

THE CHURCH'S SYNOD AND JUBILEE YEAR CELEBRATIONS AS PILGRIMAGES: A REFLECTION THROUGH THE WISDOM OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

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Abstract

The salvation of souls remains the goal of the Church's mission. Jesus remains the only Way to this salvation. The Cross is His instrument; repentance is His message. The Church, which by the mystical union is His Bride, continues to proclaim this in every generation given our earthly pilgrimage in view of seeing the Face of the Father eternally. Therefore, it is valid in perpetuity. It employs different ways of making this message permeate into the hearts of humans, among which are the Synod and Jubilee, two pathways of the same Pilgrimage to Heaven. It is a way that all the Saints, that is, all those in Heaven, have passed. Nothing that deviates, thus, from the Way of the Cross is authentic, and if it is inauthentic, then it is anti-Cross, and because it is anti-Cross, it is equally anti-Christ because Christ and His Cross are inseparable. This work demonstrates how the teaching of one of the Saints, John of the Cross, on Purgation and Celebration counters the Prosperity Gospel, which is anti-Christ. It calls us to return to the authentic Gospel message that the Synod and Jubilee invite us to.

Keywords: Synod, Jubilee, Purgation, Celebration, John of the Cross, Prosperity Gospel.

1. Initial Considerations

Scott Hahn, a renowned contemporary American Catholic theologian, titled his famous book *Rome Sweet Home*. These three words speak volumes because Rome is called in Latin "*corde ecclesiae*" (the Heart of the Church). Italians call it "*il centro del mondo*" (the centre of the world). Rome is the heart of the Church because of its rich history and tradition. St. Peter's Chair, which is occupied by the Pope and his successor, resides there. Several histories also trace their origins to Rome. In monuments and edifices of antiquity, Rome counts as the centrifugal force for others. Dante Alighieri, a famous Italian poet, praises this

splendour of Rome in his *Divine Comedy*, where he says: “Rome, that reformed the world, accustomed was. Two suns to have, which one road and the other, of God and the world, made manifest.”¹

Among the greatest historical edifices in Rome is the famous Colosseum. It began in 72 AD by Emperor Vespasian, who died later, and his son, Emperor Titus, completed it in 80 AD. Every moment of the year, countless numbers of tourists flood the Colosseum to behold the beauty, splendour, and history. One significant thing about the Colosseum is its spiritual relevance as a venue for sacred dramas for Jubilees convoked by Popes. Dante, who, according to historians, was among the pilgrims who attended the first Jubilee, equally praises Rome for its splendid monuments in these words: “Beholding Rome and all her noble works was wonderstruck.”²

This work provides a reflection on Synod and Jubilee, paying special attention to both, as the two pathways are one and the same earthly pilgrimage. It uses insights drawn from the wisdom of the Doctor of Mysticism and Patron of Poets, St John of the Cross, employing the imageries of Purgation and Celebration (or Jubilation). He is chosen for three reasons. First is because the imageries found in his mystical writings speak to contemporary Christians about their present conditions, given that the Jubilee Year reminds Christians to address the modern trends which take them away from God and their roots instead of leading them back to Him. The second is because he experienced two Jubilees in his lifetime. Third is because he was beatified in a Jubilee Year. The reference to synod would only be very minimal and almost passive, with much concentration on Jubilee.

2. Synod And Jubilee: The Two Paths Of The Same Pilgrimage.

2.1 Biblical And Exegetical Perspectives

Synod and Jubilee come from the Bible and tradition of the Church and have come to stay. The etymology of the word synod from the Greek orthography shows how its development becomes an essential part of its definition. The Greek words "*anodos*" and "*cathodos*" can be "*synodos*." Thus, *ana* + *hodos* = upward way (anode). *Cata* + *hodos* = downward way (cathode). Therefore, *syn* + *hodos* = on the way together (synod). But, just as something comes before the way together, so does something occur afterwards. Consequently, *meta* + *hodos* = transward way (method).³ An insight on how to understand the logic behind synod

¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatorio, Canto XVI.

² Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Paradiso, Canto XXXI.

³ This analysis comes from an expert in etymologies, Fr. Francis Chiadi, OP, a Dominican friar at the Dominican Institute in Ibadan.

is in the concept present in cultures. The Bantu culture in Africa has a word, *ubuntu*, which is like the Igbo term *igwebuike* (unity is strength) or *igwekamma* (unity is better), and the Italian expression, *insieme* – all passing the idea of togetherness and communion. Each Synod of the Catholic Church, whether universally convoked by a Pope or locally convoked by Bishops in their various dioceses, is for the growth and spiritual benefit of the people of God. This is why a gathering constitutes a Synod. Therefore, from this outlook, the synod is a journey – a pilgrimage.

Similarly, Jubilee conveys the notion of movement. Thus, while *Ἐξοδος* (*Exodos*) means 'on the way out', *Εἰσοδος* (*Eisodos*) becomes 'on the way in', *Περίοδος* (*Periodos*) signifies 'on the way around'. Jubilee comes from the Hebrew "yôḇēl" (jubel), the horn of a ram to announce a new dawn for restart and cancellation of burdens of debt, which the text of Leviticus 25 contains. It is periodic and reckoned with the metrics of the Sabbath. Recall that the seventh day of the week is Sabbath, the Week of weeks = Shavoth/ $7 \times 7 = 49 + 1 = 50$ Pentecost. While the 7th year is sabbatical, 7×7 years (49) is the Sabbath of sabbaths + 1-year celebration = 50. It is an occasion of pilgrimage (passage through the field) for the diaspora Jews: centripetal movement to (Exodos from alien land) and centrifugal movement from (Eisodos to alien land) the holy land.⁴

Emmanuel Dim interprets the text of Leviticus 25 as sabbatical and Jubilee text, and since the Sabbath is prior to Jubilee, the latter derives from the former. He concludes that "thus, one could describe this chapter, with regard to its content, as generally divided into two sections: vv. 2-7 sets the calendar for the Sabbatical year, while vv. 8-55, that of the jubilee year."⁵ There is something sacred and holy about this. In concordance with this, it is observed elsewhere that:

Leviticus 25 comes at the end of the 'Holiness Teaching' that begins in Leviticus 19. Like Deuteronomy, Leviticus constitutes a God-inspired dream of a new foundation for Israel's life as a people, a new style of life for Israel. The book presupposes that the people will not live the life that exodus faith requires and will find themselves in exile, but that this need not be the end of their story. God will give them another chance after exile.⁶

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵ Emmanuel Dim, "The Biblical Background of "Jubilee" Celebrations, p. 1 - OSF <https://osf.io/kvuwn/download>.

⁶ "The Significance of Jubilee," published in Jubilee USA Network, 2007, in <https://www.jubileeusa.org/de/faith/faith-and-worship-resources/jubilee-tithe/the-significance-of-jubilee.html>.

James A. Sanders argues that "the concept of the Jubilee, or the collective forgiveness of all debts and debtor/slaves, had its origins in the Ancient Near East where it was a secular practice of kings. It came into the Bible originally also as a secular practice of kings but then became the province of priests and a calendar observance to be celebrated every 50 years."⁷ He adds that Jubilee "was finally understood in... the New Testament to rest in the hands of God alone, an eschatological concept of the forgiveness of all debts/sins and the redemption of all human sins, or debts to God."⁸ This becomes the theological basis for Jubilees. Sanders identifies three "salient obligations" required in Biblical Jubilee: freedom of slaves, pardon and cancellation of debts, and finally, "repatriation of property."⁹

Viewing the Jubilee text with similar binoculars of holiness seen above, Teresa Okure insinuates that the call requires four things from God's people. The first is to return to our ancestral land and roots. The second is admittance that we have separated from God's covenant. The third is gratitude to God for being faithful to us despite our unfaithfulness to Him. The fourth is a consequence of the second, which is to resolve to be committed to God, which defines our identity. Okure, afterwards, ties this Jubilee call to Jesus, who has given it a greater height by His announcement of the Gospel of repentance.¹⁰ Thus, the message of every Jubilee is that of interior conversion.

2.2 Historical Perspectives

The Popes blow the Jubilee horn in a universal way by proclaiming Jubilee Years. As the horn hinges on the head of the ram's horn blown in the Biblical Jubilee, it becomes more significant when a Pope, the Vicar of the Lamb of God, announces an ecclesial Jubilee. Jubilee, otherwise known as Holy Year, is twofold - Ordinary and Extraordinary Jubilees, with the latter coming only in the 16th Century. The history of Ordinary Jubilees (before the Extraordinary Jubilees) in the Catholic Church traces back to 1300 and was proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII in the Bull *Antiquorum Habet Fida Relatio* (Reliable Report of Antiquity). He decreed that Jubilees would occur every 100 years. Pope Clement VI responded to the requests of the faithful who had heard of the memories of the initial Jubilee and reduced it to 50 years, hence calling a Jubilee in 1350. Pope Urban VI afterwards declared an occurrence of Jubilees every 33 years in honour

⁷ James A. Sanders, "Jubilee in the Bible", in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* (vol. 50, no. 1, The Author(s), 2020), p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁰ Cf. Teresa Okure, "Theological and Pastoral Dimensions of the Kampala Document," second paper presented at the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), January 21, 2021, p. 1.

of the Lord's earthly years. Pope Paul II promulgated the present occurrence of Jubilees every 25 years in 1470.¹¹ The mathematical implication is that in a century, four Ordinary Jubilees would be witnessed. In contrast, its theological implication is that every generation in a century would witness at least one Jubilee. The historical implication is that 2025 would be the 27th Jubilee.¹²

The following are facts drawn from Jubilee history:

1. Among many Basilicas in Rome, seven are known as Pilgrim Churches, which pilgrims usually visit to date as penitential observance. Four of them are Papal and Major Basilicas: St John Lateran Basilica, St Peter's Basilica, St Paul's Basilica Outside the Walls, and Santa Maria Maggiore "Saint Mary Major". The other three are called 'Jubilee' Basilicas: St Sebastian Basilica Outside the Walls, St Laurence Basilica Outside the Walls, and Santa Croce (Holy Cross) in Gerusalemme. Hence, the tradition of the seven-church walks developed with the history of Jubilees. In the early Church, this was known as *Exomologesis*.¹³

2. Presently, going to Rome is not mandatory because of the physical impossibility of most people. To gain the indulgences attached to a Jubilee, the faithful must have the intention to receive them while performing some acts such as passage into the doors designated as Jubilee doors by Bishops in their dioceses imitating the Pope's act of opening Jubilee doors, going for Confession, attending Mass and receiving Communion, fulfilling several other spiritual requirements like praying for the Pope's intention, and detachment from venial sins. Closing Jubilee doors signifies the end of Jubilee years. Those who, for other reasons (such as illnesses, old age or disabilities), cannot go to the Holy doors have other conditions that can enable them to gain indulgence. In a Jubilee, a Pope can also grant new privileges connected to forgiveness for the sake of salvation (for example, forgiveness of reserved sins like abortion, et al.). Jubilee is a call to deep

¹¹ See the article "What is a Holy Year?" *op. Cit.*

¹² See Desmond O'Grady, *Rome Reshaped: Jubilees 1300-2000* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1999), p. 207.

¹³ *Exomologesis* is a practice found in antiquity, and it was seen as a necessary instruction to confess sins publicly, especially as found in two texts: *Didache*, ch. 4:14 and Letter of James 5:16. Making a pilgrimage to Rome, which included during Jubilees, was done as a form of penance for the remission of sins, and in some cases, people required others to "commute" (do pilgrimage and penance for them). With time, the Church changed the form of the Sacrament of penance, which now requires confessing privately to a priest and receiving an absolution and an imposed penance. The Irish monks introduced this form of confession after the 7th century. In antiquity, public penance usually preceded confession. Among the documents that address the modern form is Pope St Paul VI's *Paenitemini* issued in 1966.

examination of conscience, repentance, forgiveness, and penance, which includes offering up our sicknesses and every form of suffering and pain to the Lord to gain grace and merit.

3. In the Jubilee of 1550, the Church discovered the instrumentality of the Holy Trinity Confraternity, founded by St Filippo (Philip) Neri (a layman at the time), in providing hospitality to pilgrims. He later (as a priest) founded the Oratorian Congregation. He was also familiar with the culture of the seven Church walks and is venerated as *Secondo Patrono di Roma* (Second Patron of Rome).

4. In the Jubilee of 1750, a renowned preacher of Rome, St Leonard of Port Maurice, set up 14 Stations of the Cross in the ruins of the Colosseum to give the edifice another spiritual significance in addition to the Sacred drama mentioned above.

5. In the Jubilee of 1950, Pope Pius XII defined the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the fourth Marian Dogma in the Bull, *Munificentissimus Deus*.

6. The Year 2000 is the first time and presently the only time a Jubilee corresponded with a Millennium.

7. Every Jubilee derives its theme from an aspect of the Catholic Faith. Hence, the Lord's Pascal Mystery (Incarnation, Birth, Death, Resurrection and Ascension) remains the basis of every Jubilee.

3. The Jubilee Man, St. John of the Cross¹⁴

John was born in 1542. He changed his name from John of St. Matthias to John of the Cross because of his deep love for Christ. Drawing from the 49 years of his lifetime well lived, it implies that John witnessed two Jubilees, in 1550, convoked by Pope Julius III when he was around eight years old, and in 1575, convened by Pope Gregory XIII, when he was around thirty-three years old. He was beatified in the Jubilee Year, 1675, by Pope Clement X. In 1726, he was canonized by Pope Benedict XIII, and in 1926, Pius XI declared him a Doctor of the Church. His tomb was transferred to the present place in Segovia in, Spain.

¹⁴The information in this section is derived from John's Biographical Chronology in *Collected Works of St John of the Cross* (Washington D.C: ICS Publications, 2017), pp. 28-35, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D.

Among the works of John, four widely known ones are *The Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticles*, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, and *The Living Flame of Love*. He has been described as "the greatest poet Spain has ever known."¹⁵ Harvey Egan argues that his works "have become almost the norm for interpreting the mystical ascent to God."¹⁶ Being both a mystic and a poet, there exists the difficulty of the best way to describe John. Peter Tyler, though he deliberately avoids calling him a 'mystic', opines that he employs several 'mystical strategies' in his writings.¹⁷ George Tavadard admits that many scholars pay little attention to his works 'poetic dimension' and affirms that he can read them strictly in this dimension.¹⁸ In fact, a great Carmelite woman, St Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), calls him "the mystical teacher."¹⁹ Since Mysticism and poetry are gifts from God, the best way to describe him is to allow both qualifications to go together. Consequently, he is both a "mystical poet" and a "poetic mystic."

4. Purgation and Celebration in John of the Cross

4.1 Mystical Perspectives

One of the greatest tragedies in the modern world, particularly in Africa and even beyond, is the crucial Gospel (Gospel of the Cross), which has been replaced with the Gospel of Prosperity. Several priests and pastors tell Christians that suffering in the life of a Christian is a misfortune and curse. It must be admitted here that this does not apply to every preacher because there are still authentic preachers who speak the truth. But most of the prosperity Gospel preachers have changed the Word of God to become the Word of man. The negative effect of this is that the preachers guilty of this anomaly hardly preach about the salvation of the soul.

Consequently, many people are blinded spiritually. Such contradicts the authentic Gospel message. The Jubilee Lord Himself warns us several times to be mindful and careful of those who twist His Gospel (see Matt. 7:15-29).

¹⁵ See the YouTube Documentary, "John of the Cross/Period Drama/Full Movie/Spiritual Canticle" in <https://youtu.be/ZR2ThXFgFiY?feature=shared>.

¹⁶ Harvey D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 452.

¹⁷ Cf. Peter Tyler, *St John of the Cross* (New York: Continuum, 2010), p.69.

¹⁸ Cf. George H. Tavadard, *Poetry and Contemplation in St. John of the Cross* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1988), p. x.

¹⁹ Edith Stein, "Love of the Cross: Some Thoughts for the Feast of St. John of the Cross," in *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, vol. IV, edited by L. Gelber and Michael Linssen, translated by Waltraut Stein (Washington D.C: ICS Publications, 1992), p. 91.

St John of the Cross remains a teacher who draws our attention to the Lord's teaching. Even though his writings do not discuss anything about Jubilee, they possess a gamut of information that is in the Jubilee call. The central imagery in his teaching that is relevant to the present discussion is that of purgation and jubilation/celebration. This could propel the attentive modern Christians to ask lived questions such as: What is the connection between pain and joy? How can one undergoing purgation celebrate? Is this not a pragmatic contradiction?

It would have been absurd for a person with no experience of suffering to be speaking about it and its connection. In John, the reverse is the case because he truly suffered but found joy in God, who consoled him. This divine joy deep within is the drama that happens inside a soul that seeks to be united with God. John's life and teaching insinuate that purgation and jubilation are two sides of a Christian's coin. They constitute the pilgrimage of the soul where the human person is the athlete; earth is the field; God is the referee who holds the final whistle of our life and who alone knows the time to blow it; the Saints are our teammates, the Angels are our fans, the Church is the coach, while Heaven remains the goal that we must score. This, thus, speaks a lot and makes sense to reflect on the theme of the upcoming Jubilee of 2025 as the Jubilee of Hope.

Among the writings of St John of the Cross, four of them find their application in this reflection: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (AMC), *The Dark Night* (DN), *The Spiritual Canticles* (SC), and *The Living Flame of Love* (LF). Something similar exists between AMC and DN, and the same is the case with SC and LF. Rather than going into in-depth details about each of them, a synthesis and application of each of them will be provided.

4.2. The Ascent of Mount Carmel

John wrote it to give hope to discouraged persons in their spiritual journey, especially those who suffer greatly and desire to embrace their difficulties and unite them with God. As Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, observes, John identifies that such souls lose hope because those who stand as their spiritual guide discourage them and, in fact, make it more difficult for them. Instead of ascending to God, they descend.

John insists that our journey towards God is like a mountain, yet it is an ascent that is attainable by perseverance. God is the goal, and the suffering Jesus is the way. Purgation is necessary to achieve this. We are purified by God, who allows us to experience life's pains in a way that makes it seem that he abandons us, but He is always around us. The experience of feeling abandoned by God, just like Jesus on the Cross, is what makes this journey feel like a "night", but it is a

night to our human perception, whereas in and to God, it is light since everything is clear to Him. It becomes a way of bringing us closer to Him.²⁰

It involves a threefold purgation, first of the intellect, where our Faith in God is tested; second of the memory, where our hope in Him is tested; and third of the will, where our love for Him is equally tested. Here, everything remains obscure, and God seems to be absent. Devoid of being absent, God is rather the present in the absence. This becomes like a torment because our intellect, which is created to believe in God, questions His Existence and whereabouts; our memory, which is created to hope, interrogates whether it is necessary to still believe, and our will, which is created to love, queries whether it is still relevant to do what is good. The good news about this is that in all these torments, anyone who remains faithful will discover that a great level of detachment from earthly things has been attained, resulting in great attachment to God. We realize that God was never far away; rather, He allows purgation to occur for His presence to be enjoyed by the soul, which is meant only for Him. In this way, our union with Him is deepened, and the summit of the mountain is reached - God's ever presence in man's soul.²¹

John equally observes how those who make efforts to love God despite their difficulties would discover the seriousness of even the least sins. Contradictorily, those who do not care are not bothered by even the most grievous sins because they are far away from Him and have been blindfolded by attachment to worldly pleasures. While earthly creatures are good in themselves, attachment to them could lead to sins. The problem is a lack of moderation, which then blindfolds people to seek power, fame, wealth, etc., incessantly. This often leads to evil and lustful gratifications. Detachment and purification of appetites are therefore required to discover God and return to Him.²² The Prosperity Gospel falls into the category of things that need to be purified, and John points out the dangers this poses to the salvation of the soul.²³ and how withdrawing from such has great benefits to us.²⁴ This also includes every preacher who deceives people and all those who believe them, especially those preachers who are more interested in getting crowds because more crowd means more money. What they love, therefore, motivates what and how they preach. John laments the danger this poses to their salvation:

²⁰Cf. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk 1, chapters 1-4; bk 2, chapters 3-4.

²¹Cf. *Ibid*, bk 2, chapters 5, 6; bk 3, chapters 2-6, 17.

²²*Ibid*, bk 1, chapters 6-12; bk 3, chapter 16.

²³*Ibid*, bk 3, chapters 18-19. This does not mean that earthly goods are sinful. They are good, but attachment to them and the wrong manner of pursuing them lead us to sin if they take the place of God in our lives.

²⁴*Ibid*, bk 3, chapters 20-25.

Today, many belong in various ways to the category of this...degree. Out there in the world, their reason darkens regarding spiritual matters through covetousness. They serve money and not God, they are moved by money rather than by God, and they give first consideration to the temporal price and not to the divine value and reward. In countless ways, they make money their principal god and goal and give it precedence over God, their ultimate end.²⁵

One great effect detachment and purification will have on us, who are Church pilgrims, is the advancement of virtues. Already, we have attained growth by the bitter experiences of trials and temptations, but we grow more by our unity with God. This would enable us to see virtues and sins how God sees them, seek the former always, and bemoan the latter, for it is a virtue to desire to be virtuous and a sin to desire to be sinful. Since acquiring virtues is a way of doing penance and being penitential for our sins, it follows that jubilation of the soul is attained through purgation.

4.3. The Dark Night

The Dark Night is the completion of AMC. Here, John fulfils the promise of explaining several points he made in the former. In the DN, he identifies what is popularly known as the three stages of the spiritual (or interior) life in the Christian tradition and discipline. The three traditional stages are the purgative way, otherwise called the beginners' stage; the illuminative way, otherwise called the proficient stage; and the unitive way, otherwise referred to as the perfect stage. John teaches that, unlike the experience he identifies in *The Ascent*, which is more of 'active purification' where a person deliberately decides to undergo bitter experiences and even works of penance, here the choice is more of 'passive purifications', which all come from God. These experiences occur in between these stages, and the passive purifications occur in two stages. The first is the dark night of the senses, usually experienced in the beginner's stage. The second is the dark night of the spirit or soul often tasted in the proficient stage. This would then lead the soul to the unitive stage when it is truly united with God in everything. On this account, John exclaims:

"O guiding night!

O night more lovely than the dawn!

O night that has united the Lover with his beloved,

Transforming the beloved in her Lover."²⁶

²⁵ *Ibid*, bk 3, chapter 19, no. 3.

²⁶ John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, Poetry, stanza 5.

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange deepens this by adding that these stages are even seen in the life of the Apostles of Jesus. In contrast, he observes that their experience as beginners was from their call up till Jesus' Passion, as proficient were from Jesus' Passion to Pentecost, and as perfect men were from the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit strengthened them with the fortitude to undergo every suffering unto life Everlasting. Among the outstanding things is how he sums up the teachings of the Greek and Latin Fathers on this matter, and the meeting point of their various opinions is that Jesus becomes the measure of our spiritual life. Thus, each stage we experience is to be seen as a journey that is 'normal' in as much as there is an intention of progress to attain Eternal Beatitude.²⁷

In Shona and some cultures in Africa, God is revered as "the great Mother."²⁸ This is not because God is female, for there is no gender in God. Rather, such anthropomorphism shows the caring nature of the Supreme Being. John of the Cross also has this idea about God. He uses the analogy of a nursing mother who breastfeeds her child to give insights into this, and in this way, we clearly see the motherly nature of God. A mother breastfeeds her baby and plays with him in her arms, and after a while, begins to withdraw the milk by placing bitter aloes on her breasts. The baby cries, but with time, he understands that the mother was training him to be capable of eating strong food. In like manner, God treats us by His grace in the experience of dark moments in our lives. John recommends that we should abandon ourselves to God in difficult times.²⁹ In the dark night of the

²⁷Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, in chapter XV of volume I of his book, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (Illinois: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1989, pp. 225-246), discusses the three stages of life of spirituality of Christians. In fact, it is appropriate to state that this chapter is where the book derives its title from. He identifies a problem that constitutes a debate among schools and scholars of spirituality, namely, how to understand the 'three ways.' To provide and develop an answer to this, he relies on the authority and insights from the Sacred Scriptures, Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and most significantly, the Doctor of Mysticism, St John of the Cross. As Garrigou-Lagrange puts it, in the traditional spirituality or interior life found in the Fathers and Doctors, there are three pathways, but this received disagreement from the 18th century by scholars such as Scaramelli and those after him.

²⁸Nisbert Taringa, a scholar from the Shona culture in Zimbabwe, explains that among the pre-Christian attributes in the Shona culture, even still present up to this day, is that of Mother, which is depicted in their metaphor, *Runji*, which means "needle." He notes that this imagery is because sewing is a feminine profession in the culture, but it is applied to God to explain the power of His creating act of "sewing Heaven and earth together" and that even though. Hence, God is not separated from His creation and creatures. For a detailed explanation of the concept of God in Shona, see Taringa, "African Metaphors for God: Male and Female?" In *Scriptura* 86, (2004), pp. 174-179. Some other cultures, like the Southern Nuba, Ovambo and Ndebele, have similar feminine languages for God and, in some cases, qualify Him with feminine pronouns.

²⁹See John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, Poetry, stanza 8.

senses, the Lord purifies us of the several spiritual inclinations which naturally affect the senses. Here, God mortifies the beginner of different capital sins, which constitute imperfections in the spiritual journey. These imperfections include spiritual pride, which God heals us off by humbling and allowing us to experience things that teach us that we cannot do anything good without Him; spiritual avarice, where God heals us of desire to practice many spiritual exercises devoid of a sense of direction and without bearing fruits; spiritual lust where God heals sensory parts of the pleasure, the fear and the guilt it experiences even in spiritual delights during prayer in a way that tempts the senses; spiritual anger where God heals us of our anger over the sins of others and our impatience against ourselves when we sin; spiritual gluttony where God heals our appetite for too many spiritual works without results by teaching us resignation to spiritual directors; spiritual envy and sloth where God heals us of sadness towards spiritual progress of others and our lukewarmness towards Him.

5. The Benefit of Purgation

While these become great purgation, they have benefits mentioned by John, such as "habitual remembrance of God" and exercising the learned "virtues together". Other benefits include possession of chastity and "freedom of spirit", wherein they acquire the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit.³⁰ These benefits become what the purged soul celebrates about God. The dark night of the spirit includes experiences such as dryness in prayer, affliction of the will, and even doubts about God. In all these moments, God draws us to a deep union with Him and consoles us.³¹ Again, this Purgation of the soul leads to the celebration of God's goodness and love.

John further recommends that what is necessary in all the moments of excruciating pain we endure is to remain fervent in prayer and patience as the baby always calls out to the mother. Therefore, the best way God proves that He loves a soul is by allowing it to undergo severe moments of suffering. But He afterwards enlightens the soul with great joy. On this, he says:

Those in this situation should feel comforted. They ought to persevere patiently and not be afflicted. Let them trust in God, who does not fail those who seek him with a simple and righteous heart, nor will he fail to impart what is needful to bring them to the clear and pure light of love.³²

³⁰ See John of the Cross, *The Dark Night* bk 1, chapters 1-13.

³¹ See *ibid.*, bk 2, chapters 1-25.

³² *Ibid.*, bk 1, chapter 10, no. 3.

5.1 The Spiritual Canticles and the Living Flame of Love

It is intentional to consider these works together because of the similarity that exists in both, though they differ in some ways. To begin with, it is necessary to mention that both are texts of hope for anyone experiencing any form of dark night explained above. Even though both contain some languages about purification or purgation found in desolation, they are more of jubilation found in consolation. Like the previous texts, they also concern the soul in a pilgrimage, a journey to the house of the Father, following His Way, which is Jesus Christ, led by the Guide, the Holy Spirit.

If anyone dares ask John of the Cross what the differences in the texts are, perhaps he would ask the person to be patient and read them prayerfully. The differences are that first, in SC, John presented the soul as being in a sort of dialogue with Christ, who is the Bridegroom and Lover of the soul. In contrast, the soul is the Beloved, but in LF, the soul is more in a dialogue with the Holy Spirit, who is the Living Flame. Secondly, in the SC, the Beloved searches for the Lover, while in the LF, the Lover unites with the Beloved. What becomes a spectrum here is that the soul is bonded with the Blessed Trinity, and this echoes the famous words of St Patrick of Ireland about the binding of the self with the Trinity.³³

There are numerous similar factors in both texts. First, both mirror and are inspired by the Biblical text of the Song of Songs, which has the image of Bride and Bridegroom used to explain God's loving relationship with Israel - God is the Bridegroom, Israel is the Bride or the Beloved. Second is that John of the Cross writes both texts at the request of two women bearing the same name, Ana. The SC is written at the request of a Carmelite Mother Superior named Ana de Jesús, whom John also gives a drawing he made of the vision of the crucified Lord from the perspective of His Eternal Father. The LF is written at the request of a nobleman, Doña Ana del Mercado y Peñalosa, who had housed Ana de Jesús and her nuns for seven months when they sought to found a new monastery. So, both Anas knew each other, and both knew John of the Cross, who was their spiritual director.

The language of dialogue of the soul with God speaks of how it is consoled by God and celebrates God's love, which is consistent in John of the Cross in both texts. He is a master on the topic of Love in the double dimension of vertical (towards God) and horizontal (towards our fellow humans). In the same year he

³³ St Patrick's Breastplate prayer, which he composed, says: "I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One and One in Three."

died, he wrote some wonderful words to Ana de Jesús to quieten her disturbance about the torments she faced from Carmelite authorities. John writes these words: Where there is no love, there put love, and there you will find love.³⁴

Love, therefore, becomes not only God's action but His identity and characteristic, which is felt in the soul, especially by those who suffer much and unite their sufferings to that of Christ. This brings about two types of union of the soul with God, according to Kavanaugh. They are 'habitual and actual union.' While in the former, the soul enjoys a series of internal yearning and longing to be with God, in the latter, it becomes permanent when it meets God in eternity, whose foretaste begins here on earth as a participation in the life of God.

John of the Cross speaks of Love as a 'wound' from God in both SC and LF, and this could be seen as the summary of these works. The suffering soul now enjoys God's indwelling in many ways. The desolated soul of the human being who suffers several sicknesses, attacks, disappointments, and all sorts of life difficulties begins to experience God's consolation in love even when these sufferings are still present. This love is the type that changes a person inwardly to resemble God by bonding with Him. The soul is propelled to celebrate God's love with the consolation that in eternity, when it meets God, there will be no more suffering but rather a perpetual consolation in His bosom. There, as Garrigou-Lagrange puts it, faith is replaced by vision, hope is replaced by possession, but love remains forever.³⁵ This vision of God is called the Beatific Vision - seeing God face to face as He really is (see Rev 22:4). As Garrigou-Lagrange adds, the Beatific Vision is a perfect act of charity/love.³⁶

Conclusively, in the soul's (Beloved's) search for the bridegroom, it yearns for eternal union, that is, for Beatific Vision with Him from this world, exclaiming:

“Where have you hidden,
Beloved, and left me moaning?
You fled like the stag.
After wounding me;
I went out calling you, but you were gone.”³⁷

³⁴ *Letter to Mother Ana de Jesús*, July 6, 1591.

³⁵ Cf. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Life Everlasting* (Illinois: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1991), p.231.

³⁶ For detailed knowledge, read the section on Heaven, which runs from chapters XXVII to XXXII of the same book.

³⁷ John of the Cross, The Poem, *The Spiritual Canticles*, stanza 1.

In the union of the Bridegroom with the Beloved, the soul affirms in joy:

“O Living Flame of Love
That tenderly wounds my soul.
In its deepest centre! Since
Now, you are not oppressive,
Now consummate! If it is your will:
Tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!”³⁸

Hence, all this is the soul's pilgrimage.

6. Lessons

Lord, I Want to See your Father

I cracked a joke about the dialogue an Igbo (the ethnic group I come from in Nigeria) drunkard had with Jesus on his entry into Heaven. When he heard the conversation of another guy who referred to Jesus' Father as "God the Grandfather", he requested to see Jesus. When Jesus saw him, Jesus asked him what he had done for any of the least of his brethren (Matt 25:39). The man replied, beginning his response on the *via negativa*, "Lord, even though I did not give food to the hungry, at least as a drunkard, I bought drinks to the thirsty, and remember You have changed water into wine". The man then added in Igbo, "*Biko nye m igodo na ụra na-atụ m*" (Give me the key I want to sleep) because in Your Father's house there are many rooms" (Jn 14:2-6). Then Jesus laughed and replied to him: "Now enter into the home of my Father." The man replied smiling and said to Jesus: "Lord, please, before I sleep, give me one bottle of drink so I can greet God the Grandfather because, in my culture, we give drinks to elders to pour libation." Jesus jokes back: "In my Father's house, there are many mansions, but not drinks." The Eternal Father burst into laughter, embracing the drunkard and repeated the words He said at Jesus' Baptism: "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

What are the points of the joke above? The first is that Jesus is a man in everything except sin. Therefore, He does everything humans do, including cracking jokes. The second is that the Eternal Father bears witness to everything His Son does, and that is why He identifies with His Son to welcome us into His Divine Home. The third is that observing that joke, there is no language of pain,

³⁸John of the Cross, The Poem, *The Living Flame of Love*, stanza 1.

trials, sicknesses, tribulations, temptations, misfortunes, and disappointments, but rather that of rejoicing. This means that Heaven is not a place of purgation but of jubilation. There, the Eternal Father (who, if we are to go by the jovial description, He received from the comic drunkard) stands as a Forefather, which is a language used to explain His eternal paternity to indicate that He knows and sees all that happens to us here on earth. As One who knows, He embraces us upon entry into Heaven to jubilate with us, a jubilation which lasts forever.

To underscore this better, a reference could be made to the Akan and Ashanti cultures of Ghana, who refer to God with the attributes of "Grandfather" and "Elder", which echo the eternity of God. One great lesson to be learned from John of the Cross in the light of the Jubilee, therefore, is that in our moments of pain in our present earthly pilgrimage; let us look beyond such by making aspirations addressed to Jesus by exclaiming to Him: "Lord I want to see your Father!" This is a way of imitating and uniting our sufferings with Jesus, who offered His sufferings to His Father, saying: "Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit" (Luke 23:46), which were also the last words said by St John of the Cross on his deathbed.

Another lesson is that we need to celebrate this Jubilee, which begins after the conclusion of the Synod on Synodality, with penitential hearts. As the theme of the Jubilee is that of Hope, which is also what every synod brings to the members of the Church, let us not be discouraged in our difficult times but offer them up to the Eternal Father through His Son Jesus. Hope itself is the second theological virtue that God infused in us. Hope is a language of love that is rooted in faith and gives peace amid desolation.

The third great lesson to be learned from the foregoing is that anywhere we find ourselves in these explained stages, we must bear in mind that humility and patience are required of us from God. This is because God is the One working something out of us - He is using our experiences in the Interior Life to perfect us to be more like Him. My observation here is that this is a great way of proving that He made us in His image and now forms us in His own likeness to be able to recognize us and recognize Him on the Last Day.

One other lesson is that there is equally the need to be attentive to two Biblical parallels that could help us live in hope, which are texts from each of the Testaments. In the Old Testament, we hear the Psalmist describe the purgation undergone by our souls each time we have bitter experiences: "They go out they go out full of tears". But that is immediately followed by a language of hope: "They come back, they come back full of joy carrying their sheaves" (Psalm 126:6). The Lord does the same in the New Testament in the Beatitudes when He identified a blessing attached to purgation: "Blessed are those who mourn", and

He supplied the message of hope: "for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). The rewards in the Beatitudes are in the passive to indicate that humans receive them from God. Jubilee is a ceremony of joyful songs, and it is only when we are comforted in our mourning, that is, our purgation, here on earth, that we can return to Heaven filled with songs. At the same time, we carry our sheaves, that is, the merits we have gained from our earthly suffering, followed by the salutation of the Eternal Father and the entire heavenly court.

7. Final Words

The afore-cited Beatitude says in the Greek text: "*paracletesontai*", which is "They shall be comforted." Who then shall comfort us? The One to comfort us is the Holy Spirit, whom St John of the Cross calls the Living Flame of Love. He comforts us by wounding our souls tenderly in their deepest centre. This deepest centre, according to John of the Cross, is God. The Jubilee calls us to return to that centre, God, our baptismal root through purgation, that is, doing contrite penance for our sins. Our baptismal renewal involves renouncing Satan and all his works and pomp in the profession of our belief in the Trinitarian God. Through purgation (both active and passive), we live far away from our sins. Undergoing and enduring sorrows is not easy. But if this is a necessity required for holiness, then it is possible to be attained by the grace of God. Praying for the grace of perseverance is necessary, for while in purgation, we wear the crown of thorns, and while in jubilation, it changes to the crown of glory. Prosperity Gospel lacks this insight and foresight. The best way to prosper is to prosper in virtues.

Finally, the Synod and Jubilee remind us that our life is a daily pilgrimage. Consequently, we should remember the need to reflect on prayers and rites that speak of our journey and how they are dispositive and contain traits of Jubilee. Some of them include, first, the Holy Mass, where a Divine-human Synod occurs in our gathering and communion with Angels and Saints to celebrate the divine Jubilee of feasting on the Body and Blood of Christ for our sanctification. The next is the Advent prayer "Maranatha!" It reminds us that we are marching to meet Christ, and He comes to meet us. Another prayer is the Salve Regina (Hail Holy Queen), composed by a crippled Monk, Herman Contratto, where we ask the Blessed Mother to help us in our temptations and difficulties in this world, the valley of tears. Among the other relevant prayers is the Act of Hope, in which we yearn for God to console us in our present suffering in this life in the hope of being eternally consoled in the life to come. Another is the rite of candlelight processions at Easter Vigil and the Presentation of the Lord. We carry lights to indicate the idea of being purified of darkness by Light—purgation.