opinion that he was born in December. But the parish baptismal record bears 24th of June and Julian de Avila asserts that John was named after John the Baptist and not John the Evangelist.¹⁵ His parents, Gonzalo de Yepes and Catalina Alvarez, earned a meagre living as poor silk weavers.¹⁶ It was in this family that John first experienced the light in surroundings of poverty, hard work and suffering.

¹⁴ Cf. I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 6.

¹⁵ J. V. RODRIGUEZ, “Origins: The “Yepes” Family”, 9.

¹⁶ Cf. S. PAYNE, *The Carmelite Tradition*, 42.

The house was humble, its furniture was plain, the food none too plentiful. They could not even eat their fill of wheat bread, for often enough only barley bread was available and did not even go round the family members.¹⁷

The love story of his parents unfolded in this manner: Gonzalo de Yepes was on one of his business trips to Medina del Campo, and in passing through Fontiveros, he stopped at the house of a rich widow, who had taken an orphan girl Catalina Alvarez into her care. “Gonzalo set eyes on the young girl from Toledo and fell in love.”¹⁸ Gonzalo decides to marry this poor orphan, against the wishes of his family and relatives. As a result of this, Gonzalo was disinherited and he had no choice but to join the poor trade of his new wife Catalina and they both became weavers of silk and crepe. In this situation, which was prompted by genuine love and not selfishness, Gonzalo “had to confront life and maintain a home”.¹⁹

A short time after the birth of John, “Our Lord tried the father with an illness, lasting two years, in which he showed through his patience how united he was to God’s will”.²⁰ This illness finally claimed the life of his father, Gonzalo, who died along with Luis, the middle brother to John. This meant that Catalina would have to fend for John and his older brother Francisco. In a bid to make ends meet, she relocated the family to Medina del Campo, where John received his early education in a catechetical school that catered for poor children.²¹

¹⁷ Cf. CRISÓGONO DE JESÚS, *The Life of St. John of the Cross*, 3.

¹⁸ J. V. RODRIGUEZ, “Yepes Family”, 5.

¹⁹ J. V. RODRIGUEZ, “Yepes Family”, 6.

²⁰ J. V. RODRIGUEZ, “Yepes Family”, 11.

²¹ Cf. S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 42.

1.2.2 *John's Early Years as an Apprentice*

John was nine when they settled in Medina, a major market place in Castile. The city attracted commerce from northern Europe and from the East, as well as from other parts of the peninsula. It also attracted disease. John, who had found a place in a catechetical school for poor children, transferred in his teens to work “as a nurse-orderly at Medina’s so-called Plague Hospital, whose patients included many suffering from venereal diseases, and where he developed a lifelong concern for the sick”²² and those who suffer. According to Iain Matthew, John was able to meet this environment with a “certain robustness and kind feeling, judging from his sensitivity to the sick and suffering which became proverbial in later years”.²³ For John of the Cross, we could say that the sick and the poor are alike: “the sick who are poor or the poor who are sick; especially those having a contagious disease, the most feared and abandoned because of the danger and one’s natural repugnance”.²⁴ John treated these people with so much affection. He would go from house to house seeking alms to help them.²⁵

While at this catechetical school, John was chosen to serve as acolyte at the convent of the Augustinian Nuns; as was the custom in this school, this meant duties in the sacristy for four hours in the morning, and in the afternoons whenever he was needed. In addition to his elementary studies, he also received the opportunity to learn other crafts, such as carpentry, tailoring, sculpturing, and painting through

²² S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 42.

²³ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 7; J. V. RODRIGUEZ, “Youth: Paths Towards a Vocation”, 41.

²⁴ F. RUIZ, “The Generosity of the Poor”, 41.

²⁵ Cf. F. RUIZ, “Generosity”, 41.

apprenticeships to local craftsmen. He showed no enthusiasm towards this apprenticeship. Rather, he discovered a great gift of compassion toward the sick.²⁶

John found favour with the nuns and with Don Alonso Alvarez, founder and administrator of the Plague Hospital where John worked. Don Alonso allowed John in his free time to attend the new Jesuit *colegio* close by, where John received lectures in the humanities. This administrator would later offer John the opportunity of training to become a hospital chaplain. This would have been a great opportunity to help alleviate their poor condition and secure income for his family had John not turned down the offer in order to join the Carmelite Order in 1563.²⁷

1.3 John's Entrance into the Carmelite Order

John entered the Carmelite Order at the monastery of Santa Ana in Medina del Campo; he received the Carmelite habit in February 24, 1563, changing his name to Br. John of St. Matthias. After his novitiate which lasted for one year, John was sent to study at the University of Salamanca, one of the renowned institutes of learning in that era.²⁸

We are told that on entering the Carmelite Order, John found it difficult to continue with his practice of begging to support the poor which had almost become an inseparable part of his life. Nevertheless, he still kept the same kind heart towards his brothers in the monastery. We learn that later on “when one of his subjects was sick, he

²⁶ Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, “General Introduction”, 10.

²⁷ Cf. S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 42.

²⁸ Cf. S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 42-43.

cared for him with a mother's heart, remaining with him, pampering him, making his bed, keeping him clean, and often feeding him himself".²⁹

1.3.1 Ordination and John's Encounter with Teresa of Avila

After three years in the University of Salamanca, John was ordained priest in the spring of 1567, and he returned home to Medina del Campo to celebrate his thanksgiving or first Mass as some would call it. This visit was the occasion for his providential meeting with Teresa of Avila, who was in Medina at that time to establish a second foundation for the nuns of her reform, and searching for potential candidates to initiate the same reform among the friars.³⁰

When he met Teresa in 1567, John was twenty-five years old, while she was fifty-two. Teresa was happy when she met with John. Before this meeting, John had been contemplating joining the Carthusians. He seems to have been unsatisfied with life in Carmel, and was looking for something more (perhaps more austere and contemplative). She persuaded him not to join the Carthusians but her own reformed Carmelites. She wanted to begin a group of Carmelite reformed men, who would accompany the nuns in their spiritual life, share the same lifestyle with them, while also being available for mission (cf. F3, 17). It was this meeting with Teresa of Jesus, and his later joining and championing the Teresian Reform of the friars of the Carmelite Order, that would occupy John for the rest of his life.³¹

²⁹ F. RUIZ, "Generosity", 41.

³⁰ Cf. S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 43.

³¹ Cf. A. PEERS, *Spirit of Flame*, 15.

1.4 John Becomes Part of the Reform

After his ordination and first Mass, John returned to the University of Salamanca to complete his theological studies. The following year, Teresa secured a run-down farm property in the remote village of Duruelo where she began the first monastery of the discalced friars. By herself she tutored John on the prospects of their new form of life. Then together with two other friars, John formally renounced the mitigated Carmelite Rule of Eugene IV and started the pioneering foundation of the discalced³² Carmelite friars at Duruelo. John who has been known as John of St. Matthias took up a new name of John of the Cross. This was a sign of a new way of life for John. He was made the subprior and novice master of their new foundation.³³

In 1571 when Teresa was sent back to Avila as prioress to the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation, she requested for John's help. John joined her as vicar and confessor to the nuns.³⁴ He worked tirelessly to improve the spiritual growth of the nuns while still caring for the poor and sick amongst them. It was reported that when one of the nuns, Doña Maria Yera, was very ill, John spent whole nights attending to her spiritual needs, gave her viaticum, and cheered and helped her in her suffering moments. She later died in the peace and love of Christ.³⁵ His kind-heartedness was not only to the sick nuns, but was also extended to the poor nuns. We are told that on one occasion when John entered the monastery to hear confessions, he noticed a nun who was sweeping the floor barefoot. Realizing that the poor nun had neither shoes nor

³² At this time, the word "discalced" which means "without shoes" was used as an adjective to describe individuals, groups, foundations, etc that belong to Teresa's reform. "Discalced" became a proper name for Teresa's reform when the Discalced Carmelites separated from the main Order of Carmelites.

³³ Cf. S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 43.

³⁴ Cf. S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 43.

³⁵ Cf. J. V. RODRIGUEZ, "With Teresa in Avila: Ministry to the Nuns", 131.

money to purchase them, John went begging alms to buy her a pair of shoes. He acted in like manner for poor nuns who were sick but had no money for medications.³⁶

This involvement of John in Teresa's reform triggered mixed reactions from John's own Carmelite confreres who were not involved in the reform and they arrested John in early December 1577, taking him away to the Carmelite monastery in Toledo, where he would undergo severe sufferings for almost nine months.³⁷

1.4.1 Imprisonment of John at Toledo

On hearing of this arrest by friars opposing her reform, Teresa feared the worst. She composed a letter to King Philip II of Spain in which she stated: "I feel very sad to see these confessors in the hands of those friars... I would consider the confessors better off if they were held by the Moors, who perhaps would show more compassion" (LT 218).³⁸ In this letter, Teresa seems to make reference to the fact that John has gone through a lot of suffering in his life. She said: "And this one friar [John of the Cross] who is so great a servant of God is so weak from all that he has suffered that I fear for his life" (LT 218). But for once her personality failed to produce the desired result. Unknown to her, John was being transported across the freezing Sierra Guadarrama, to the city of Toledo. There he was incarcerated first in the monastery jail, then in a tiny closet with little or no light, and left to himself.³⁹

The city of Toledo can be very cold in winter, suffocating in summer. For John, solitary confinement meant malnutrition, regular flogging (causing wounds which

³⁶ Cf. J. V. RODRIGUEZ, "Teresa in Avila", 131.

³⁷ Cf. S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 44.

³⁸ TERESA of AVILA, *Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. K. KAVANAUGH – O. RODRIGUEZ, 580.

³⁹ Cf. I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 9.

remained with him for a long time), decomposing clothing, and lice. All of these was accompanied a kind of psychological torture. His captors apparently manufactured conversations at the door of his prison cell, leaving their words to provoke his thoughts. They hinted that he would get out in a coffin. They said that the reform – his life’s commitment – had disintegrated.⁴⁰

All this does seem to have affected John’s thought. As he ate his little ration, he had to cope with the fear of being poisoned. He had to cope also with the insinuation that he was a rebel – he, whose religious life had been built on obedience. And he narrated that what tortured him most was the worry that Teresa and the others would think he had abandoned them.⁴¹

It was all happening at the same time: physical and emotional torture; a whirl of anxiety in his mind; and, in his relationship with God, darkness. At the time when, if ever, he needed to feel the divine presence, his God seemed distant, even alien, and John felt himself a stranger to God.⁴²

It was this experience that formed John’s understanding of God as a Hidden Lover. During the time they had him in prison, he suffered great inner dryness and affliction; “at times [the Lord] withdrew and left him in inner darkness along with the darkness of his cell”.⁴³ It was as if his inner self had been scraped bare, and he now ached in a way he never had before for a God who was utterly beyond him. This was the real wound, and it drew from him a raw cry, “Where have you hidden?”

Where have you hidden
Beloved, and left me moaning?

⁴⁰ Cf. I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 9.

⁴¹ Cf. I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 10.

⁴² Cf. I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 10.

⁴³ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 10.

You fled like a stag
 After wounding me;
 I went out calling you, but you were gone (C1).⁴⁴

This is the first stanza of “The Spiritual Canticle”, one of the poems which John composed in the prison. Surprisingly, it was here, in this terrible situation, that his mature writing started.

His major writings are all commentaries on his poetry. They unfold the poems and draw us back to them, and through them to the crucible that forged them. They reflect John’s most personal experience, when his life was most precarious, and his God was seemingly hidden.⁴⁵

As already mentioned, his imprisonment lasted nearly nine months in that small and unventilated cell. At Toledo, he suffered intensely in body and in spirit. But these extraordinary sufferings served to complete his preparation for the highest spiritual favours. The prison was a physical illustration of what was happening in his soul. He used its imagery afterwards in his work *The Dark Night* in describing the night of the spirit, and how God uses this means to bring a soul to an intimate relationship with him.⁴⁶

With the elapse of six months of imprisonment, he was assigned a new guard who was compassionate towards him. It was this guard who gave him paper and ink, thus enabling him in these sad surroundings to write down great lyric poems which, as a

⁴⁴ JOHN OF THE CROSS, “Spiritual Canticle”, in *Collected Works*, 410.

⁴⁵ Cf. I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 10.

⁴⁶ Cf. N. CUMMINS, *An Introduction to St. John of the Cross*, 3-4.

means of passing time, he had been composing in his mind.⁴⁷ John later noted whimsically, “I’ve been flogged more than Saint Paul!”⁴⁸

This whole episode of his imprisonment helped to shape his idea of suffering. John interprets this episode using the experience or analogy of Jonah in the belly of the whale. In his letter to Catalina de Jesús,⁴⁹ he says: “For after that whale swallowed me up and vomited me out on this alien port, I have never merited to see Teresa again or the saints up there” (L 1). When he later wrote of the deepest transformation that God works in a soul (the night of the spirit), he used the same expression. The soul “... feels as if it were swallowed by a beast and being digested in the dark belly, and it suffers an anguish comparable to Jonah's in the belly of the whale” (N 2.6.1).

John’s biographers have described the physical sufferings he endured in great detail. But far more challenging for John was his suffering of “interior darkness, the temptation to despair, and the fear that he had been abandoned not only by his friends and companions but by God as well”.⁵⁰ Still, amidst the nothingness (*Nada*) of Toledo prison cell John found the All (*Todo*), and when he managed to escape in what seem like a miracle in mid-August 1578, he brought with him some mystical verses which he had put into writing during his months of sufferings in the cell of Toledo. These writings include the 31 stanzas of “The Spiritual Canticle,” which has been ranked among the best poetic compositions of all time.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, “General Introduction”, 22.

⁴⁸ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 11.

⁴⁹ As a Carmelite nun, Mother Catalina de Jesús accompanied Teresa to the new foundation in Burgos and was later transferred to Soria where she spent her last days. She was one of those that John helped while she suffered internal trials. Cf. K. KAVANAUGH in *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. K. KAVANAUGH – O. RODRIGUEZ, 736.

⁵⁰ S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 44.

⁵¹ Cf. S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 44.

After his escape in 1578, John was sent for a time to Andalusia in the south of Spain, where he was given numerous administrative responsibilities and he continued his writing. John began writing commentaries at the request of the nuns in Beas. He began writing seriously in Beas, and finished ten years later in Granada. His major works are the results of the rich fruit that was sown in Beas.⁵²

1.5 Illness, Death and Canonization

Towards the end of his life, John of the Cross was assigned to an isolated little monastery called La Peñuela, in Andalusia, apparently to prepare for assignment to Mexico, perhaps as punishment for having spoken out against some of the harsh policies of the provincial administration. And with the permission of Antonio de Jesús, the provincial of Andalusia, John stayed in that monastery since he had told the provincial that he would prefer the solitude of Peñuela.⁵³ John was in La Peñuela only a few months when he became sick with fever and it became necessary for him to seek proper medical care.⁵⁴ John chose to go for treatment to Ubeda where he was little known. While he was there, he was badly treated by the resentful prior of that monastery, Fray Francisco Crisóstomo. This ill-treatment left him in no better condition.⁵⁵ His sickness became worse. “His leg was already ulcerated, and the disease, erysipelas, spread to his back where a new fist-sized tumour formed.”⁵⁶

In December 13, 1591, realising that his death was near, John called for the prior and asked him to forgive him for all the trouble and expenses he had caused him. This

⁵² Cf. F. RUIZ, “Master and Writer”, 213.

⁵³ Cf. J. V. RODRIGUEZ, “Death and Glorification”, 355-356.

⁵⁴ Cf. G. BURKE, “The Life and Times of St. John of the Cross”, 42.

⁵⁵ Cf. S. PAYNE, *Carmelite Tradition*, 44.

⁵⁶ K. KAVANAUGH, “General Introduction”, 23.

act by John changed the life of the prior for the better. He regretted his bad behaviour towards John and reformed his life. John died in the state of sanctity and without agony, without struggle, at the age of forty-nine, repeating the words of the Psalmist: “Into your hands, oh Lord, I commend my spirit” (Ps. 31:5). His death was the direct outcome of harsh treatment and much suffering. He actually received the favour he had asked from the Lord which was: “not to die as a superior, to die in a place where he was unknown, and to die after having suffered much”.⁵⁷ He died as he lived. His spirit was victorious in suffering; his holiness was clear to all the people of the town, and, at last, to his own Carmelite brothers.⁵⁸

After his death, his body was later taken to Segovia. He was beatified by Pope Clement X in 1675, and was canonized by Pope Benedict XIII in 1726. In the year 1926, he was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius XI, and in 1952, Pope Pius XII declared him patron of all poets and writers of Spain, the most recent honour conferred on him by the Catholic Church.⁵⁹

1.6 Influences on John of the Cross

The story of the life of St. John of the Cross would be incomplete if we failed to re-trace the events in his life that influenced him the most and gave us the person whom we celebrate today as a saint, a great mystic and doctor of divine love. The picture would be incomplete if no description was given of his character and spiritual life.

John’s early privations, together with the misunderstanding, imprisonment, and persecutions which he suffered at the hands of his Carmelite brothers, could easily have

⁵⁷ K. KAVANAUGH, “General Introduction”, 23.

⁵⁸ Cf. G. BURKE, “Life and Times”, 43.

⁵⁹ Cf. O. RODRIGUEZ, *Saint John of the Cross*, 19.

produced a bitter and pessimistic person, instead of a purified and enlightened master of the spiritual life. For John, these sad events became a stepping stone to his transformation and occasioned in him a great love of God and great “charity toward others and deep compassion for the sufferer”⁶⁰

a) *John’s Early Privations*

John knew suffering from an early age. His father died when he was eight, a father disinherited into poverty by his rich family for marrying Catalina, John’s mother. He also lost his brother Luis, just a little older than himself, when he was still young. Luis probably died from sheer malnutrition. Rodriguez observes that John suffered material needs from his childhood which affected his physical development. Despite these deprivations, John was outstanding intellectually and morally.⁶¹

John’s difficult and poverty-stricken early life could have left him trapped and broken; but his severe experience, doubtless, led him to bring relief to others afflicted by suffering and the misfortune of material need. He did not restrict himself to seeking the spiritual good of his penitents but sought as well to aid them when they were in material want as we have seen in the cases of the sick and poor nuns in the Incarnation Convent. He would beg to get a new cassock for a priest who came to him for confession. “Finding the poor wherever he journeyed, he also found the sick”⁶² and he helped them all. But his deepest concern was for individuals who were suffering

⁶⁰ K. KAVANAUGH, “General Introduction”, 23.

⁶¹ Cf. O. RODRIGUEZ, *Nightingale*, 21.

⁶² K. KAVANAUGH, “General Introduction”, 24.

internal trials. The need of such souls prompted him to write *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*.⁶³

Though John's life and ministry were deeply influenced by the pains of poverty which he suffered as a child and also again as a friar, he did not allow himself to be broken down by these experiences; instead he used them as opportunities to bring relief to others and as means to draw them closer to God. Above all, his experience made him able to bear his own suffering with love for God. He saw the hand of God in all circumstances. While he was persecuted, he saw the hand of God in it and urged others not to speak ill of his persecutors, but to "Think nothing else but that God ordains all..." (L 26). In his letter to Doña Juana de Pedraza, John says: "God ordains our sufferings that we may love what we most desire, make greater sacrifices, and be worth more" (L11).

John was highly influenced by his immediate family and its surroundings. His older brother Francisco was known for his kindness and hospitality to strangers; he was noted for feeding the homeless and giving them shelter in their poor home. John was used to introducing his brother thus: "May I introduce you to my brother, who is the treasure I value most in the world".⁶⁴ Apart from his brother Francisco and his mother Catalina, St. Teresa was another figure that had great influence on John. It is a fact that Fray John of the Cross had a high regard and love for Teresa, so much that he carried her portrait everywhere he went.⁶⁵

⁶³ Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, "General Introduction", 25.

⁶⁴ K. KAVANAUGH, "General Introduction", 26.

⁶⁵ Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, "General Introduction", 26.

b) *Impact of Toledo Imprisonment on John*

John was locked up in a stinking dark prison for almost nine months, in an airless cell with only a small opening high up for a little light. To say that he suffered intensely at this time in body and in spirit is an understatement. These extraordinary sufferings served to complete his preparation for the highest spiritual favours. The darkness he encountered during these months became for him a sacrament of communion with God. Hence he used this prison experience later on in his writings as a physical illustration of what was happening in his soul, and employed its imagery in describing the night of the spirit.⁶⁶

The prison experience of St. John of the Cross seems to have impacted and influenced him the most, and has given us the Mystical Doctor of Divine Love that we have today in the person of St. John of the Cross. In the *Dark Night*, he describes this darkness and its influence on the soul in these words:

Until the Lord finishes purging them in the way he desires, no remedy is a help to them in their sorrow. Their helplessness is even greater because of the little they can do in this situation. They resemble one who is imprisoned in a dark dungeon, bound hands and feet, and able neither to move nor see nor feel any favor from heaven or earth. They remain in this condition until their spirit is humbled, softened, and purified, until it becomes so delicate, simple, and refined that it can be one with the Spirit of God, (N 2.7.3).

Also from the verses of “The Spiritual Canticle”, which he composed during his Toledo imprisonment, we can learn what degree of spiritual refinement he had attained. Hence Fr. Norbert Cummins asserts, “It is clear from stanza 27 of the *Spiritual Canticle*, that he had made complete gift of himself to God. When St. John commented on these lines afterwards, he explained that ‘giving one’s breast’ to another signifies giving love

⁶⁶ Cf. N. CUMMINS, *Introduction*, 3-4.

and friendship and revealing secrets to him as to a friend.”⁶⁷ It seems most likely then, that by the time of his escape from prison St. John had already reached the summit of the spiritual life. All his written works date from this time, and it would not be an understatement to affirm that his Toledo experience impacted on him the most and had given us the Mystical Doctor of Divine Love.

c) *John of the Cross, Lover of the Sacred Scriptures*

The Holy Bible was the book John of the Cross cherished the most. The Gospels, mainly, helped him to enter into intimate union with the three persons of the Trinity. Through the Scripture he learned that the Father had spoken and revealed everything through his Son, and that hidden in Christ were all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. He asserted in the prologue to *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* that “my help in all that, with God’s favour, I shall say, will be Sacred Scripture, at least in the most important matters, or those that are difficult to understand” (*Ascent* Prologue, 2). John was attuned to the text of the Sacred Scriptures, as Fr. John Evangelist, his friend and confessor, remarked: “He was fond of reading Sacred Scriptures, which he knew almost by heart”.⁶⁸ He would spend most of his times reading and meditating on the words of the Scriptures. The Sacred Scriptures were his companion on all his earthly journeys. When it was time for John to journey to the world beyond, the Bible, like a faithful friend, still accompanied him. As he lay dying the friars started singing the *De Profundis* and other prayers. John with a gesture beckoned them to stop, and then requested for some verses from the Bible, “Father, read

⁶⁷ N. CUMMINS, *Introduction*, 4.

⁶⁸ J. V. RODRIGUEZ, “John of the Cross, Man of the Bible” 292.

from the Song of Songs, the other is not necessary”.⁶⁹ The Scriptures were his rule of life. The words of the Bible became the natural expression of his inner experience and came spontaneously to him as he wrote his works to the extent that we have about 1,500 quotations or references from the Sacred Scriptures in his writings.⁷⁰

d) *The Crucified Jesus*

Besides the Scriptures, Christ crucified was another textbook for John, and it was in his cross that he learned the science of mystical theology. The crucified Jesus influenced him greatly. The crucified is all that matters to John. So we are not surprised to read that one day when John saw a picture of our Lord falling beneath the cross, crushed like grapes in the wine press, he was wrapped in wonder unable to resist the ecstasy. He was so much in love with the cross of Christ that he asked the Lord to give him more suffering to be borne for the Lord’s sake, and that he may be despised and regarded as worthless. It is this secret of divine love revealed to St. John of the Cross through suffering that he tries to express in writing to us his numerous spiritual children.⁷¹

We can see some of these expressions in his letters as he admonished his recipients. Writing to a discalced Carmelite nun who was suffering from scruples, John advised her saying: “When something distasteful or unpleasant comes your way, remember Christ crucified and be silent. Live in faith and hope, even though you are in darkness, because it is in these darkneses that God protects the soul” (L 20). The same advice is given to Doña Juana de Pedraza, when in reply to her letter John wrote: “It

⁶⁹ J. V. RODRIGUEZ, “Man of the Bible”, 292; Cf. G. G. BURKE, “Life and Times”, 43.

⁷⁰ Cf. J. V. RODRIGUEZ, “Man of the Bible”, 292.

⁷¹ Cf. N. CUMMINS, *Introduction*, 5.

behooves us not to go without the cross, just as our Beloved did not go without it, even to the death of love...” (L 11). These and other numerous references can be found in John of the Cross’s writings.

1.7 The Writings of St. John of the Cross

Many scholars wonder why a man so well educated and so gifted wrote so little, because the poems and his commentaries on them came only during the last twelve to thirteen years of his life. Some of his earlier writings were apparently lost. But perhaps he did not write more because he did not feel the necessity to write. Or he probably thought that so many books had already been written that there was no need to write anything more.⁷² On the other hand, it seems his many administrative duties did not leave him enough time to do so much creative work like writing. Juan Evangelista comments on the many activities that interrupted John of the Cross as he wrote his works, “As for what concerns my having seen our venerable Father write his books, I saw him writing all of them, because, as I have said, I was the one who was ever at his side for he wrote [his works] only with many interruptions”.⁷³ Nevertheless, John of the Cross was able to leave us with the following works as they have been grouped by Federico Ruiz:

- Poetry
- Sayings of Light and Love
- Precautions; Counsels to a Religious, [Censure and Opinion]⁷⁴

⁷² Cf. O. RODRIGUEZ, *Nightingale*, 22.

⁷³ F. RUIZ, “Master and Writer”, 247.

⁷⁴ The *Censure and Opinion* though not mentioned by Federico Ruiz, is grouped as part of the Special Counsels together with the *The Precautions and The Counsels to the Counsels to a Religious*. The *Censure and Opinion* was written at the request of Nicolás Doria who was vicar general at the time, who

- Letters
- The Ascent of Mount Carmel
- The Dark Night
- The Spiritual Canticle (with two redactions, A and B)
- The Living Flame of Love (with two redactions, A and B)

Though John did not write much, his less than a thousand lines of poetry and less than a thousand pages of prose are of profound spiritual depth.⁷⁵

In his poems, John presents his reader with a description of his own mystical experiences. Using a lot of symbols, John gives his poems the characteristics of “being more emotional, universal, and living”.⁷⁶ These and other qualities make John’s poems more relevant and readable in our present era.

John’s commentaries shed light on his poems. His four major prose treatises are: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love*. These commentaries enable his readers to gain access to the mystical language and deep theological and spiritual secrets of his verses.⁷⁷

1.7.1 The Major Works of St. John of the Cross

Among the major works of St. John of the Cross, the two to which we will be referring most often in the following pages are “The Spiritual Canticle” and “The Dark Night” poems with their corresponding commentaries. Other texts will be cited less often.

asked John to write his opinion about the spiritual state of a particular disalced Carmelite nun. Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, “Introduction to the Censure and Opinion”, 730.

⁷⁵ Cf. F. RUIZ, “Master and Writer”, 249.

⁷⁶ F. RUIZ, “Master and Writer”, 249.

⁷⁷ Cf. F. RUIZ, “Master and Writer”, 249; Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, “General Introduction”, 33.

John of the Cross's favourite poem was the "The Spiritual Canticle" written mostly in 1578 while he was in prison. He kept this poem and meditated upon it for several years. He cherished it so much because of the mystery it contained. This mystery could be summarized in two words: "Love and beauty: love for God, Christ, persons, and nature; beauty of God, Christ, persons, and nature".⁷⁸ "The Spiritual Canticle" is a reflection of John's personal experience. While in prison, he composed the first 31 stanzas. Later he added 8 more stanzas with a commentary which he wrote in Granada in 1584 and dedicated it to Madre Ana de Jesús, prioress of the discalced nuns. John later added one more stanza to the 39, making a total of 40 stanzas. This stanza, inserted as stanza 11 in the final version, was on beauty.⁷⁹ These stanzas, together with the explanation he gives, make "The Spiritual Canticle" one of the most beautiful texts on the spiritual life.⁸⁰

The second important poem, "The Dark Night", was written around 1579 to 1581 at El Calvario, after John's escape from prison. He wrote this poem for some of the nuns and later gave it to some of the friars to read but with no explanation added. The poem consists of eight stanzas, each having five lines. It is an allegory in which the lover sings of her good fortune in having escaped at night (stanzas 1-2); then of the marvel of that night as a guide and means (stanzas 3-5); and finally of the actual communion with the beloved realized in that night (stanzas 6-8).⁸¹

⁷⁸ F. RUIZ, "A Writer in Granada", 248.

⁷⁹ Cf. F. RUIZ, "A Writer in Granada", 248-49.

⁸⁰ Cf. O. RODRIGUEZ, *Nightingale*, 24.

⁸¹ Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, "Introduction to the Ascent" in *Collected Works*, 102.

Contrary to popular assumption, “The Dark Night” poem was not written in prison,⁸² neither were its stanzas a lament because of personal pain or struggle. Rather, the soul recites them when it has already reached the state of perfection, that is, union with God through love, and has already passed through the dark night.⁸³ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* which is also a commentary on “The Dark Night” will be used in this work. As a matter of fact, the *Ascent* and *Night* “constitute one work, the same project organized in two parts. As a result, one speaks of the diptych *Ascent-Dark Night*, two segments of one composition. The two focus on the same themes and experiences and use the same terms”.⁸⁴ As one major work, the *Ascent-Dark Night* is organized in the following manner:⁸⁵

The Ascent of Mount Carmel and The Dark Night

Treatise	Book	Manner of Purification	Reason for calling Journey Dark
<u>The Ascent</u>	One	Active Night of Sense	Mortification of Appetites
<u>of Mount Carmel</u>	Two	Active Night of Spirit	Journey in Faith
	Three		
<u>The Dark Night</u>	One	Passive Night Of Sense	Communication of God
	Two	Passive Night Of Spirit	

⁸² However, John’s escape at night from prison may have influenced the poem. Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, in *Collected Works*, 428.

⁸³ Cf. JOHN OF THE CROSS, “*Dark Night*, Prologue” in *Collected Works*, 361.

⁸⁴ F. RUIZ, “The Ascent and The Dark Night”, 310.

⁸⁵ K. G. CULLIGAN, *John of the Cross*, 139.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that John of the Cross was a man shaped by his time and experience of suffering. His life and experience moulded and shaped his writings and message. Through his experience of suffering, he was able to empathize with those who suffer and to recognise the hand of the Transcendent in such situations.

The life of John of the Cross is a forceful manifestation of the presence of Transcendence that inspires and encourages us to rise above paralysing life situations and sufferings. The endless challenges that John encountered in his life served as fertile ground for his personal growth. He was born into poverty, as most African children are, struggled through economic hardship as he grew up, experienced hunger, rejection, and extreme privation in his life. These conditions are not far from what most children and families experience here in Africa. The very circumstances that cripple most African children, and could have crippled anyone else, became occasions of grace for John because he sought God above all things and situations. Through his constant seeking of God even in his sufferings, he was able to experience the presence of God, even when God seemed absent.

His own experience of suffering taught him to live in solidarity with those who suffer. He knew that “Love consists not in feeling great things but in having great detachment and in suffering for the Beloved” (*Maxims on Love*, 36). In the Plague Hospital he was brought face to face with physical sufferings as well as with psychological and moral afflictions. He was in close contact with wounded humanity and shared its sorrows with an active and tender compassion.

In religious life, too, he was a victim of cruel treatment, and sustained wounds which only love and grace could heal. He was imprisoned, tortured and reviled. The natural human instinct and reaction would be to run away fearfully from such trials. But during this period of great sufferings John appears to have experienced God's all-encompassing love most profoundly and this enabled him to overcome them. John learned to look beyond present suffering and darkness and to fix his eyes on the light that comes from God.

Chapter II

The Understanding of Suffering and God as a Hidden Lover in the Bible and in the Teaching of the Church

2.1 Introduction

Suffering pierces the lives of people in countless ways. Illness, death, loss, or tragedies within families or among friends or fellow citizens brings out a sense of serious pain.⁸⁶ John Paul II in *Salvifici Doloris* says that:

Suffering is something which is still wider than sickness, more complex and at the same time still more deeply rooted in humanity itself. A certain idea of this problem comes to us from the distinction between physical suffering and moral suffering. Insofar as the words “suffering” and “pain”, can, up to a certain degree, be used as synonyms, physical suffering is present when “the body is hurting” in some way, whereas moral suffering is “pain of the soul” (*SD*, 5).

Thus suffering can be physical, spiritual, psychological or moral. Daniel Harrington in his definition of suffering says: “To suffer is to feel pain, distress; to sustain injury, disadvantage, or loss; or to undergo a penalty”.⁸⁷

Turning to the Bible, we can identify various ways in which suffering could come to a person: danger of death, death of one’s family member, barrenness or childlessness, loneliness and abandonment, injury or pain in one part of the body, loss

⁸⁶ Cf. J. SCHUBERT, “Suffering in the Gospel of Mark”, 3.

⁸⁷ D.H. HARRINGTON, *Why Do We Suffer?*, 1.

or property (by theft, fire, and so forth), being victim of violence (by rape or assault), racial and ethnic discrimination, etc. (cf. *SD*, 6). It is remarkably clear that the concept of “suffering” permeates the Old and New Testaments. And the church through her teachings has tried to explain and to bring to our consciousness the reality of evil and suffering and ways of understanding suffering.⁸⁸

In the Old Testament, when suffering came, the natural tendency was to interpret it as a consequence of a wrong act or of someone’s sin against God.⁸⁹ Consequently, for every suffering, there must be a reason. This reason must be something negative. In such a setting, it was difficult to imagine a strong idea of a loving God who tempers his anger with his mercy. God would more likely be seen as a God of justice, who punishes evil and rewards good. It will take prophets like Hosea a strong effort to convince the people that YHWH is a God who seeks humanity out the way a young man might pursue his beloved. John of the Cross will borrow such images in describing how a soul in love goes out in search for her beloved who is at the moment hidden from her.

The positive side to suffering is something that came later on in the prophetic writings and reached its hallmark in the New Testament, with the salvific death of Jesus Christ. In Christ’s suffering we learn that suffering can be borne in love. And the magisterium of the church whose responsibility it is to interpret the Sacred Scriptures will shed more light on the biblical understanding of suffering.

⁸⁸ Cf. D.H. HARRINGTON, *Why Do We Suffer?*, 1

⁸⁹ Cf. D. J. SIMUNDSON, “Suffering”, 219.

We shall now look at the Old Testament, the New Testament and the writings of the magisterium, to see the evolution and the interpretation of the idea of suffering and God as a hidden lover.

2.2 God's Hiddenness in the Scriptures

The idea of God's hiddenness which I want to bring out in the teaching of John of the Cross finds its foundation in the second book of the Pentateuch, the book of Exodus. In Exodus chapter 20:2-4, YHWH says to the people: "I am the Lord your God... You shall not have other gods besides me. You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth" (Ex 20:2-4). John is aware of the fact that images cannot give a clear idea about God because God is incomprehensible. No human experiences, nothing that man can carve, mould or conceive, can approach the reality of the incomprehensible God. (cf. A 3.12.1). John also makes reference to texts such as, "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side has revealed him" (Jn 1:18), "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9; Is 64:4).⁹⁰ And in "The Spiritual Canticle", he will cry out, "Where have you hidden", a cry which recalls a quote from Isaiah 45:15, "Truly with you, God is hidden".⁹¹ From this text, we see that John is conscious of God's hiddenness and presence in Christ (cf. A 2.8.4).

We can say therefore that in the New Testament, God reveals himself in Jesus Christ which means that to find God, we must see him through Christ, for he says: "I

⁹⁰ Cf. C. THOMPSON, *St. John of the Cross*, 239.

⁹¹ Cf. G. GAUCHER, *John and Thérèse: Flames of Love*, 108; cf. C. THOMPSON, *St. John of the Cross*, 110.

am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6).

The Fathers and the tradition of the church teaches that in the historical Jesus, divinity is no longer hidden, but is seen clearly in the humble life of Jesus of Nazareth though Christ himself is a mystery.⁹² But it is paradoxical to say that God is revealed in Christ, yet remains hidden. He remains hidden in the innermost recess of the soul as John will also point out.⁹³ The Catholic tradition has maintained this point that: “In the incarnation, divine nature is made known – brought out of hiding... in the lowly humanity of Jesus. What is plainly disclosed here can come to be known without ceasing thereby to be mysterious”.⁹⁴ The point here is that God has made himself known and has shown us the way to find him, which is through his Son Jesus Christ, through the life, person, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2.2.1 A God Who is Hidden in Suffering

Several theologians have tried to explain the idea of a God who is hidden in suffering, and the best image to illustrate this is the cross of Christ. The background to this understanding is the Gospel of John where we see that it was on the cross that the true identity of Christ as a glorified God is revealed. Likewise in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, we see that it was beneath the cross that the centurion acclaimed him as Son of God (cf. Mk 15:39; Mt 27:54). The theology of the cross that is taught by several theologians tries to understand God as hidden in suffering.⁹⁵ Reflections on passages

⁹² Cf. B. HUNTER, “Incarnation and the Divine Hiddenness Debate”, 259.

⁹³ Cf. G. GAUCHER, *John and Thérèse: Flames of Love*, 108

⁹⁴ B. HUNTER, “Divine Hiddenness”, 259

⁹⁵ Cf. D. J. PETERSON, “Speaking of God after the Death of God”, 208.

such as these have led scholars to emphasize a theology of the cross as a way of “knowing God which begins with God’s paradoxical revelation [of his] hiddenness in the cross and human suffering”.⁹⁶

Theologians like Paul Tillich identifies this paradox as the “law of contrast . . . [where] power in weakness, glory in suffering, and life in death show how hidden [God] is”.⁹⁷ Can we therefore say that God, though present, remains hidden to us when we suffer? This also depends on how we understand and react to the sufferings that come our way. Some people take suffering as a message or discipline, and see it as an occasion to adjust their lives. Some others respond to their sufferings by turning to God or to alcohol, drugs and other activities.⁹⁸ Let us consider how people looked at suffering in the Scriptures and in the teaching of the church.

2.3 Understanding of Suffering in the Scriptures

In the Old Testament, there is no specific vocabulary that indicates “suffering”. Man is said to be suffering “whenever he experiences any kind of evil” (*SD*, 7). Suffering and evil are inseparable in the Old Testament. It is the New Testament writers that will distinguish suffering from evil by introducing “the verb *πασχει* ‘I am affected by . . . I experience a feeling, I suffer’. With the introduction of this verb, suffering is no longer directly identifiable with (objective) evil, but expresses a situation in which man experiences evil and in doing so becomes the subject of suffering” (*SD*, 7). The Bible presents us with varied understandings of suffering. I will briefly discuss some of this.

⁹⁶ D. J. PETERSON, “God after the Death”, 208.

⁹⁷ D. J. PETERSON, “God after the Death”, 209.

⁹⁸ Cf. D.H. HARRINGTON, *Why Do We Suffer?*, 2.

a) *Suffering as Divine Punishment and Retribution*

“Punishment” is a concept that conveys the idea that an individual can be subjected to ongoing retribution for evil acts committed. The theme of retribution is common in the Book of Proverbs as in Proverbs chapter 11: “The honesty of the upright guides them; the faithless are ruined by their duplicity” (Prv 11:3). This proverb is based on three contrasts: “integrity” versus “crookedness”, “upright” versus “treacherous”, and “guide” versus “destroy”.⁹⁹ Retribution can mean the punishment of the individual offender in the form of poverty, sickness and death, or on the whole society in form of plague, drought, or defeat in battle.¹⁰⁰ Genesis chapters 1, 2 and 3 assert the fact that at creation, God intended the world to be a good place. However the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve opened the door to pain and suffering for all humanity and to the entire creation itself (cf. Gn 3:14-19). It was human beings that brought pain and suffering and as such they must bear the responsibility for the pain and suffering.¹⁰¹ The story of the fall therefore became the basic cause for the presence of suffering in the world.

Before the time of the prophets, the common belief was that the sin of an individual member of the community could bring punishment and suffering to the entire society. “If the punishment does not come directly on the head of the offender, it will nevertheless work itself out eventually in the life of one’s children or grandchildren”.¹⁰² It was the prophets who brought out a personal dimension to suffering and the idea of a personal responsibility. The great prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and

⁹⁹ D.H. HARRINGTON, *Why Do We Suffer?*, 18.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. R. WESTBROOK, “Punishments and Crimes”, 548.

¹⁰¹ Cf. D. J. SIMUNDSON, “Suffering”, 220.

¹⁰² D. J. SIMUNDSON, “Suffering”, 220.

Ezekiel identified that there is a necessary connection between sin and punishment. The prophet Ezekiel challenges those who subscribe to the idea that the children have to pay for the sins of their fathers. Ezekiel confirms that only “the one who sins shall die!” (cf. Ez 18:4). Ezekiel declares that everyone is accountable for his or her own conduct. No one has to pay or suffer for the offence or the sin of another. Hence individual suffering comes as a result of one’s sin, and not as a result of the sin of others.¹⁰³

What then do we say of those who suffer for no committed offence, like Job? Are they being punished unjustly? The basic question underlying Psalm 73 is, “How can a good God allow the righteous to suffer?”¹⁰⁴ Is it possible that John of the Cross could have thought that he was being punished unjustly while he was being imprisoned and tortured?

The suffering of the innocent and the prosperity of the wicked is an issue that troubled the people of the Old Testament and continues to trouble present day Christians. We find the book of Job dealing explicitly with this issue.¹⁰⁵ The purpose of the book of Job is to explore the theme of innocent suffering and the different attempts at explaining it.¹⁰⁶ In an attempt to interpret Job’s suffering, his three friends accused him of committing a sin against God, claiming that this has brought him great suffering. In Job chapters 4 and 5 Eliphaz, one of Job’s friends reaffirms the law of retribution with regards to individual human beings: “Surely impatience kills the fool and indignation slays the simpleton” (Jb 5:2). The friends of Job believed that a just God rules in the world. Such awful things would not happen to Job unless he was deserving

¹⁰³ Cf. D. J. SIMUNDSON “Suffering”, 221-222.

¹⁰⁴ R.L. DEFFINBAUGH, “Psalm 73”, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. R.L. DEFFINBAUGH, “Psalm 73”, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. D.H. HARRINGTON, *Why Do We Suffer?*, 33.

of them.¹⁰⁷ But Job refuses agree with the answers presented by his three companions. Job is convinced of his innocence, and he expects God to deliver him and he actually does (cf. Jb 9:20-24, 16:6-17; 19:5-13). Job's friends were being influenced by the predominant theology of suffering and a God of justice: "Humans sin and God executes justice".¹⁰⁸

When we ask the question, "How can a good God allow the righteous to suffer?", we seem to be suggesting that: "...suffering is always evil and therefore irreconcilable with God's goodness"¹⁰⁹ but psalm 73 urges us to reconsider our definition of good, "lest we accuse God of being the author of evil by allowing us to suffer".¹¹⁰ The psalmist declares faith in a God who is good and almighty and is able to reflect on the positive effects of his sufferings. He is able to see that: "... affliction, while unpleasant, had the beneficial effect of drawing him closer to God".¹¹¹

John of the Cross refers to this psalm 73 in his work. In the "Spiritual Canticle", he quotes this psalm when he referred to the suffering the soul endures as a result of the absence of the beloved: "The pain and sorrow I ordinarily suffer in your absence was not enough for me, but having inflicted on me a deeper wound of love with your arrow, and increasing my desire to see you, you flee as swiftly as the stag and do not let yourself be captured even for a moment" (C 1.16). This wound inflames the soul with the fire of love for God and draws it closer to God and as such it is called a wound of love (cf. C 1.17). This fire inflames and transforms the soul as the psalmist says: "Since my heart was embittered and my soul deeply wounded, I was stupid and could not

¹⁰⁷ Cf. D.H. HARRINGTON, *Why Do We Suffer?*, 36.

¹⁰⁸ D. J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 223.

¹⁰⁹ R.L. DEFFINBAUGH, "Psalm 73", 1.

¹¹⁰ R.L. DEFFINBAUGH, "Psalm 73", 1.

¹¹¹ R.L. DEFFINBAUGH, "Psalm 73", 3.

understand; I was like a brute beast in your presence. Yet I am always with you... With your counsel you guide me, and at the end receive me with honour” (Ps 73: 21-24; cf. C 1.17). In *The Dark Night*, John also refers to this psalm while still speaking of the increased longing for God that is caused by this fire of love, “Fired with love’s urgent longing”. As this fire increases, the more the soul becomes attracted and it longs urgently for God as the psalmist says: “Since my heart was embittered and my soul deeply wounded” (Ps 73: 21; cf. N 1.11.1). From these references, I can say that John sees that suffering can have a positive effect as the psalmist earlier did.

In Jesus we see a total overhauling and rejection of the Old Testament understanding of suffering as punishment and direct consequence of sin. Jesus’ words in Luke 13:1-5,¹¹² highlight the point that suffering is not always as a result of sinfulness. This point is also clear in the story of the man who was born blind (cf. Jn 9). In these stories, Jesus rejects the Jewish understanding of suffering as punishment for sin.¹¹³ However, the New Testament does not completely reject the idea that those who do evil will eventually be punished at the end.

While the notion of suffering as divine punishment still influences some present day Christians, some prominent biblical scholars have cautioned against such an understanding. They argue that the doctrine of divine retribution “places inappropriate severe limits upon God’s power”.¹¹⁴ Still others are of the opinion that such a doctrine

¹¹² “At that time some people who were present there told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He said to them in reply, ‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did’” (Lk 13: 1-5).

¹¹³ Cf. D. J. SIMUNDSON, “Suffering”, 224.

¹¹⁴ B. L. WHITNEY, *What Are They Saying about God and Evil?*, 24.

gives a wrong idea of God as “one who continually intervenes in worldly affairs to reward the good and punish evil-doers”.¹¹⁵ This surely is proved not to be the case as we have seen that the wicked are not always punished; rather the innocent suffers on certain occasions.

b) Suffering for Others: A Redemptive Work and a Path to Faith

Redemptive work is the act of “making safe, rescuing: a comprehensive term for being delivered from personal or collective suffering and evil”.¹¹⁶ According to McKenzie in his *Dictionary of the Bible*, the Hebrew word for “redeem” and “ransom” primarily means the “payment of a sum for the release of a person or object which is held in detention”.¹¹⁷ The word “redemption” is used in this sense to describe the saving act of God to his people, such as the liberation from Egypt and from the Babylonian exile. In this sense, “Redemption is a work of Yahweh’s power (Dt 15:15) or of His love (Ps 44: 27)”.¹¹⁸

As the Israelites lamented their suffering in the Babylonian exile, Second-Isaiah comes with a message of hope and faith in God, telling the people that their suffering is only for a while. While affirming that Judah’s suffering to some extent was a consequence of their sin, he nevertheless introduces a positive attitude to suffering. “If the people have the faith to see it, they may discover that their suffering is part of God’s work in the world. They are God’s witnesses (cf. Isa. 43:9-10), called to be a light to the

¹¹⁵ B. L. WHITNEY, *Saying about God*, 24.

¹¹⁶ *THE AFRICAN BIBLE*, “Salvation,” 2229.

¹¹⁷ J. L. MCKENZIE, “Redemption”, 723.

¹¹⁸ J. L. MCKENZIE, “Redemption”, 724.

nations (cf. Isa. 42:6 and 49:6)".¹¹⁹ From this perspective, we could see the author of Second-Isaiah attempting to change the negative mentality of viewing "suffering only as punishment to a more hopeful, future-oriented understanding. God will work some greater good for others out of the suffering of the faithful".¹²⁰ This shift in mentality that Second-Isaiah tries to introduce will be better appropriated by the New Testament Christians in the light of the redemptive work of Christ.

The early Christians taught that Christ's redeeming death is the Father's full and decisive response to human suffering and its causes. Though sin has made humanity the enemies of God, God did not abandon us to suffer. Rather he sent his only Son to redeem us so as to restore us to his original plan of sharing in his divine union (cf. Eph 1:3-14). Thus the suffering and death of Christ on the cross was for a good purpose which is our redemption. Just as in the Old Testament where redemption was perceived as the work of Yahweh, the New Testament uses "redemption" as "a technical term for the saving work of Jesus".¹²¹ John of the Cross sees the redemption of the soul as the work of Christ who like a good shepherd, pardons, searches and brings the soul back to himself (C 23. 1-3).

The suffering of Christ is in this sense given a redemptive and sacrificial character. This is clearly expressed in the Letter to the Hebrews, where the author teaches that Christ offered the sacrifice of himself once and for all to redeem mankind from sin, death and punishment (cf. Heb 9-10). This clearly shows that in the New Testament suffering can have a positive purpose or outcome. It shows that suffering can

¹¹⁹ D. J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 222.

¹²⁰ D. J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 222.

¹²¹ J. L. MCKENZIE, "Redemption", 724.

be for the good of others or for even the redemption and benefit of the victim. As Daniel Simundson puts it:

The benefit of the suffering might fall on the sufferers themselves rather than on other persons. Though suffering is, by definition, negative, it is still possible to receive some personal benefits from such an experience. As Paul says, it is even possible to rejoice in one's suffering, looking back and realizing that lessons have been learned, that humility has been realized, that hope has met response, and that God's reassuring presence has been with the sufferer even in the depth of suffering.¹²²

Thus suffering for others or for oneself could be a vocation or "a calling for a Christian. Just as Jesus died for others, so should Christians be willing to suffer for the good of others and the spreading of the gospel".¹²³

In Jesus we see the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Suffering Servant of YHWH, the prophecy that YHWH will finally redeem his people through his servant. And in him we also see that the innocent could suffer for no sin of their own.

It is the resurrection of Christ that changes the Christian understanding of suffering. In the resurrection of Jesus, his disciples are able to understand that Jesus was unjustly condemned, that the innocent could suffer unjustly, and that suffering or death does not have the final victory. Thus in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, we see the complete self-revelation of God, God's hidden nature. Speaking from the perspective of God the Father, John of the Cross will say:

If I have already told you all things in my Word, my Son, and if I have no other word, what answer or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? Fasten your eyes on him alone because in him I have spoken and revealed all and in him you will discover even more than you ask for and desire. You are making an appeal for locutions and revelations that are incomplete, but if you turn your eyes to him you will find them complete. For he is my entire locution and response, vision and revelation, which I have already spoken, answered, manifested, and revealed to you by giving him to you as a brother, companion, master, ransom, and reward. (A 2. 22.5)

¹²² D. J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 225

¹²³ D. J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 225.

God has fully revealed himself in his Son; though he appears to be absent while his only Son suffers, the resurrection now proves that he was present all along even on the cross.¹²⁴ The cross is no longer viewed as the curse of God or the absence of God, but the way to glory, first for Christ, then for all Christians (cf. Gal 3:13).

This idea of redemptive suffering and suffering for others is seen by many scholars as the most convincing argument offered by Christianity to the problem of suffering. Influenced by the passages from Isaiah 40-55, in particular, the song of the Suffering Servant, and by the life of Jesus Christ, several New Testament writings present the view that: “our suffering may be part of God’s work in the world to do some greater good for other people”.¹²⁵ Thus when we suffer, we are sharing in the suffering and redemptive work of Christ. We need to have faith like that of Job that God is still with us in our suffering.

This view has encouraged Christians to bear their suffering patiently, yet it may not have completely solved the problem of suffering. The bone of contention here is whether God causes suffering for the purpose of redemption or for whatever purpose. In the time of Jesus and the early Christians like Paul and the martyrs (who suffered for the spreading of the Gospel), the validity of the theory was clearer than it is for our present world. Simundson points out that it is no longer obvious that: “Most human suffering has a potential value for others”.¹²⁶ Such an understanding of suffering, he argues, would be unrealistic to propose in our present situation.

¹²⁴ Cf. C. OHLRICH, *The Suffering God*, 69.

¹²⁵ B. L. WHITNEY, *Saying about God*, 25.

¹²⁶ D. SIMUNDSON, *Faith under Fire*, 131.

c) *Suffering as the Path to Glory and Heavenly Compensation*

The idea of a reward after this life is one of the most popular means that Christians have used to explain the unjust situations of suffering. Biblical scholars trace this mentality back to the Old Testament apocalyptic writers. This was later taken up by the New Testament writers.¹²⁷

In order to encourage fellow Christians, early Christian writers drawing from the suffering of Christ, concentrated on two areas of encouragement to those who were suffering: First, they should be assured that no matter how severely they are treated in this life, the promise of resurrection is there for them. If Jesus rose from the dead, then surely the followers of Christ will also be raised on the judgement day into new life (1 Cor 15).¹²⁸ Secondly, they reassured one another that God can draw good even out of suffering. “God permits suffering to the saint only to work for him an eternal weight of glory. No one ever becomes saint without suffering because suffering, properly accepted, is the pathway to glory.”¹²⁹ Our Scripture tell us how God used some of the foreign kings like Babylonian and Assyrian rulers to bring about his own plans. Paul speaks of God using the stubbornness of Pharaoh to show his glory (cf. Rom 9:17). Our point is not that God allows suffering just for the purpose of showing his glory, but first because he wants to allow the natural causal system to operate, while giving room for personal freedom. Secondly, he permits suffering so as to reawaken us from our nonchalant attitude towards self-preservation.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Cf. D. SIMUNDSON, *Faith under Fire*, 132.

¹²⁸ Cf. D. J. SIMUNDSON, “Suffering”, 224.

¹²⁹ P. BILLHEIMER, *Don't Waste Your Sorrows*, 27.

¹³⁰ Cf. J. T. MURPHREE, *A Loving God and a Suffering World*, 109-110.

This does not imply that God allows suffering for the sake of promoting his own agenda for us. But the point is that once suffering surfaces, God does not delay nor hesitate to use that suffering our good and for his glory. What is good in suffering is not the suffering in itself, but its benefits which I shall highlight in chapter four of this work.¹³¹ In *The Ascent*, John of the Cross makes reference to glory that will be enjoyed in the life after as a result of the many temporal goods that we have denied ourselves (cf. A 3.26.8).

Some scholars have argued that though this teaching helps Christians to strengthen their belief in a life of glory hereafter, it is not clear how our present suffering can “be vindicated or ‘made right’ in the afterlife”.¹³² This has led some other theologians to argue that the glory in heaven should not be understood “as compensation for evil and suffering, but rather as a fulfilment, a bringing to fruition of the spiritual perfection of human beings”.¹³³

2.4 Understanding of Suffering in the Teaching of the Church’s Magisterium

Following the Scriptures, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that God created everything good. Even our first parents, Adam and Eve were created in an “original state of holiness and justice”. They were created in a state of intimate friendship and harmony with God and all creatures. In this original state of his being, “man would not have to suffer or die”, he would enjoy complete harmony, happiness and joy with God (CCC 374-376).

¹³¹ Cf. J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 110.

¹³² Cf. B. L. WHITNEY, *Saying about God*, 26.

¹³³ B. L. WHITNEY, *Saying about God*, 26-27.

This harmony was lost by the sin of our first parents and this brought about a disharmony in creation. It brought about suffering and death. As St. Paul rightly puts it: “Therefore, just as through one person sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned...” (Rom 5:12). St. Augustine is of the opinion that God did not create nor desire evil; rather it is to be seen as the “privation of good”, brought into existence by humans.¹³⁴

So from the Catholic point of view, I could say that suffering and death, and the evils we experience in this life, have their origin in the sin of Adam, sin which has been transmitted to us his children and whose consequence is suffering, and the “death of the soul” (CCC 403). Some contemporary theologians would say that without sin, death and suffering might still have been there (it is hard to imagine truly human existence without a nervous system and a capacity to feel pain) but that it would have had a different meaning for us. That notwithstanding, we have to consider how the church wants us as individuals to understand and cope with this reality of suffering.

a) Suffering Can Make Us Repent

The church teaches us that though God is not the source of suffering, he allows it so as to bring to our consciousness the reality of our sin, death, emptiness without God, or to help us repent and turn back to God. This was what Pope John Paul II was trying to put across when he said that: “Suffering must serve for conversion, that is, for the rebuilding of goodness in the subject, who can recognize the divine mercy in this call to repentance” (*SD*, 12). This point is clearly seen in the story of the prodigal son

¹³⁴ Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, 3.7. in *Confessions*, trans., R. S. PINE-COFFIN, 63.

whom the father allowed to go to a distant country, only for him to realize his nothingness and miserable state without his father. Thus his suffering made him realize the importance of his father and return to him (cf. Lk 15: 11-32).

When we suffer, God has good reasons for allowing it, which is to draw greater good from it.¹³⁵ This does not mean that God allows suffering solely because he has a good reason for doing so; rather it means that when suffering occurs, God looks for a way to turn it to our benefit. One such reason and benefit could be to make us turn back to him and to make us recognize that he is still present to us. This is what *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* means when it says that illness and suffering “can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him” (CCC 1501).

But we can also develop a negative attitude towards our sufferings, in which case, instead of leading us to God, they harden our hearts and draw us away from God, as *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes clear: “Every illness [suffering] can make us glimpse death. Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God” (CCC 1500-1501). In this sense, suffering becomes a test of whether we are willing to stay close to God or to run away from him. Suffering in this sense becomes a test of how much we will make our suffering a salvific suffering or a test of how much we will to complete in our flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. If we endure the suffering, then like St. Paul, we will rejoice because we have given a salvific meaning to our own suffering (cf. *SD*, 1).

¹³⁵ Cf. B. L. WHITNEY, *Saying about God*, 31.

b) *Suffering as a Test to Make Us Recognize God's "Hidden" Presence*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that our faith in God the Father can be put to the test by the sufferings and evil that we experience in our daily lives. This is so because suffering can make us think sometimes that God has abandoned us or that he is absent from us. But in reality God is even closer to us as he was to his Son when he was being crucified. To our human minds, "God can sometimes seem to be absent and incapable of stopping evil. But in the most mysterious way God the Father has revealed his almighty power in the voluntary humiliation and Resurrection of his Son, by which he conquered evil" (CCC 272).

In the story of Job, which I already made reference to, we see that God can allow us to be tested by Satan to demonstrate our faith, sincere love and commitment to him (cf. Jb 1:6-12). To deal with this test, we need to allow ourselves to be guided by our faith and hope "that nothing is impossible with God" because he is all powerful and almighty (CCC, 274). If we are able to meet this test, then our suffering becomes for us a means of growing in holiness.

c) *Suffering as a Means to Help Us Mature in Holiness*

It is true that in much of the Old Testament, suffering is seen as punishment for sin, an idea that Jesus and the magisterium of the church do not completely subscribe to. There are times when suffering can be a punishment for sin, but not always. Of course, there can be cases of physical sufferings resulting from a reckless lifestyle. But rather

than seeing suffering as punishment, the church sees it more as a form of discipline, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews indicates in Hebrews chapter 12.¹³⁶

St. Thomas commented on this passage that: “All the saints who have pleased God have passed through many tribulations, by which they were made the sons of God” (AQUINAS, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 678).¹³⁷ If all the saints of the church have been subjected to suffering, it means that the church sets them as examples of disciplined life to us all and she uses their lives to teach us that as children of God, we should expect sufferings in our Christian journey, believing that God will draw good out of our suffering situations. One such good can be to make us grow in our state of life and in holiness. When suffering is seen as a form of discipline in holiness, then the Christian can willingly offer up his suffering with the sufferings of Christ, as St. Paul writes to the Romans: “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). In this way, suffering becomes redemptive.

d) *Suffering as Participation in Christ’s Redemptive Work and a Sharing in His Glory*

It is the teaching of the Catholic Church that our suffering is an opportunity given to us to share or participate in the saving work of Christ and to partake in his

¹³⁶ “My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; For whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges. Endure your trials as ‘discipline’; God treats you as sons. For what ‘son’ is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards. Besides this, we have had our earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not (then) submit all the more to the Father of spirits and live? They disciplined us for a short time as seemed right to them, but he does so for our benefit, in order that we may share his holiness. At that time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it” (Heb 12:5-11).

¹³⁷ F.R. LARCHER, “Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews by Thomas Aquinas”, CD-Rom.

eternal glory. St. Gregory the Great thinks that our suffering is a sign of God's love for us and a preparation for an eternal reward in heaven. Thus when things are going on smoothly for us here on earth, we should be more concerned than when we suffer, lest we receive our rewards here on earth. This for him is how the Christian mind thinks because of the mysterious nature of God's justice. Thus he writes:

And so the saints, by hope of the ultimate end of eternal happiness, chose affliction and poverty over riches and pleasures, because by them they would have been hindered from attaining the end they hoped: 'Blessed are you when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you,' and he continues: 'Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven' (Mt. 5:11). Though, the appointments of God are very much hidden from sight, why it is that in this life it is sometimes ill with the good and well with the wicked, yet they are then still more mysterious when it both goes well with the good here below, and ill with the wicked... But when it is well with the good here and ill with the wicked, it is very doubtful, whether the good for this reason receive good things, that they may be set forward and advance to something better, or whether by a just and secret appointment they receive here the reward of their deeds, that they may prove void of the rewards of the life to come... Therefore, because in the midst of the divine appointments the human mind is closed in by the great darkness of its uncertainty, holy men, when they see this world's prosperity to be their lot, are disquieted with fearful misgivings. For they fear lest they should receive here the fruits of their labours. They fear lest Divine Justice should see in them a secret wound, and in loading them with external blessings should withhold them from the interior... And hence it is that holy men are in greater dread of prosperity in this world than of adversity (St. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Moralia in Job, Bk 5, Introduction*).¹³⁸

It was their greater hope of eternal reward that made the martyrs of the church rejoice even in their sufferings. They saw their suffering as an opportunity to grow in holiness and love of God which in turn stores up treasures for them in heaven. This means that for a typical Catholic, suffering is an opportunity for "meriting" the Kingdom of God, as Pope John Paul II says: Thus to share in the sufferings of Christ is, at the same time, to suffer for the Kingdom of God. In the eyes of the just God, before his judgment, those who share in the suffering of Christ become worthy of this

¹³⁸ GREGORY THE GREAT, "Moralia in Job" in *Lectionary Central*, 1.

Kingdom. Through their sufferings, in a certain sense they repay the infinite price of the Passion and death of Christ, which became the price of our redemption (*SD*, 21).

This implies that because we are joined with Christ, the church teaches that our sufferings are also joined with his and we participate in the redemption he accomplished and also in his resurrection. This is as John Paul II writes: “Those who share in the sufferings of Christ preserve in their own sufferings a very special particle of the infinite treasure of the world’s Redemption, and can share this treasure with others” (*SD*, 27). This means that we are called to share in the suffering of Christ and this in turns makes our own sufferings redemptive suffering. Thus when we suffer, we are redeeming humanity alongside Christ. John Paul II develops this point when he says:

In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed... Every man has his own share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ (*SD*, 19).

It is this mentality that makes Catholics (saints and martyrs) have a positive disposition towards human suffering. And John Paul II witnesses to it as he suffered towards the end of his life here on earth.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown the evolution in the understanding of suffering in Scriptures and in the teaching of the church. From the Scriptures, we have seen that the Hebrew people take suffering seriously; they see it as a consequence of one’s sin. Helped by the prophets and wisdom literature, they gradually moved from viewing

suffering as something totally negative to the understanding that it could also be positive. They discover the “purifying value of suffering, like that of the fire which separates metal from its dross”.¹³⁹ Thus they went beyond seeing suffering only as a means of retribution and punishment to seeing it as something beneficial to the human person and also as a test. By faith and hope in the plan of God, suffering becomes a very high test, which God reserves for his faithful ones in order to see their commitment and love for him, as we see in Job’s case. For the Hebrew people, this marked the end of viewing suffering only in a negative light.¹⁴⁰

Starting with the Old Testament idea of suffering as punishment, the New Testament goes beyond to bring out the idea of redemptive suffering seen as the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Suffering servant of YHWH and a sharing in the glory of Christ in the life hereafter. Jesus Christ makes suffering blessed. He teaches us that there is no love without suffering; and no self-giving without pain.¹⁴¹ In Christ, suffering becomes a means to divine union. It becomes a blessing, for it prepares man to welcome the kingdom; it allows for “the works of God to be made visible” (Jn 9:3), “for the glory of God, and that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (Jn 11:4).¹⁴²

The teaching of the Catholic Church takes this up and sees human suffering as a participation in the redemptive work of Christ. In this sense, human suffering takes on a redemptive dimension. Suffering is no longer viewed only negatively but also as something potentially positive and this makes the saints and martyrs of the church

¹³⁹ St. John of the Cross will later take up this image in his writing to describe the effect of God’s impact on the soul.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. X. LEON-DUFOUR, “Suffering”, 516.

¹⁴¹ P. BILLHEIMER, *Sorrows*, 36.

¹⁴² X. LEON-DUFOUR, “Suffering”, 517.

rejoice even in their sufferings for they are a means to their glorification with Christ in heaven.

Suffering therefore has become a necessary condition for Christian glorification. In order to be glorified with Christ, we must also suffer or be crucified with him. We are to carry everywhere and always in our body the suffering of the death of Jesus. When we suffer with him, we shall also rejoice with him in this world and in the world to come.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Cf. X. LEON-DUFOUR, "Suffering", 518.

Chapter III

A Hidden God and the Theology of Love and Suffering in the Works of St. John of the Cross

3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of John's message is to demonstrate and to reveal to us the God of love. This God of love is the God who did not spare his Son Jesus Christ, but gave him up to die for us on the cross (cf. Jn 3:16-17). So for John, it is extremely important to come to the knowledge and presence of this God, the God of love, a love that burns and purifies us through pains and suffering and eventually leads us to ultimate union with God. This idea is clear in John's writings as I shall illustrate.

As a Carmelite, John of the Cross shared deeply in the biblical heritage of the Carmelite tradition. Little wonder then that the book which he cherished most was the Scripture. And José Vicente Rodríguez will refer to him as a man of the Bible as already pointed out in chapter one of this essay. The Scriptures therefore were the foundation of all that he wrote. Consequently his doctrine on love and suffering was an attempt to internalize and appropriate the teachings of the Scriptures.

John of the Cross was aware of the observation I made in chapter two of this essay, concerning the Old Testament perception of suffering as something negative.

However, he did not stop at such an interpretation. He went further to discover in the book of Isaiah the redemptive aspect of suffering, and a figure of Christ in the suffering servant of YHWH. St. John of the Cross saw in Christ's own suffering and death for all humankind – which was an act of perfect love to his Father – the most suitable interpretation of suffering. It was in Christ's paschal mystery that he discovered the real meaning of suffering: suffering as redemptive and a path to glory and union with the Hidden God.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to show that John's idea of suffering is suffering for the sake of love and union with God and also to show that this union with God is achieved after several periods of purification.

To do this, I will look at John's idea of God as a Hidden Lover, and how this hiddenness makes the soul suffer and long for him. Then I will look at the several stages of purification that the soul has to undergo in order to be united with God. In this, we will realize that suffering sometimes purifies us and prepares us to meet the Lord and enjoy his glory.

3.2 God's Hiddenness in John's Writings

John's teaching on the hiddenness of God can be seen in his strong advice to beginners in the spiritual journey on how to make use of images in prayer. Though John is aware of the value and importance of these images for beginners, he does not seem to be supportive of their usage. For him, "People who are truly devout direct their devotion mainly to the invisible" (A 3.35.5). When images are properly used, however, they may

not constitute any danger. That is why John tells us that images should be used in such a way that they do not prevent or hinder our journey to the true spiritual God.

In actual fact, no image can truly represent the reality of God because he transcends all our images and concepts about him. “Creatures, earthly or heavenly, and all distinct ideas and images, natural and supernatural, that can be the objects of a person's faculties, are incomparable and unproportioned to God's being” (A 3.12.1). As E. Allison Peers points out, John “restores, to a world which had nearly lost it, a sense of the transcendence of Almighty God”.¹⁴⁴ The point is that John emphasises divine hiddenness while still being conscious of divine presence.

In this first stanza of “The Spiritual Canticle”, the soul suffers and feels wounded by the love of his beloved and longs to be united with him. But the beloved remains hidden from all human knowledge, for no amount of our knowledge can fully grasp the mystery of God as John points out using the text from Job “Should he come near, I do not see him; should he pass by, I am not aware of him” (Jb 9:11). This means that no matter how much we claim to know God, there is still an aspect of him which remains hidden (cf. C 1.3). That is why he is God and not man. Lyddon says: “If God is truly God and not a being made by us in our own image, there will always be areas of mystery which have not yet been opened to us”.¹⁴⁵ In other words, what we don't know of God is infinite, and infinitely more than what we know of him.

¹⁴⁴ E. A. PEERS, *Spirit of Flame: A Study of St. John of the Cross*, 163.

¹⁴⁵ E. Lyddon, *Door Through Darkness: John of the Cross and the Mysticism in Everyday Life*, 159.

3.2.1 *God As a Hidden Lover*

In the “Spiritual Canticle” the bride feels her beloved is hidden from her and she goes out in search of him. She is in love with a hidden God, and so cries out, “Where have you hidden Beloved” (C1).¹⁴⁶ Even though God is hidden, the bride still sees him as her Beloved. “If by chance you see him I love most, tell him I am sick, I suffer, and I die” (C2). Being filled with anxiety and afraid of losing her beloved, she renounces everything except the pursuit of love and profound union. She is aware that as long as she is in this earthly life, God will remain hidden.¹⁴⁷

John teaches us that sometimes we can have a wrong perception of God’s presence. “Neither the sublime communication nor the sensible awareness of his nearness is a sure testimony of his gracious presence, nor are dryness and the lack of these a reflection of his absence” (C 1.3). As much as we may desire to be united with God, we can never fully achieve that in this world; God will always be hidden to the soul in this our pilgrim state. In this search for the beloved, the soul should be aware that God is primary actor, drawing us to divine life.¹⁴⁸ “In the first place it should be known that if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more” (F 3.28). God comes to us and inflames our hearts with love and then hides himself, leaving us with painful longings of love.¹⁴⁹

As the soul yearns for God, it begins to feel the presence of God in created things. He reveals himself in different ways, in creation, in persons and in events of life,

¹⁴⁶ In describing the journey toward union, and using nuptial imagery, John imagines the soul as feminine and God or Jesus as the bridegroom.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. L. DOOHAN, “Reflections on some Key Concepts in the Spiritual Canticle”, 1.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. GABRIEL OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE, *Union with God*, 18-19.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. L. DOOHAN, “Key Concepts”, 1.

but the beloved seems to be hidden all the more, and to abandon the soul who is longing for completeness and union. This partial feeling of the presence of God in creatures, “inflames the soul and leave her aware that God is really still more hidden than revealed”.¹⁵⁰ She welcomes his communications, but he still will always be somehow hidden “until God introduces her into his divine splendors through transformation of love... In the meanwhile, like Job, she exclaims over and over: *Who will grant me to know him and find him and come unto his throne?*” (C 13.1). According to John, the reason the soul suffers this much in her desire for God is that she is drawing nearer to him and has an experience of what his absence is like (C 13.1).¹⁵¹

One question that comes to mind at this point is, where is God hidden, where do we find him and why or for what purpose is he hidden? In the *Spiritual Canticle*, John gives us some clues as to where God is hidden and where to find him. God is hidden and could be found in the following places which are drawn from Doohan’s “Key Concepts: The Hiddenness of God”:

- We can find God in the revelation of the Son. “The Son is the only delight of the Father, who rests nowhere else nor is present in any other than in his beloved Son” (C. 1.5).
- God as Trinity is hidden and disclosed in the depths of our own hearts. “It should be known that the Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden by his essence and his presence in the innermost being of the soul” (C. 1.6). God is hidden within us, not outside us; “you yourself are his dwelling and his secret inner room and

¹⁵⁰ L. DOOHAN, “Key Concepts”, 1.

¹⁵¹ Cf. L. DOOHAN, “Key Concepts”, 2.

hiding place” (C. 1.7). This means that we should not search for him outside but inside of ourselves. As we already hinted above, nearness to God inflames greater love, reveals the Beloved, but reminds the soul that God is more hidden than revealed (cf. C 13.1). Even when the soul feels she is closer to the Beloved, she is told that she is not ready for union and receives glimpses and greater longings, but is still told to go back (cf. C 13.2). This means that no matter our own efforts, “God remains hidden, and we need to appreciate the need for purification, emptiness, and receptivity”.¹⁵²

- Sometimes, God lies hidden in the images we have of him, the communications we receive and our concepts of him. God is transcendent, that we must know. Thus we must “let God be who God wishes to be for us. While the full revelation of God only comes in the next life, God is within our hearts but hidden”.¹⁵³ This means that to find God, we must put aside all our self-made images of him and seek him as he truly is. “Sometimes God is hidden because we continue to look at our own false images of God. We must remove these false gods in the dark night. Clinging to our own knowledge, memories, and loves blocks a genuine revelation of God. Our knowledge impedes God’s self-revelation”.¹⁵⁴ This means we must be aware that what seem to be spiritual communications can be more our own images than who God

¹⁵² L. DOOHAN, “Key Concepts”, 2.

¹⁵³ L. DOOHAN, “Key Concepts”, 2.

¹⁵⁴ L. DOOHAN, “Key Concepts”, 3.

really is. Thus we must transcend the normal objects of the faculties – intellectual knowledge, memories, and limited desires (cf. C 1. 12-13).

- John tells us that God is hidden in faith. Thus we continue to seek him in faith, love, and unknowing, putting aside all our former concepts, images and ideas of him (cf. C 1. 10-11). Often, in John’s understanding, we can see better in darkness. “Only by means of faith, in divine light exceeding all understanding, does God manifest Himself to the soul” (A.2. 9.1).
- God remains hidden even in the touches of love that he gives to the soul; they communicate, reveal, and wound, but they hide, too. “The soul experiencing this love exclaims: ‘Why do you leave it so,’ that is, empty, hungry, alone, sorely wounded and sick with love” (C. 9.6). The soul goes on lamenting “Extinguish these miseries, since no one else can stamp them out.” In this touches of love, God both reveals and remains hidden. “The reason for this is that the love of God is the soul’s health, and the soul does not have full health until love is complete” (C. 11.11).¹⁵⁵
- Finally, I can also say that God remains hidden in our depressing misery and sufferings. Our suffering situations of hopelessness can hide our appreciation of God, “but God’s future, our hope, overwhelms and overcomes the misery and even gives meaning to what seems increasingly meaningless”.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Cf. L. DOOHAN, “Key Concepts”, 3.

¹⁵⁶ L. DOOHAN, “Key Concepts”, 3.

I have given some hints on the purpose of God's hiddenness, but I would like to explain further here.

3.2.2 *God Hiddenness Serves the Purpose of Deepening Faith*

John tells us that the lover went in search of her beloved at night, when she is left with nothing but faith. It suggests to us that the reason the beloved remains hidden is to allow the soul to seek him through faith. Faith is the means to reach God. This faith is a gift that one receives as one perseveres in the nights of purification. Faith is to propose to us the very nature of the hidden God.¹⁵⁷ Daniel Peterson will say that "God veils God-self under forms of contrast such as shame and suffering for the purpose of eliciting faith. Genuine faith trusts in God the most when it seems like God is most absent. God leads us to trust in God's hidden presence where we would least expect to find it [such as in suffering]".¹⁵⁸ God demands that we trust him greatly, that we have faith in him, and as such he hides to win our faith. "The hiddenness of God provides for a deeper relationship with God built entirely on trust".¹⁵⁹

So anyone who is determined to find God must be willing to take up his cross and go through the way of purification, pain and suffering (cf. Mk 7:14; Lk 14:33; Mt 16:24; A 2.7.2). Whoever wishes to find this hidden God, must take up his cross and journey through the narrow gate because "the cross is a supporting staff and greatly lightens and eases the journey" (A 2.7.7). This is the way that Jesus sets for us and John understands him to be the way to the knowledge of God. It requires going out of self,

¹⁵⁷ C. THOMPSON, *St. John of the Cross*, 193.

¹⁵⁸ D. J. PETERSON, "God after the Death of God", 209.

¹⁵⁹ D. J. PETERSON, "God after the Death of God", 209.

getting completely free and detached from all created things so as to seek the Beloved who remains hidden.¹⁶⁰

John's concept of faith is very interesting. We tend to think of "faith" in terms of the "articles of faith", which somehow "inform" us about God. By faith we believe that God is one in three persons, for example. So you have faith when you accept the creed. John does not deny this view (cf. A2.3.1). But for him, the theological virtue of faith has more to do with the purification of the intellect, allowing ourselves to be emptied of all our own notions, feelings and concepts, and to receive God's loving but dark self-communication.

This journey to seek the Beloved according to John must be made "in the night". By this he means that we must proceed on this journey in the darkness of faith and complete detachment, free from any desires for satisfaction. "A person must be liberated of them all however slight they be, in order to arrive at this complete union" (A 1.11.2).¹⁶¹ By "night", John means being guided by faith like a blind man being led by the hand, all along the road to union with God. "This road is faith, and for the intellect faith is also like a dark night" (A 1.2.1). We must allow ourselves to be liberated from our inappropriate desire. We must leave aside the idea of God we have constructed by ourselves and make way for "the true God who can only be encountered through naked faith".¹⁶²

Using the analogy of ordinary night, John explains to us the reality of the night of faith, which he "compared to midnight".¹⁶³ It is a night of total darkness in which

¹⁶⁰ Cf. N. CUMMINS, *Introduction*, 9.

¹⁶¹ Cf. H. BLOMMESTIJN, – al., ed., *The Footprints of Love*, 89-90.

¹⁶² H. BLOMMESTIJN, – al., ed., *The Footprints of Love*, 93.

¹⁶³ O. RODRIGUEZ, *Nightingale*, 58.

nothing at all is visible (cf. A 1.1.3). This dark night, a “journey toward union with God,” begins with a departure from the desires for “worldly possessions”, and is a journey of faith, which “is also like a dark night”. In the long run, the dark night is a journey into God for “God is also a dark night to the soul in this life” (A 1.2.1). These three nights are actually one night with three parts: early evening (twilight), midnight, and “very early dawn just before the break of day” (A 1.2.5).¹⁶⁴ When we have passed through these nights, “God supernaturally illumines the soul with the ray of his divine light. This light is the principle of the perfect union that follows after the third night” (A 2.2.1). With this explanation, John makes it clear that the journey to union with God is a journey that is done in faith. So to find this hidden God, we must proceed through faith and love. This is the way that Jesus teaches us as he had faith in his Father to vindicate him from his death on the cross.

3.3 A God Who Suffers on the Cross

John presents to us the person of Jesus Christ as a God who suffers for the sake of the love he has for us. This Jesus is God’s total gift of love to us. “When St. John speaks of the All and the Nothing, the All is Jesus Christ and everything else is nothing. God has given us everything in his Son, and Jesus Christ is the religious human being *par excellence*”.¹⁶⁵ Jesus as God became incarnate as a consequence of the Father’s love for us. Jesus lived in total submission to the will of the Father even to the point of dying on a cross.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Cf. K.J. EGAN, “Dark Night”, 255.

¹⁶⁵ M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 27.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 27.

It was Christ's desire to demonstrate his love for us that led him to the cross. When John and Teresa use the word "*Crucificado*", they refer to Jesus Christ, the Crucified One. He is the One who has received everything from the Father and that which he receives, he passes on to us. He receives love from the Father and this he passes on to us. Thus, "to follow the Crucified is to be a lover. I love with a love I received, for love comes from God, and I pass it on to my neighbour".¹⁶⁷

In book two of *The Ascent*, chapter seven, John presents to us the figure of the historical Jesus as one who lives a life of love. His cross is a visible sign of his love for us. Jesus carries the cross because of us. In the same way we are to carry our crosses for the sake of others. We are to suffer for love of the others. Love wants to please and seeks what is best for the other and the community and not for the self.¹⁶⁸

The popular image of St. John of the Cross is related to the texts already mentioned in the Synoptics which tell us to take up our cross in denial of self and follow Christ.¹⁶⁹ This is the way of love that Christ shows us. John affirms that the way of *Nada*, dispossession and detachment is the most secure road to the hidden God. It is a way of suffering that is united with the suffering of Christ. We see in the life of John that he suffered a lot, but when he speaks of suffering, he "never appeals to his own travail or agony, rather he appeals to the inner gospel, that is, to the experience of Christ himself as he brought forth our salvation".¹⁷⁰ In other words, Christ was John's model, "and it was in his cross that he learned the science of mystical theology".¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 28.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 28-29.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. N. CUMMINS, *Introduction*, 1.

¹⁷⁰ N. CUMMINS, *Introduction*, 5.

¹⁷¹ N. CUMMINS, *Introduction*, 5.

3.4 Suffering as Unifying and Purifying

The most significant point in the doctrine of John of the Cross is “*La Union, union with God*”.¹⁷² John sees the absolute goal of human life as perfect union with God resulting from a fully developed faith, hope and love. This union makes the person one with God, transforms the human faculties, enabling them to know and love in a divine manner.¹⁷³

John is described as someone who has only one goal in all his writings: union with God in love, and how to get there in the quickest possible way.¹⁷⁴ In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul*, John describes to us the path that a soul has to struggle through so as to reach perfect love and union with God who is hidden within it. If one is to achieve union with God, it is necessary to go through the nights of purification of both the senses and the spirit. These purifications are painful and entail suffering, but in the end, we are set right to encounter the One True God.¹⁷⁵ On this journey to unite with the Lord, one is required to undergo two purifications: the “active” and “passive” purifications. And because the human nature is twofold – sensory and spiritual components –, it is necessary to purify both components in an “active” and “passive” purifications.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 39.

¹⁷³ Cf. K. CULLIGAN, “Toward a Contemporary Model of Spiritual Direction”, 98-99.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 2.

¹⁷⁵ H. BLOMMESTIJN, – al., *The Footprints of Love*, 89.

¹⁷⁶ Purification is the process of eliminating all that prevents one from receiving into one's own life, the fullness of God's life. It may be either active or passive (cf. A 1.13.1). “The expression purgative way is applied to beginners; but the work of purification is brought to completion especially through the passive spiritual suffering of the dark night, which belongs to the illuminative way. The entire spiritual journey, however, is purifying, comprising God's communication and the human person's efforts to respond (cf. A 1.2.1)”. K. KAVANAUGH, “Glossary of Terms”, in *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 774.

John adopts the classic “three ways” and “three stages”: the “purgative way” of beginners, the “illuminative way” of proficient, and the “unitive” way of the perfect.¹⁷⁷ These phases are separated from each other by two “passive nights” “where all hidden (and even unconscious) resistance is purged and we are prepared for “spiritual marriage” or “transforming union” with God”.¹⁷⁸ The beginner transitions to the stage of proficient through the passive night of sense, and the proficient enters the unitive way by undergoing the passive night of spirit. But beginners are to engage in the active night of sense, and proficient are to engage in the active night of spirit. This gives us a four-fold pattern: “active night of sense; passive night of sense; active night of spirit; passive night of spirit”.¹⁷⁹ Thus you end up with this sequence:

- Beginners/Purgative Way/Active Night of Sense
- Passive Night of Sense
- Proficient/Illuminative Way/Active Night of Spirit
- Passive Night of Spirit
- Perfect/Unitive Way/Spiritual Marriage¹⁸⁰

Beginners have to detach themselves from disordered sensory desires and satisfactions, and what they can accomplish by their own graced efforts is completed when the sensory satisfaction dries up in the “passive night of sense”.

¹⁷⁷ John adopts a classic scheme. Traditionally, the three “ages” of the interior life are beginners, proficient, and perfect. The three “ways” are purgative, illuminative and unitive ways. The beginners are those in the first stage of the spiritual journey, while the proficient are in the second stage and the perfect are those in the final stage. Cf. K. KAVANAUGH, “Glossary of Terms”, in *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 767, 774.

¹⁷⁸ S. PAYNE, *The Carmelite Tradition*, 45.

¹⁷⁹ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 59.

¹⁸⁰ Spiritual Marriage is a symbolic expression which is rooted in the Bible. John uses it to signify “full union with God”. K. KAVANAUGH, “Glossary of Terms”, in *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 775.

Similarly, proficient have to detach themselves from spiritual consolations and experiences, and what they can accomplish by their own efforts is completed when the spiritual consolation is taken away in the “passive night of spirit”.

But the paradox is that the terrible darkness and sense of absence is actually caused by a more intense unveiling of the presence of the One who is always already “hidden” in the soul. Let us now consider these purifications and see how the soul perceives God’s hiddenness in them.

a) Active Purification of the Senses

It is necessary to actively purify the senses because without such purification, one cannot “expect the passive purification which God will work in us. Until we achieve this preliminary purification of our whole being, body and soul, it is an illusion to hope for that intimate, transforming union with God”.¹⁸¹ This active purification of the senses is very important because if it is not done, our senses will pass everything received over to the intellect, since everything the intellect naturally knows passes through the senses: “no knowledge is communicated to it naturally from any other source” (A 1.3.3).

But how is this active purification of the senses realized? John gives us the following “counsels” which he describes as “brief and few in number... as profitable and efficacious as they are concise. A person who sincerely wants to practice them will need no others since all the others are included in these” (A 1.13.2).

First, have habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with his. You must then study his life in order to know how to imitate him and behave in all events as he would. Second, in order to be successful in this imitation,

¹⁸¹ O. RODRIGUEZ, *Nightingale*, 60.

renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God. Do this out of love for Jesus Christ. In his life he had no other gratification, nor desired any other, than the fulfillment of his Father's will, which he called his meat and food [Jn. 4:34]. Third, try to think lowly and contemptuously of yourself and desire that all others do the same (A 1.13.3-4,9).

John goes on to encourage us to embrace these practises as they are enough for entry into the night of the senses. On the other hand, he warns that this way is not easy, but requires suffering and mortification, and in these sufferings and mortifications the soul sometimes feels that God has left her alone to suffer (cf. A 1.13.6). These steps and practises require a strong determination on our part, on the part of our will. But God, who really wants us to make this journey, will assist us through the Holy Spirit for we cannot do this alone. It is necessary to be “fired with love's urgent longings” (A 1.14.2). But we must also have the courage to embark on this great task.¹⁸²

This brings us to the other night of the senses, the passive night of purification. First we must bear in mind that although both active and passive purification are necessary, they are of their nature completely different. While active purification can be achieved by our own efforts through God's grace, passive purification is entirely the work of God.¹⁸³

b) Passive Purification of the Senses

The passive night of the senses is treated in book one of *The Dark Night*. In terms of prayer, this night marks the transition from meditative prayer to contemplation;

¹⁸² Cf. O. RODRIGUEZ, *Nightingale*, 57.

¹⁸³ Cf. O. RODRIGUEZ, *Nightingale*, 89.

St. Teresa treats it in the Fourth Mansion. And John tells us that the beginner who is recollected will enter this night sooner than others.¹⁸⁴

According to John, those who practice mental prayer will come to this stage of purification within a short time. At the time when we experienced active purification, we have been given some strength to endure a little dryness and darkness that comes at this stage of passive purification. “The power of our attachments has been weakened and we are more ready to accept the strangeness of God’s ways with us. Now we face a blankness, a full stop to the activity of our minds, whenever we try to pray. At the beginning we may need a simple image to lead us into the darkness.”¹⁸⁵ When one first encounters this stage, it is painful and bitter, it seems boring and a waste of our energy and the natural tendency is to look for how to help ourselves out of it. But we shouldn’t do that because at this stage, God is the one at work. All we need do is to persevere in prayer with a blind faith in God. When one perseveres, one will later realize that the dryness and emptiness are all full of God’s action. “They will notice that they have a yearning hunger to return to this dark contemplation that seems to make no sense yet fills them with life”.¹⁸⁶

This experience is described by John in his poem “Not for all of Beauty” as the “I-don’t-know-what of the soul”. When we are in this stage of purification, our “faculty lies dormant within us, concealed below our noisy minds and the clamour of our desires. Only when God stills us can we begin to recognize its presence”.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Cf. E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 65.

¹⁸⁵ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 64.

¹⁸⁶ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 64.

¹⁸⁷ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 65.

c) *Active Purification of the Spirit*

Through the “passive night of the senses” persons are brought into the other phase of the spiritual journey called the “proficient stage”. At this phase, one is no longer controlled by their desires for sensory satisfactions or gratifications. They become more settled and willing to embrace contemplative prayer, and to have deeper spiritual experiences. Yet there are other areas of attachments that still need to be purified. This is why active and passive purification of the spirit are needed. John treats active purification of the spirit in book two of *The Ascent*. This stage is stage where the soul makes effort to imitate Christ. John notes that “A person makes progress only by imitating Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (A 2.7.8). This aspect also involves suffering which cannot be avoided as we seek to follow Christ but at the end of it all, comes the long awaited resurrection. The crosses and sufferings encounter in our spiritual journey are the raw material of our spiritual growth.¹⁸⁸ This is the reason we need a strong faith, hope and charity. In this active night of the spirit, our theological virtues of faith, hope and love help us to bear our healthily and positively.¹⁸⁹ How does this happen? It happens in such a way that:

Our understanding is helped by faith, as we cling to the promises found in God’s Word. Our memory is fed by hope that trusts in the goodness of our heavenly Father: such hope is based on recollection of the good rather than the bad things that have happened to us. Our will is helped by charity, in which we respond with obedience to what we think he is asking us even though we do not know its meaning.¹⁹⁰

Though this path is quite challenging and difficult, we can follow it through the grace of God which strengthens our will to say “No” and “No” and “No” again! This

¹⁸⁸ Cf. E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 98-99.

¹⁸⁹ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 99.

¹⁹⁰ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 99.

means that there is no other means than the way of purification and suffering and total detachment of the soul from all creatures if it must be united with God.¹⁹¹

d) Passive Purification of the Spirit

The other night, the passive night of the spirit, is treated in book two of *The Dark Night*. St. Teresa treats it in the Sixth Mansion, though not exactly as John does.¹⁹²

The passive night of the spirit is the night of purification which comes before union. At this night of purification, “God is piercing deeper into the unconverted places of the soul, which are well known to him if not to us”.¹⁹³ In the passive night of the spirit, we hope against hope. It is a time that we tell ourselves in our sufferings that it is love that “it is love that has brought us to this place and love that will hold us in it”.¹⁹⁴

John tells us that:

In the midst of these dark and loving afflictions, the soul feels a certain companionship and an interior strength; these so fortify and accompany it that when this weight of anxious darkness passes, the soul often feels alone, empty, and weak. The reason is that since the strength and efficacy of the dark fire of love that assails it is communicated and impressed on it passively, the darkness, strength, and warmth of love cease when the assault terminates (N 2.11.7).

God’s communication in the passive purgation is a night not merely because it is infused through faith, but also because it is painful to the soul and causes it suffering. God illumines the soul through the light of contemplation in regard to its own wretchedness and, at the same time, increases this awareness by enlightening it as well in regard to God’s own purity and transcendence. Contemplation, besides illuminating the intellect, also communicates love to the will, which intensifies the soul’s hunger and

¹⁹¹ Cf. O. RODRIGUEZ, *Nightingale*, 34.

¹⁹² Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 16.

¹⁹³ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 133.

¹⁹⁴ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 134.

thirst for perfection and makes it search solicitously for ways of pleasing God and remaining in his favour. Through this love, all the appetites and the faculties, unable to derive satisfaction in any other object, are withdrawn from everything and concentrate intensely upon God (cf. N 2.11.1). The soul is not satisfied with any other thing, persons or intermediaries but finds complete satisfaction in God. That is why the communication of God through other means will cause the soul great anguish and a feeling that God is hidden. John experienced this anguish and dissatisfaction in his search for God. He expresses this in his comment on stanza six of his *Spiritual Canticle*: “Do not send me any more messengers. They cannot tell me what I must hear.” John expresses his dissatisfaction at the communication of God that he is getting through other means: “You have communicated by means of others, as if joking with me; now may you do so truly, communicating yourself by yourself” (C 6.6).¹⁹⁵ This communication through intermediaries makes the soul feel that God is a lover who sends his friends to communicate his intention rather than coming himself. But the soul is longing for the real lover and not any other. Thus the soul finds satisfaction in nothing except God who speaks to him and is united with him. For to “speak to the heart is to satisfy the heart, which is dissatisfied with anything less than God” (C 35.1).

So the goal of these purifications is union. And the effect of this union is such that it produces good works in the life of the Christian, even though he or she might be undergoing some real life challenges and sufferings. One is able to grow in virtue and good works.¹⁹⁶ “This union achieves something at the roots of our being, by it we are

¹⁹⁵ Cf. L. DOOHAN, “The Transforming Power of Love”, 1.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 40.

fulfilled and our deepest needs are met”.¹⁹⁷ We should know that John thinks that this journey to union is a life-long struggle, through the night which never ends here on earth. But we must endure it lovingly because it is only love that can bring about this union. So it is necessary to work lovingly for this union.¹⁹⁸ Though our ultimate union is in heaven, where all struggles cease, there is still a stability and a certain cessation of struggle when one reaches spiritual marriage here on earth.

3.5 Suffering Borne in Love: A Path to Glory

St. John of the Cross, throughout his writing on suffering, was very careful in order not to be misunderstood. Each time he speaks of the cross and suffering he does not fail to state that this suffering must always be borne out of love for Christ. Christian suffering must be bound up with divine love. The motivating force of all Christian crosses and sufferings is a burning quest and love for God. It is this divine love that gives us the grace and impetus to brave all sufferings for the sake of our divine lover and to be united with him in his glory.

Iain Matthew in speaking of John tells us that “John sees the world slung between Friday and Sunday”.¹⁹⁹ In other words, John’s view of the cross is necessarily connected with Easter. He does not speak of suffering alone; his understanding of suffering is necessarily connected with Christ’s crucifixion (Good Friday) and resurrection (Easter). This can be observed also in the Fourth Gospel. When the Evangelist speaks of the “hour” and “glory” he means the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. “When we remember the precise way John [the Evangelist] uses “glory,”

¹⁹⁷ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 41-42.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 41.

¹⁹⁹ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 3.

we see that Jesus' death is the moment when God's presence is, paradoxically, the most powerful."²⁰⁰ Consequently all Christian suffering is to be seen in union with Christ's suffering and as a path to glory. It is at the moment when we suffer most that Christ is even closer to us though we feel his presence less because we are engrossed in our suffering.

The soul having united itself to God through suffering borne in love now becomes one with God here on earth. While still in this world the soul is already having a foretaste of eternal glory. But the fullness of this glory will be in heaven and the path to this glory is the cross (cf. C 35.1; 11.2).

According to Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), the cross symbolizes "all that is difficult and oppressive and so against human nature that taking it upon oneself is like a journey to death. And the disciple of Jesus is to take up this burden daily".²⁰¹ John was able to go beyond what the cross presents to us in appearance, and realised the hidden treasure embedded in the cross: a way of uniting one's soul with our crucified Lord and a door to the soul's glorification. As a result of this discovery, the cross for him therefore was no longer to be seen as something oppressive and contrary to nature, but a good that must be embraced and carried with love, for in it lies a hidden and inestimable treasure.²⁰²

St. John of the Cross has very often been misunderstood as an advocate of ascetical practices for their own sake. But a good knowledge of him will reveal to us that he is the "doctor of divine love, a love which demands the negation of everything

²⁰⁰ C. OWCZAREK, "Johannine Literature", 16.

²⁰¹ E. STEIN, *The Science of the Cross*, 17.

²⁰² Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 34.

that is not love”.²⁰³ This must be very practical in the sense that our renunciation of all things is done for the sake of love. “If penance and renunciation make us hard, this is a sign that it was not renunciation for the sake of Jesus Christ and has nothing to do with following him. If it is inspired by love, the effect is positive”.²⁰⁴ Love is the driving force towards union with the lover who lies within, and the soul in order to reach him must bear all penance and detachment for the sake of love.

In the doctrine of St. John, suffering has no meaning if not borne for love. So John’s understanding is that “God gives himself to me and thus enables me to let go of everything else” (cf. A 3.39.1).²⁰⁵ If we do not find joy in Jesus Christ and desire his company, we cannot have the courage to suffer for his sake. But if we first discover the amount of love he has for us, then we will not mind any sufferings for his sake. In fact, we will gladly bear sufferings for the sake of him whom we love. This is what we see in marital and family lives where spouses suffer for the love of each other and for their children.²⁰⁶ It is this love that sustains family relationships even when members of the family are in far away countries. So also it is in our relationship with God. When our sufferings make him seem to be hidden in a far away country, we know that he loves us and will return to us in due time.

St. Teresa of Avila would say: “*Del Amor saca amor*”, which means from love, draw out love. Teresa understood just as John does that the human being has a great need to be loved. One cannot love unless one is loved in return. One can actually say that love is reciprocal, “for love begets love” (LF 22.14). So if we undergo any form of

²⁰³ M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 33.

²⁰⁴ M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 33.

²⁰⁵ M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 34.

²⁰⁶ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 34-35.

suffering that is not based on love, it will have no effect and may even harm us.²⁰⁷ Most human beings seek a reciprocal love. But in Christ, we see an example of one who first loved us and gave his life for us even when we were still enemies and did not love him (cf. Rom 5:10). This shows us that the suffering could be based on the love of the lover or on the love of the one on whom suffering is inflicted. For instance, a mother could suffer for love of her children. And certainly my enemy may inflict suffering on me that is not based on love, but if I deal with it in love, it can still be turned to my benefit, perhaps even to his benefit. So love is necessary in confronting any form of suffering.

This is evident in John's life. It was love that made him suffer both for Christ and for his neighbour. Because of love, John was able to say 'yes' to Jesus and 'no' to all other things that do not please Christ. When we are actually in love, we try to prevent any obstacle that will come between us and the one we love. This also applies to anything one loves doing. There is this desire to always do that which I love doing without being hindered by anyone or any other thing.²⁰⁸ The real meaning of Christian suffering "is therefore to lose everything for the sake of Christ. Love wants complete surrender. We are to love as God loves, and love what he loves".²⁰⁹ This is what it means to be in a loving relationship with God and to be united with him in glory.

3.6 John's Teaching is Reflected in his Life

The doctrine of St. John of the Cross on love and suffering is consistent with his life as we have seen in chapter one of this essay. He has been described as one who had an experience of the cross in the transforming power of divine love. Divine love was his

²⁰⁷ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 35.

²⁰⁸ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 35-37.

²⁰⁹ M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 37.

primary intuition. His life bore no other witness, and his writings carry no other message. Thus the life and writings of St John of the Cross can be understood only as the enterprise of a great lover. He experienced the great love of a God who is hidden and he spends most of his life in search of him.²¹⁰

John's life's journey taught him that the cross meant not God's absence, but his passionate presence and love for humankind. So when John talks of 'night', he does not mean the suffering which implies the absence of God but a suffering which redeems and reveals the presence and work of God in purifying a soul.²¹¹ John did not shrink from suffering because he understood his suffering as a sharing in the suffering of Christ and was convinced of his presence.²¹² It was in the light of his own experiences that that John encourages us to trust more in God, to allow God to take hold of our lives so that he may lead us safely through the sufferings, pains, the dark night that we come across in our life's journey.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have reviewed John's understanding of God as a hidden lover. Through his own personal experience, he came to a better understanding of God's hiddenness. This hiddenness is an attempt by God to draw him closer after having wounded him with his love. John searches for his lover and this makes him suffer several purifications.

He had to allow himself to go through the active and passive purification of senses and spirit. These purifications are like nights where the senses are silenced and

²¹⁰ Cf. N. CUMMINS, *Introduction*, 1.

²¹¹ Cf. I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 94.

²¹² Cf. D. MILES, *More Certain Than the Noon*, 6.

all is in darkness. He had to trust and have faith as his only guide. He had to endure these purifications because they are paths to a life of union and glorification with the Lord. The motivation throughout this journey is love: the love that one has for God who has first loved him, and the love for neighbour.

The experience of John of the Cross reveals that those who have experienced this hidden lover are more concerned for the salvation of all, for the good of all because they become self-giving and no longer selfish, as I explained in chapter one when I talked about how John's suffering made him compassionate and loving towards others. Through them, the world is saved. Every step they take draws them closer to God and the whole of humanity. Even in black hours of seeming despair, when God seems absent and evil threatens – even then they are very, very close to God and neighbour. They are aware as we ourselves are aware of the fact that our world is in a dark night. The evils of hunger, oppression, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, etc. are symptoms of an even deeper evil: rejection of God and deliberate choice of darkness. “Many people are without faith, without hope, without love, lost in a morass of despair, wandering in the night, lost in this world”.²¹³

Though difficulties and sufferings may come, we have to keep believing knowing that we are called to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow him. It is true that suffering can evoke different responses in people – anger and despair or solidarity and inner growth. Through his own personal life which we saw in chapter one, John teaches us that the awareness of the presence of God, though apparently hidden, will help us to transcend our life situation and sufferings. This awareness of the

²¹³ Cf. W. JOHNSTON, *The Wounded Stag*, 32.

presence of a hidden God will keep us focused on the journey and will definitely lead us to that union which we seek with the Lord.

Chapter IV

The Contemporary Relevance of John's Teaching

4.1 Introduction

John of the Cross is not just a man who lived centuries ago, but someone who speaks to us in the present day. Our Christian calling to live a life of union with God is described in his writings and we must keep in constant dialogue with him in order to learn how we are expected to live our Christian life today.²¹⁴ This is necessary since God speaks anew to every human being; we need the experience of the others to interpret and complete our own. John was a mystic of his age and in his own way. So also are the people of today called to be mystics in different ways, in ways that serve the present age. He or she could be a teacher of ecumenical dialogue, a promoter of religious tolerance, an advocate of peace in a world plagued with wars and terrorism, etc. The mystic of today should be a person looking to the future with the hope of helping the next generation to find meaning in their sufferings.²¹⁵

The study of the works of St. John of the Cross helps us know what God is doing in our souls using the perspective and experiences of St. John of the Cross. His

²¹⁴ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 1.

²¹⁵ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover's Quest*, 4.

experiences encourage us in understanding our own spiritual difficulties.²¹⁶ Thus in reading John of the Cross, “we have to ask ourselves: Is John’s God also my God? Who is the God that gives meaning to my life?”²¹⁷ At this moment, it might start dawning on us that John’s God is the same God who gave himself up on the cross for love of us and bids us to carry our crosses after him. In this way, we will allow ourselves to be moved by him as he moved John towards a life of union with him.

If our lives are not moved towards God, then all our statements about God will be meaningless, since our statements about God are only understandable in the context of lives that are pointed to God. They will be like arrows that are never fired or released from the bow. They will have no weight to convince anyone. We can talk as much as we like about love and suffering, but if there are no traces of these in our lives, then we are empty gongs making a whole lot of noise and wasting our energy (cf. 1Cor 13:1).²¹⁸ Consequently, a person who answers to the name Christian must be ready to live out the daily demands of discipleship in his/her life; and this necessarily demands a daily carrying of the cross in the following of Christ (cf. Lk 9:23; Mk 8:34).

This journey and the demands of discipleship are not easy, since human nature ordinary seeks pleasure and withdraws from pain. So we do not in any way wish to underplay the painful aspect of the cross or suffering. Rather we want to highlight the fact that Christian suffering has been elevated by Christ. In Christ we see a model which St. John of the Cross followed and also invites us to follow.

Those persons who want to make this journey must be determined to love Christ more than any other and be ready to endure suffering for this love of Christ. This is the

²¹⁶ Cf. M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 5.

²¹⁷ M. H. GARCIA, *A Lover’s Quest*, 5.

²¹⁸ Cf. T. RADCLIFFE, *What is the Point of Being a Christian*, 209-210.

path John expects every true Christian pilgrim to follow. This is the ideal he has left for us contemporary Christians to imitate.

In this chapter, I will try to show the need to have a positive attitude towards our sufferings. Then, I will try to show that Christian suffering is an invitation to be in solidarity with those who suffer. This chapter will conclude by describing the different benefits we can derive from our sufferings.

4.2 Invitation to Have a Positive Attitude towards Suffering Today

The way we interpret the sufferings that come to us will tell whether we are true followers of Christ or not. John of the Cross encourages us to put on the attitude of a true disciple in the midst of suffering. He is very much aware of the negative connotation that suffering has, and he knows that this kind of impression about suffering does not lead to union with this hidden God who we must seek through purification and suffering. Even though he did not like suffering for its own sake, as that would make him a sadist, he accepted it for the sake of Christ. St. Thérèse will follow in this way, desiring suffering for love of Christ.²¹⁹ John saw suffering as the price for following Christ, and he was willing to pay that price. In his journey to union with God, he gave up everything. “The “nothing” (*nada*) of the nights’ denials was a means to the “everything” (*todo*) of the union and self-fulfilment”.²²⁰ The point here is that John saw suffering not as an end in itself, but as a positive means to something absolutely good, which is a life of union with God who is hidden within us.²²¹

²¹⁹ Cf. G. GAUCHER, *John and Thérèse: Flames of Love*, 9.

²²⁰ L. DOOHAN, *The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross*, 85.

²²¹ Cf. L. DOOHAN, *Challenge of John*, 85.

John of the Cross is inviting all Christians to develop this positive attitude towards the cross. God allows suffering in his plan of salvation for humanity. That is why Job initially understood his suffering as part of human existence.²²² Thus we are to accept sufferings when they come our way, knowing that they are a means that purifies us and prepares us for a deeper union with God. John of the Cross himself was an embodiment of these purifying effects of suffering as can be seen in his life and writings.²²³

When we develop a positive attitude towards suffering, it can help us as Christians to grow in love of God and neighbour. This attitude turns hurt into an opportunity to grow and helps us to get in touch with the limitations of the other person. Like Jesus, John was able to put this into practice in his own life. He treated those who persecuted him with love. He is therefore a model that we can follow. This kind of positive attitude to suffering can dispose us to be in solidarity with those who suffer, helping and encouraging them to endure the present moment.

This also is evident in the life of John. He showed considerable empathy towards those who suffer and those who were struggling in their spiritual lives and his evaluation of them was basically positive.²²⁴ John is able to develop this positive attitude because he is one who has suffered, who has been injured and has allowed himself to be healed. So he is one that can be described as a wounded healer. He is able to help others because he has been through suffering himself. We may find it difficult to share and understand the different sufferings of other people if we have not experienced suffering in some form at one time or another in our life. One can learn how to love

²²² Cf. D.H. HARRINGTON, *Why Do We Suffer?*, 35.

²²³ Cf. L. DOOHAN, *Challenge of John*, 85.

²²⁴ Cf. L. DOOHAN, *Challenge of John*, 87.

from suffering since one appreciates and loves more what one has suffered for than what one did not suffer for. I can say that with reference to our search for God who is hidden, we will feel a strong urge not to let him go if we have journeyed through the way of suffering and purification in order to find him. Thus we can infer that sometimes, one's solidarity and love for other people increases depending on how much one suffers for them. Suffering for others enables one to be self-giving. The self-centered person turns everything to self-gratification, a life without love.²²⁵

A great setback to a positive acceptance of suffering is the Old Testament's negative influence and our traditional cultural mentality. Sadly enough, this thinking has influenced our present-day attitude towards suffering. The Deuteronomic teaching on retribution which maintains that God rewards the good and punishes the bad seems to be evident in our present day way of thinking and acting. That is why some Christians, especially those who preach a Gospel of prosperity and wealth, still perceive suffering, misfortune, sickness, etc as a punishment from God for their sins. But experience has shown that it is not only the sinner that suffers, the just man also suffers. And at other times, the sinner appears even to prosper while the just languish in poverty. The Wisdom Literature try to propose another life in which God who is just must reward the just person.²²⁶

It becomes a challenge for today's Christians to understand the innocent suffering of Christ in the light of their individual sufferings. Christ, who was without sin, suffered for sinners like us (cf. Rom 5:8). But because of the negative mentality towards suffering, those who suffer are made to suffer alone because we do not want to

²²⁵ Cf. L. DOOHAN, *Challenge of John*, 88.

²²⁶ Cf. N. FOGLIACCO, "Eschatology", 21-22.

associate ourselves with their suffering and “punishment”. It is at this point that Jesus challenges us by teaching us that suffering is not necessarily a punishment from God; it is not necessarily the result of sin. He explains this by telling us that the man who was born blind was not born so because of his sins or those of his parents (Jn 9:1-7). He suffered blindness but God turned it into an opportunity to manifest his glory. So too he turns our suffering situations around.

4.2.1 Positive Purpose of Christian Suffering

As Christ has demonstrated, Christian suffering has a positive purpose; it is for the glorification of God and the manifestation of his love for us. This same positive attitude is what John challenges us to understand and embrace. Suffering for him is a means of purification. If taken with a positive attitude, suffering purifies the Christian and unites us with God. If John’s imprisonment could lead him to his discovery of God’s love for him, then suffering is a “sheer grace” and a blessing in disguise. It is not a thing that happens by chance, but is allowed by God as part of his eternal plan for us and a manifestation of his glory.²²⁷ But as John did everything in his human power to free himself from the prison cell, so should we also try all in our human powers to elevate our suffering situations while keeping in mind the positive lessons that could come from our experiences.

It becomes a great challenge for us Christians to understand that no amount of suffering that comes to us today is by chance. We may suffer hardships and poverty in most countries of Africa, hunger, malnutrition, poor infrastructures, etc Although they

²²⁷ Cf. N. FOGLIACCO, “Christian Anthropology: Creation”, 18.

are man-made, an effect of bad leadership, they are allowed by God and he makes use of them for our own good. Our sufferings are not by accident: they have a purpose. Carretto would say that: “No tear falls from the eye without making it purer and cleaner”.²²⁸

The point here is not that we are to do nothing to relieve ourselves of these difficulties; even Christ and John of the Cross made efforts to free themselves of their difficult moments. I would say that even our efforts to relieve ourselves of suffering are themselves part of God’s plan to build us up into the kind of person he wants us to be. John sees the painful journey through the active and passive purification as a means of developing the good in us, “or else the refusal to be committed to the narrow path of the ascent will cause our potential for evil to flourish. The journey to God, with its purification... is a preparation for union, and is at the same time a discovery of the person’s true and authentic self”.²²⁹ I do not suggest in any way that John provides a comprehensive “justification for suffering”, nor is he trying to provide it. Even if one grants everything he says, there is still the mystery of animal suffering, of the suffering of babies who die in infancy (how does their suffering help them grow spiritually?), and so on. But he provides one important tool for interpreting some of the challenges and sufferings we face in a positive light.

Sr. Eileen Lyddon in her book *Door Through Darkness: John of the Cross and Mysticism in Everyday Life* narrates an experience she had while working with some prisoners who were first offenders. She mentioned how they shared with her their traumatic experience in prison, and how they have been able to achieve the best and

²²⁸ C. CARRETTO, *Why O Lord? The Meaning of Suffering*, 86.

²²⁹ L. DOOHAN, *Challenge of John*, 92.

develop themselves in their difficult prison life. They learnt several good skills like painting, cooking, etc. and some also passed their technical and professional exams and even received the sacrament of Confirmation. Some of them testified that they might not have achieved all these on their own without their imprisonment and they thanked God for these opportunities.²³⁰ Hence we can say that suffering sometimes has a way of bringing out the best in individuals and shaping their personalities for the better. Looking back at their experiences, they realized the gentle presence of a hidden God whose presence would hardly have been felt at the very beginning of their imprisonment.

At the initial stage of our suffering, we all fight against it and it does not produce any positive effects in us. At other times, when we are not able to do anything about it, we may just resign ourselves to our fate, hoping that it is the will of God. This, according to Lyddon, is “a fatalistic rather than a Christian reaction. At this point, we are not capable of judging God’s intentions or his ways with us”.²³¹ Instead of this kind of attitude, it is better to see the strong relationship between us and God our Loving Father as John did while in the prison walls of the monastery.

Our nights may be a discipline, and they are certainly a challenge. The night can herald the coming of God, “cleaving us off ourselves, opening us to himself”.²³² God expects us to face up to our night, our sufferings, because he is with us and his grace is sufficient for us.²³³ This attitude is an attitude of acceptance of self and of our situations as they are. When this is done, it is only then that: “The night [suffering] begins to

²³⁰ Cf. E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 24.

²³¹ Cf. E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 24.

²³² I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 86.

²³³ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 24.

reveal what lies hidden within it, things that we could never have guessed beforehand”.²³⁴ For John, that which lies hidden is Christ the Beloved.

When we look at the suffering of Christ and his glorification, we can conclude that his suffering was not in vain. It has a purpose: it inaugurated the kingdom of love. If this is true, then we can also infer that the catastrophes of war, tribal and boundary clashes, religious and political conflicts and killings, famine and poverty and all our sufferings have a meaning provided we do not lose our focus, which is God. Even as we suffer, our eyes should always be set on God; this is the one way we can dispose our minds to draw out positive meanings in our situations. Therefore in all our sufferings, pains, miseries, rejection and distress, we are invited to be positive and unite them with the suffering and death of Christ and draw strength from them and from him.²³⁵

The risk, though, is that this can end up in a kind of “blaming the victim” stance. “God allowed you to be raped and tortured because he knew you needed more purification.” We may want to avoid such risk by insisting that God does not in any way inflict sufferings on us because he wants the good for us. Rather, when he sees us in a situation of suffering, he turns it into an opportunity to do us better. In the midst of all our difficulties, it is right to grieve, to take a stand and to look for a way out. But it is also important not to miss “the God-content in the darkness. On offer is freedom from ourselves, for a God who fills. To trust – that God is present in this – can turn the pain, where there has to be pain, from death-throes into the pangs of birth”.²³⁶ This requires an attitude of trust. In the passive night of the spirit, part of what we have to let go of,

²³⁴ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 24.

²³⁵ Cf. E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 26.

²³⁶ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 87.

is our preconceptions and certainties about why God allows suffering, and develop an attitude of trust in him.

Our sufferings should inspire our trust and faith in Divine Providence. We dare to say that suffering is part of God's providential plan for us. If it is, then we are sure that "everything that happens to us, everyone we meet with can be a gateway to God if we are open and listening for his message coming in and through them. Otherwise circumstances become a prison no matter how gilded the cage may be".²³⁷ Trust is the key to personal growth and development. One of the images John uses to describe growth is a mountain climb – *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. But this mountain, like that of Elijah and Moses on Mount Horeb, is a religious mountain and the goal is communion with God (cf. A 1.5.7). When it becomes hostile and difficult for the mountain climber to continue, his next choice would to "trust the directions and take the hand of someone higher up".²³⁸

Jesus invites us to be open to God and to trust even in difficult moments. As a man, he attained full personal growth through death, because personal growth is identical with love. And we know that he grew in love by offering himself in obedience and love to the Father and to you and me. The cross provided Jesus with the opportunity through which true, disinterested, total love is expressed.²³⁹ As Jesus in and through his suffering inaugurates the kingdom of love, not only in his person but also in each individual believer, so Christians are encouraged to see their sufferings as an opportunity for them to grow in solidarity and in love for neighbour and for God. John of the Cross grew to love in a like manner.

²³⁷ E. LYDDON, *Door Through Darkness*, 26.

²³⁸ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 87.

²³⁹ Cf. N. FOGLIACCO, "Eschatology", 91.

4.3 Christian Suffering as an Invitation to Communion and Solidarity

By his solidarity with humanity, Jesus offers us to God and brings us to full communion with him, as it is said that “he became man that man might become God”. John in his suffering learnt what it meant to sacrifice all for the sake of true love and to be in solidarity with the poor, the sick and all who suffer. The poverty of his family taught him that mere accumulation of wealth is not a guarantee of happiness. “However, the pain and struggles that came with poverty made John sensitive to deprivation in others and always ready to alleviate it where he could”.²⁴⁰

The sense of solidarity and compassionate charity, learnt especially in his hospital service, became a permanent feature in his concern for others. Deep love for God and for his neighbours was the special quality that permeated John’s whole life, and is reflected in his message. “Poverty, charity, piety, study, and deep love formed permanent parts of John’s life”.²⁴¹

4.3.1 *Solidarity and Help to Those Who Suffer*

I have pointed out how John’s suffering disposed him to help and show solidarity with all who suffer. This raises the question in our own time: What are the means that the communities of Christians use in helping people endure suffering and pain? John was practical in helping people cope with suffering because he discovered the God who lies hidden within us even as we suffer. He helped people so that they wouldn’t despair and fail to come into contact with the Hidden God who is patiently waiting for this encounter. Thus at this point, we must turn to a more practical way of

²⁴⁰ L. DOOHAN, “John of the Cross: A Contemporary Inspiration”, 1.

²⁴¹ L. DOOHAN, “Contemporary Inspiration”, 1.

helping those around us, those in our contemporary African community to cope and journey through their own sufferings so as to discover the beauty of God's hidden love through us. There are three means of helping that I would like to highlight here.

a) *Presence*

The Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians compares the Christian community to the human body, with each individual a different organ in that body. This means that we belong to one another as though we were all part of a single organism. And Paul remind us that within this community, we are to rejoice with those who rejoice and to suffer with those who suffer (Rom 12:15; cf. 1 Cor 12). In our suffering and rejoicing with one another, we also suffer and rejoice with Christ who said to us that whatever we do to others, we do to him (cf. Mt 25:40).²⁴² So what does this imply?

This implies that the primary means of coping with pain and suffering is each other. Our individual presence, just being there – our personal, bodily, sacramental presence – is the most important help we have to give to those who suffer.²⁴³ John of the Cross in his lifetime offered his presence to those who were in pain. He stayed with those who suffered in the hospital. With the brothers and sisters who were sick, he comforted them with his presence, revealing to them the hidden face of Christ. Sometimes when we visit the sick, they are able to remember that we visited them, but they hardly remember anything we said to them. This shows how important our presence is to the sick and suffering. They are able to draw courage from our presence.

²⁴² Cf. R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 110-111.

²⁴³ Cf. R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 111.

They are able to see hidden face of God through our presence. They recognize God's hidden love in the care and love we show to them.

It is very crucial that we be there with friends, relatives and family members in their moments of suffering. If one is able to bring along some material assistance for them as John did, that is good. But we should note that this is not as important as the presence, which communicates to them that we care, that we are available in whatever way they need us and that we are here and willing to listen to them. It also communicates to them that God cares and he is present to them through us. "Suffering people need to talk out their hurts with someone, and it doesn't help much to talk to the walls."²⁴⁴ We may not jump into giving theological explanations and answers to their problems. John gave listening ear to those who suffered and some of them used it as opportunity to speak out and to go for confession which in a way was the encounter between them and God whom they had abandoned by their sins. This is a reunion with God, the Loving Father, like the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke's Gospel (cf. Lk 15). Just being there and listening helps a lot. We are used to the common words that are said to families who lost their loved ones, "God needs him or her in heaven". This may not be of much help to the one who suffers.²⁴⁵

All that may be expected of us is to listen empathically. Many a time, the temptation is to proffer answers as a bid to help the sufferer. But we seem to forget that "Before Easter comes Gethsemane with its question, could you not watch with me one hour?"²⁴⁶ Henri Nouwen will say that: "The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair and confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and

²⁴⁴ R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 111.

²⁴⁵ Cf. R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 114.

²⁴⁶ R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 112.

bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares”.²⁴⁷ This is evident in the life of Mary who stood by the side of the cross without uttering a word. Our individual presence, followed by our caring and listening ear, are the most precious things we have to offer to the suffering person.

b) *Eradicate the Source of the Suffering*

Even though we presented John of the Cross as a man who wished to suffer for the love of Christ, he did all he could to get rid of the suffering situations even if it meant begging for alms so as to ease the sufferings of the sisters or brothers. We can use the analogy of a particular bad spot in a road that causes an accident. It is not enough to help those who are always injured on that spot. We have to call the government to fix the problem.²⁴⁸ The point is that Christians should not only take care of those who suffer, but should also do something to eliminate the cause of the suffering. Our God is a God of love, not a God of suffering who is looking for suffering situations so as to manifest his glory. Rather, he wishes that his children be spared from unnecessary situations of suffering and thus discover his true love for them which suffering does not make so visible but hides. That is why we have to do all in our power to eradicate situations of suffering so as to reveal to unconditional love of God to people. For instance, there are religious congregations that help to shelter the homeless,

²⁴⁷ R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 112.

²⁴⁸ Cf. R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 122.

yet they are reluctant to advocate for political action, good governance that could help eliminate the cause of homelessness.²⁴⁹

Such moves or actions are what we need especially in Africa where people suffer as a result of bad governance and poor political structures, corruption and greed. In Africa, we witness a situation where the resources that are meant for all are hoarded by the few. People are given aid to help erect structures for the homeless, but one man might decide to take the whole money for himself. If these resources are shared equally, won't it be an opportunity for the people to recall the episode of the multiplication of bread (cf. Mt 14:13-21; Mk 8:1-11; Lk 9:10-17) when Christ revealed his sympathy, love and care for the crowd and thus translate this love and care to their own lives? When this is done, God truly will be made present and no longer hidden from the people. We have lack of transparency in governance that could reveal such corruption and eliminate it. So Christians are invited not to remain passive in the presence of suffering and unjust situations. But in being active, they are not required to be violently rebellious. They are called to creative non-violence. It is recognised by some scholars as "the preferred means for resisting evil in the Christian community".²⁵⁰

c) *Praying and Worshipping Together*

In an attempt to help those who suffer, we have established a kind of horizontal relationship by trying to be present to them and making efforts to eliminate the source of their sufferings. This is good. But we should not neglect the vertical relationship, which brings in the presence of God. "The God-content", as Iain Mathew puts it, is very

²⁴⁹ Cf. R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 123.

²⁵⁰ R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 124.

important.²⁵¹ “God is the ‘between’ in relationships, to use Buber’s insightful metaphor”.²⁵² Worshipping or praying together makes the presence of God strongly felt. By worship, we mean the liturgy of the church, which includes its praise, sacraments, homilies, sermons and hymns.²⁵³

John never neglected the presence of God as he ministered to the sick and those who suffer. He would speak to them, write poems or letters to remind them of this wonderful presence of God. We recall the admonition he gave to the nun who was suffering from scruples and to Doña Juana de Pedraza, reminding them to be mindful of the presence of Christ in their suffering. In the liturgy, this presence which seems hidden is embodied. “The liturgy embodies and enacts the healing touch of divine transcendence, surrounding life with meaning and giving it hope”.²⁵⁴ John in his poem *For I Know Well the Spring* talks about a hidden God, who is found “in the bread of the Eucharist”.²⁵⁵ “This eternal spring is hidden in this living bread for our life's sake, although it is night” (Poem 8. 9). So when we receive Christ in the Eucharist we give him the opportunity to reveal his hidden self to our soul.

We might have observed that when people are in crisis, or when there are national crises, people tend to frequent the church. Their coming may not be as a way of seeking explanations for their situations, but just to present their situations before God who alone can give meaning to our troubled world. This meaning is not necessarily what our human reason can verbalize, but that which the Spirit gives in gestures beyond words, in worship. “That’s why liturgy, sacrament and ritual are so important to the

²⁵¹ I. MATTHEW, *Impact*, 87.

²⁵² R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 132.

²⁵³ Cf. R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 132.

²⁵⁴ R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 132.

²⁵⁵ K. KAVANAUGH, “Introduction to the Poetry”, in *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 43.

sense of life's wholeness and worthiness."²⁵⁶ That may explain why people who suffer easily ask for Mass and prayers. John did not deny them this prayer as he often prayed with the sick. This gives them strength because there is a kind of power that goes with supportive fellowship in prayer.

We are familiar with situations where families that are bereaved feel so strengthened after the celebration of the Mass. The point is that they feel that way because "death and life were set within the context of a caring community and a compassionate God, symbolized and celebrated as dramatically and concretely as can be imagined. Neither words alone nor can deeds alone communicate the depth of meaning expressed here through liturgical action".²⁵⁷ Those who participate in the liturgy irrespective of their suffering tend to embody the words of Christ: "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (Jn 16:33). This way they set their minds, not on their present situations, but on the glory of Christ.

4.4 Making Good Use of Our Suffering for Our Benefits

I have pointed out that the purpose of this whole journey of suffering and purification is to attain union with God. That may sound transcendental or theoretical. But there are other benefits that are derived from our commitment to the experience of purification. Leonard Doohan says that "the many "nothings" (*nadas*) lead to "everything" (*todo*), even on a human level".²⁵⁸

Though I had said that God allows suffering for the purpose of drawing good out of it, that should not be taken as the general rule. As we already hinted, God does not

²⁵⁶ R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 133.

²⁵⁷ R. F., VIETH, *Holy Power Human Pain*, 133.

²⁵⁸ L. DOOHAN, *Challenge of John*, 96.

allow suffering for the sole purpose of facilitating his own plans. But he uses suffering for our benefit whenever and wherever it surfaces.²⁵⁹ And as I said, John of the Cross does not try to solve tackle all occasions of suffering, but gives us a way of having a positive attitude towards suffering. So some of the benefits I am going to list are to help us have a positive outlook on suffering. The list is not exhaustive, but as mystics of our own time, I can be more creative by adding to the list. The following are some of the benefits that God may be trying to bring about through our sufferings:

- **Moulding of Personal Character**

God uses suffering to help us to shape our individual moral characters. Just as an athlete goes through difficult training so as to build his muscles, so does every trial handled successfully help to strengthen our moral and spiritual nerves. “When bitter testing and severe trial produce positive decisions, one’s character grows stronger.”²⁶⁰ But does character have to be built through suffering? Well, that is a question which may be difficult for us to answer. But we may not see a big problem with allowing difficulties if they strengthen our character.²⁶¹

It is often thought that the true quality of one’s Christian life and motivation is known in moments of crisis, challenges and suffering. Most often, “the test may reveal a better and stronger person than one expected to find. On the other hand, it may shake us out of the illusion of our own goodness by showing us how cowardly, deceitful and morally weak we really are”.²⁶² In this sense, we can see our suffering as an opportunity for us to test ourselves, giving each individual who suffers an opportunity for self-

²⁵⁹ Cf. J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 110.

²⁶⁰ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 111.

²⁶¹ Cf. J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 111.

²⁶² J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 114.

evaluation. I do not doubt that John of the Cross used his suffering in Toledo “prison” to re-evaluate his own relationship with the Lord whom he then discovered as the Beloved.

The effort one makes to discipline the faculties and appetites leads to freedom and joy in spiritual and moral life. “Oh, what a sheer grace it is for the soul to be freed from the house of its senses. For then such persons will understand how the life of the spirit is true freedom and wealth and embodies inestimable goods” (N 2.14.3). This discipline brings with it freedom from anxiety and worries and increased concentration in prayer life. The author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that Christ learnt obedience through suffering (cf. Heb 5:8). Christ himself paid the expensive price of our salvation. “Salvation sometimes seems cheap to us, though for God it was costly in suffering.”²⁶³ It might be easier for God to give us character, than for him to help and watch us develop it ourselves. But the concern is that we may not value it so much. My point is not that God allows suffering just for character building, but that he makes use of the opportunities of sufferings to mould us into better individuals and to help us to be more Christ-like.²⁶⁴ So those who suffer especially in Africa should try to have a positive attitude that will dispose them to be formed into better persons through their sufferings just as John of the Cross allowed himself to be purified by his sufferings.

- **Making us Christ-like**

As Christians, we do not only need good or moral characters, but we also need to be persons whose lives are like that of Christ. As we already said, we have to make good use of our sufferings. There are individuals who are hardened and embittered by

²⁶³ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 111.

²⁶⁴ Cf. J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 112.

their sufferings to the extent that they wish everyone to suffer the same. This shows that they have not put their sufferings to good use. Yet, there are many others who have been softened, are meek and have become more Christ-like. These are those who “allowed suffering to be used as a chisel to smooth off the rough corners, as sandpaper to polish down the surface.”²⁶⁵

If our people in Africa put their sufferings to good use, they will not want the next generation to pass through same hardship they endured. This means that they will make the continent a better place for all to live, rooting out all corruption, injustice, poverty and the like that promote suffering and marginalization of the poor. This does not mean that the next generation will not suffer, but it does not have to be same suffering that the previous generations went through. Those who wish not to inflict the same suffering on others are those who have allowed their lives to reflect the beauty of Christ and have surrendered and offered up their suffering with that of Christ to our heavenly Father. “When suffering is surrendered to Christ it can be used for something infinitely worthwhile.”²⁶⁶

- **Correction and Education**

In chapter two of this work, we made reference to the development of the Old Testament understanding of suffering as punishment for sin. That mentality is somehow still evident in our world today. But we already said that God never imposes suffering. Rather, he uses suffering wherever he finds it. But if at all he allows it for punishment, it must be on rare occasions. We have noticed, like the Old Testament Jews, that sufferings are experienced as disproportionate to one’s sin – the innocent suffer more

²⁶⁵ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 112.

²⁶⁶ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 112.

while the wicked don't suffer as much, was the experience of Job and even John of the Cross. However, it was never a universal norm, since some wicked people do suffer horribly. "So suffering does not necessarily point to the sin of the sufferer, and good health and wealth do not point to one's innocence."²⁶⁷

So rather than thinking like the people of the Old Testament that suffering is the punishment or penalty for sin, it would be more correct to say that "suffering at times is the effect, the consequence, the automatic fallout of sin".²⁶⁸ It's like someone who spends all his income in drinking; he automatically will remain poor and wretched. His poverty and suffering were not imposed by God but were the direct consequence of his action. But if this fellow, considering his miserable state, stops drinking and draws closer to God, his suffering becomes a corrective measure and an educative element and in this sense, "we must admit that suffering is sometimes so used by God".²⁶⁹ It is out of his mercy, not vengeance, that God uses suffering to educate us into the good persons we are meant to be. And we know that suffering has provided many occasions for countless individuals to do a self-evaluation and to convert to God. In this way, suffering becomes corrective and educative.²⁷⁰

- **The Witness of Suffering**

Sometimes, God uses the suffering of one person to witness or minister to others who are not able to face suffering. For instance, we see that people who are able to cope with certain challenges like HIV+, AIDS, cancer, etc are better witnesses and better ministers to others who might be facing similar situations. The courage of Christians

²⁶⁷ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 113.

²⁶⁸ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 113.

²⁶⁹ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 113.

²⁷⁰ Cf. J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 113.

like John of the Cross, who suffered from poverty and ill health, John Paul II who suffered from Parkinson's Disease and the martyrs who suffered for their faith have inspired other persons, not in spite of their suffering but precisely because of it.²⁷¹

Looking at the experience of John of the Cross, we will agree that when a Christian bears his or her suffering with courage and love, he or she becomes a source of courage to others. It was said that those who ministered to the lepers of the Island of Molokai in Hawaii, drew their courage to minister from the lepers themselves. This is reflected in the poem of Robert Louis Stevenson, who almost lost his faith at the initial stage of his visit to the island. His poem reads:

To see the infinite pity of this place,
 The mangled limb, the devastated face,
 The innocent sufferer smiling at the rod –
 A fool were tempted to deny his God.
 He sees, he shrinks. But if he gaze again,
 Lo, beauty springing from the breast of pain!
 He marks the sisters on the mournful shores;
 And even a fool is silent, and adores.²⁷²

This shows that I can use my suffering as way ministering to others and showing the glory and presence of God even in my difficult situation. Thus, suffering becomes a witness and ministry. “If I suffer, I minister to other persons by providing for them an occasion to minister to me”.²⁷³

²⁷¹ Cf. J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 114.

²⁷² J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 114-115.

²⁷³ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 116.

These lepers radiated the beauty of Christ even in their sufferings. We have seen people who suffer serious pains on their death-beds, yet radiate the personality of Christ. This is evident in the last moments of John's life, in the pain he endured and the heart he had to forgive those who made him suffer just as Christ forgave those who crucified him. In his suffering he was still conscious of the divine Presence of God. On his bed of suffering, he ministered to those around him with the way he bore his suffering. The same Christ ministered to those who saw him bear his pain to the point that they had to acknowledge him as truly the Son of God.

- **Suffering Reveals the Hidden Presence of God**

God uses the occasion of suffering to make known his hidden presence. The song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" was composed by Joseph Scriven after his lover drowned. "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go" was written by George Matheson after his lover abandoned him because he was going blind. So many have discovered Christ as a real person when they felt all hopes was lost. Many individuals have felt God's hidden presence and the awareness that he was carrying their pain on his own shoulders. "They have felt that intangible tap on their shoulder and heard in their souls that inaudible whisper, 'Move over now. You forgot I'm in this with you. You are not alone'."²⁷⁴

When we suffer, God is closer to us than we know. Colonel Robinson Risner who suffered greatly as a prisoner of war once said that: "God was very close to me. I found a new relationship with God".²⁷⁵ Again when he was being interviewed about his

²⁷⁴ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 116.

²⁷⁵ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 117.

experience in prison he said: “I have tested God in ways many people will never be able to test him. I can say that I know, even in Hanoi prison camp, that God is real”.²⁷⁶

We have no doubt that those words echo the experience of John of the Cross in the Toledo “prison” and in his several sufferings. There is no doubt that God may become real to us through various means, through nature, other persons, images and other creatures, through prayer and liturgy. But to those who suffer, sometimes, God becomes real in “hunger, torture and isolation, in ridicule, rejection, filth and fear – in prison camp on the other side of the world from home”.²⁷⁷ God breaks into the darkness of our suffering and shines his bright light to signal to us that he is there always.

Christ invites us not only to believe, but also to suffer (cf. Phil. 1:29); and to carry the cross as he leads us through our darkness into his own light. This is so that, in the end, we may also receive the crown of glory.

4.5 Conclusion

If Christ did not resist his own suffering when he has the power to do so, and even when his innocence was not in doubt, then we his followers are called to do the same. Christ’s suffering was a very clear case of the innocent one suffering unjustly. Christians must learn to embrace the sufferings that God allows to come their way. For through these sufferings borne innocently and for God’s love will our glory as Christians be realised. This is the meaning of the Christian watchword: ‘no cross, no crown.’ Our glorification comes after we have carried our cross, and not before it.

²⁷⁶ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 117.

²⁷⁷ J. T. MURPHREE, *Loving God*, 117.

General Conclusion

The objective of this study was to come to an understanding of John of the Cross's idea of God as a Hidden Lover and how it applies to Christians today who are undergoing sufferings and feel the absence of God their lives.

In the first chapter we saw that John was a man shaped by his own experience of love and suffering. He came to a profound and deep reflection on God as a lover who remains hidden while he searches for him. This search caused him a lot of suffering and purification, but it was worth it because the final goal is union with God. This should also apply to us in our suffering moments to see how all could lead us to union with God. From his early life, friends and well-wishers had all kinds of plans for him, but John knew what he wanted, which was a life of union with God and this brought him to Carmel. John sensed an irresistible attraction to God and with determination he pursued this goal.²⁷⁸

In the second chapter I treated the evolution of the understanding of suffering in the Scriptures and in the magisterium of the church. I noted that initially, the Old Testament perception of suffering was a negative one. It was seen as a punishment for sin. It was the wisdom authors that started changing that mentality which reached its

²⁷⁸ Cf. L. DOOHAN, "Contemporary Inspiration", 1.

climax in the New Testament with the teaching of Jesus Christ. I said that our sufferings could be an invitation from Christ that we should take up our crosses and follow him.

In the third chapter I looked at John's idea of God as a hidden lover and his message of love and suffering. I said that John had an idea of God as a bridegroom whom his soul must keep searching for. This search is a result of the love that God has first instilled in him and which wounds and burns him. Thus he made this search for his lover the primary goal of his life. This made him renounce everything, to be purified and choose to love God alone.²⁷⁹

In the fourth chapter, I showed the relevance of John's message to Christians today. In it, I explained that Christian suffering can have a positive value and benefit and that we are all called to be in solidarity with those who suffer, as they also can minister to us through their sufferings.

The findings of this study are that the God of John is a Hidden Lover. He loves us with a strong love that pierces and inflames our souls and makes us long all the more to be united with him even if it means suffering. God's love allowed him to give his only Son to suffer and die for our sake. This redemptive love should make us love other all the more, even if it means suffering for their sake and to help them in elevating their sufferings. John's experience led him into a great search for God. But he did not search selfishly; he took others along with him, "sharing the vision and the love by which he felt drawn".²⁸⁰ In the words of Doohan:

John shows us how to live in a struggle-filled post-conciliar Church, since he himself entered Carmel the year the Council of Trent finished its deliberations. He learned to cope with people who resisted the renewal he wanted, with ecclesiastical authorities interested in the power that religion brings, with the spite of some, the envy of others,

²⁷⁹ Cf. L. DOOHAN, "Contemporary Inspiration", 1.

²⁸⁰ Cf. L. DOOHAN, "Contemporary Inspiration", 2.

and dishonest slander of still others. Through all his struggles, he maintained right priorities and proved that contemplative union is possible under any circumstances. John's life was one long night.²⁸¹

This study does not claim to resolve all the problems associated with the understanding of the message of John. Neither does it make any claim of having the final word on the relevance of the writings of John for Christians today. Rather, it further questions and calls for more research and investigation. Some of the new areas worth researching are: 1). The implications of reading and interpreting John's message for the ordinary Christian; 2). A comparative study of John's idea of God's love and that of Prophet Hosea; 3). How might John's approach relate to contemporary philosophical and theological discussions of the problem of evil?

²⁸¹ L. DOOHAN, "Contemporary Inspiration", 2.

Bibliography

- KAVANAUGH, K. – RODRIGUEZ, O., trans., *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Washington, D.C: ICS Publications 1991.
- , *Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila, I*. Washington, D.C: ICS Publications 2001.
- , *Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila, II*. Washington, D.C: ICS Publications 2007.
- AROSTEGUI, L., *The Teresian Carmel Today*, Rome: Casa Generalizia, 2009.
- ARRAJ, J., *From St. John of the Cross to Us: The Story of 400 Year Long Misunderstanding and What It Means for the Future of Christian Mysticism*, Chiloquin, OR: Inner Growth Books 1999.
- BILLHEIMER, P., *Don't Waste Your Sorrows*, Bombay: Evangelical Literature Service Operation Mobilisation 1977.
- BLOMMESTIJN, H., *al.*, *The Footprints of Love*, Leuven: Peeters Press 2000.
- BURKE, G., "The Life and Times of St. John of the Cross", in *St. John of the Cross*, ed., P. SLATTERY, New York: Alba House 1994, 33-43.
- BURROWS, R., *Ascent to Love: the Spiritual Teaching of St. John of the Cross*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1987.
- CARRETTO, C., *Why O Lord? The Meaning of Suffering*, Robert R. B., trans., London: Sage Publication 1982.
- COLACRAI, A., *al.*, *The New African Bible*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications 2011.
- CULLIGAN, K., *Toward a Contemporary Model of Spiritual Direction A Contemporary Study of John of the Cross and Carl Rogers: An Exploratory Study* PH.D Thesis, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilm International 1979.
- , "Toward a Contemporary Model of Spiritual Direction: A Contemporary Study of John of the Cross and Carl Rogers", *Carmelite Studies II*, Washington, DC: ICS Publications 1979.
- CUMMINS, N., *An Introduction to St John of the Cross*, Langham: Darlington Carmel Publications 1984.
- CRISÓGONO DE JESÚS, *The Life of St. John of the Cross*, New York: Harper & Brothers 1958.
- DOOHAN, L., *The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross*, Washington, D.C: ICS Publications 1995.
- EGAN, K.J., "Dark Night: Education for Beauty", *Carmelite Studies VIII*, Washington, DC: ICS

- Publications (2000) 241-266.
- FLANNERY, A., ed., *The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, I-II, New Delhi, St. Paul's Publications 1999.
- FORESTI, F., *Sinai and Carmel*, Darlington, England: Darlington Carmel Publications 1981.
- GABRIEL OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE, *Union with God*, Rome: Carmel of Maria Regina, 1990.
- GARCIA, M. H., *A Lover's Quest: Introducing St. John of the Cross for Today*, Darlington, England: Darlington Carmel Publications 1993.
- GAUCHER, G., *John and Thérèse: Flames of Love*, New York: Alba House, 2008.
- GORMAN, M. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.
- HARRINGTON, D.H., *Why Do We Suffer?*, Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward, 2000.
- HUNTER, B., "Incarnation and the Divine Hiddenness Debate", *The Heythrop Journal* (2013) 252-260.
- JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris* on the "The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering" (11 February 1984), Nairobi: Pauline Publications 2008.
- JOHNSTON, W., *The Wounded Stag*, London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1985.
- LARCHER F.R., trans., in "Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews by Thomas Aquinas", *Thomas Aquinas Major Theological Works CD-Rom*.
- LEON-DUFOUR, X., "Suffering" *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. LEON-DUFOUR X., London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967.
- LYDDON, E., *Door Through Darkness: John of the Cross and the Mysticism in Everyday Life*, Hyde Park, New York: New City Press 1995.
- MATTHEW, I., *The Impact of God: Soundings from St. John of the Cross*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995.
- MCKENZIE, J. L., "Redemption", in *Dictionary of the Bible*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1965.
- MILES, D., *More Certain than the Noon*, Swansea: Windflower 1991
- MURPHREE, J. T., *A Loving God and a Suffering World*, Westmont, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press 1981.
- MUTO, S. *John of the Cross for Today: The Dark Night*, Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press 1994.
- PAYNE, S., *The Carmelite Tradition*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press 2011.
- PEERS, A., *Spirit of Flame, A Study of St. John of the Cross*, London: Student Christian Movement Press 1979.
- PETERSON, D. J., "Speaking of God after the Death of God", *Dialog: Journal of Theology* 44 (2005) 207-226.
- RADCLIFFE, T., *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* New York: Burns & Oates 2005.
- RODRIGUEZ, O., *St. John of the Cross-the Nightingale of God*, Rome: Teresianum 1990.
- RUIZ, F., al., ed., *God Speaks in the Night: The Life, Times, and Teachings of St. John of the Cross*, Washington, D.C: ICS Publications 1991.
- , *St. John of the Cross: The Saint and His Teaching*, Darlington, England: Darlington Carmel 1988.
- SAINT AUGUSTINE *Confessions*, PINE-COFFIN, R.S., trans., New York: Penguin Books Ltd. 1985.

- SCHUBERT, J., "Suffering in the Gospel of Mark", *The Bible Today* 49 (2011) 359-364.
- SIBLEY, T. "Retribution," in BROWN, R.E. *al.*, *New The Jerome Biblical Dictionary*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1990.
- SIMUNDSON, D.J., *Where is God in My Suffering?: Biblical Responses to Seven Searching Questions*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House 1983.
- , "Suffering," in ACHTEMEIER, P. J., *al.*, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2009.
- , "Suffering," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* VI, ed. FREEDMAN, D. New York: Doubleday 1972.
- , *Faith under Fire*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publications 1980.
- STEIN, E., *The Science of the Cross*, KOEPEL, J., trans., Washington, DC: ICS Publications 2002.
- SULLIVAN, J., "How is It God Loves Us?", *Carmelite Studies* VI, Washington, DC: ICS Publications (1992) 1-6.
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nairobi: Pauline Pub., 2001.
- THOMPSON, C., *St. John of the Cross: Songs in the Night*, Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
- VIETH, R. F., *Holy Power Human Pain*, Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books 1988.
- WEINANDY, T., *Does God Suffer?* Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.
- WHITNEY, B. L., *What Are They Saying about God and Evil?*, New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989.

Unpublished Work:

- FOGLIACCO, N., "Eschatology", Class Notes, Nairobi, 2014.
- , "Creation", Class Notes, Nairobi, 2014.
- OWCZAREK, C., "Johannine Literature", Class Notes, Nairobi, 2014.

Internet Materials:

- DEFFINBAUGH, R.L., "Psalm 73",
<<https://bible.org/seriespage/6-psalm-73-suffering-righteous-and-success-sinners>>, 10/11/2014.
- DOOHAN, L., "John of the Cross A Contemporary Inspiration", (2011)
<<http://johnofthecrosstoday.wordpress.com/2011/12/30/>>, 14/12/2014.
- DOOHAN, L., "Reflections on some Key Concepts in the Spiritual Canticle",
<<http://johnofthecrosstoday.wordpress.com/2014/06/07/reflections-on-some-key-concepts-in-the-spiritual-canticle/>>, 14/12/2014, 1-5.
- DOOHAN, L., "The Transforming Power of Love",
<<https://johnofthecrosstoday.wordpress.com/2013/04/02/the-transforming-power-of-christian-love/>>, 3/03/2015, 1-5.
- GREGORY THE GREAT, "Moralia on Job Bk V" *Lectionary Central*,
<<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book05.html>>, 1/12/2014, 1-99.