

Psychic- Quest for the Union through Love in the Poems of John of the Cross

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Abstract

John of the cross was a person of high piety and an ideologist of the reformation in the church. The Church opposed him for his spiritual reformativ actions. Then he went through different stages of difficulties. He became imprisoned and tortured by the authorities. At this juncture, he composed his masterpieces. His poetry reflect his psychic-quest for the union with God through the love. The poet never depressed. But he was anxious for the union with his beloved. Finally he achieves the goal. The psychic-quest was the driven force in the poet. The poetical psyce is the main theme of this paper.

KEYWORDS: Psyche, Quest, Spiritual Experience, Union.

Introduction.

The psyche of the poet plays a vital role in the creation of the poetry. K.M Barclay points out that poetry is itself a therapeutic for the writer. American philosopher and psychologist William James, in his book The “Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature” is believed to be a lay the foundations for the psychology of religion. In his book he wonderfully describes the harmonious relation and union with the ultimate being is one of the great goals of a human psyche. John of the cross, a mystic poet in the Spanish literature is the example taken for the paper to point out for the poet’s spiritual distress and its psychic implications.

According to William James Having examined religious and psychic states, the author identified three essential “characteristics of the religious life”

- 1)“That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance”;
- 2)“That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end”;
- 3)“That prayer or inner communion with the spirit there of be that spirit “God” or “law” - is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world.”

John of Cross (1542-1591) considered as great a mystic-saint, renounced poet and major figure of Counter Reformation in the Spanish world of literature. He composed more than 2500 verses in Spanish language. Among them, Spiritual Canticle, Dark Night of the Soul, Living Flame of love and Ascent of Mount Carmel ate widely considered masterpiece of his poetry. John of Cross, a man of pious purity of mind and modesty of

life stood apart from materialistic way of his community. Due to this, he was kept under a brutal regime included public lashing before the community at least weekly, and punished with severe isolation in tiny stifling cell barely large enough for his body.

Born to an orthodox Jewish family, in June 24, 1542, in Fontiveros, Spain, John became a victim of poverty and struggles of the life after the demise of his father. He became a Carmelite monk in 1563 and an ordained priest in 1567. A year later, he was called by St. Teresa of Avila to reform the monastic order with pure spiritual centeredness. However, due to consequential friction, he was imprisoned in 1576 and again in 1577. During this time of his imprisonment he started to writing poetry, some of his finest work outlining the steps of mystical ascent, also known as the soul's journey to Christ. Many of his poems including "The Dark Night of the Soul" and "The Living Flame of Love", are considered the pinnacle of mystical Spanish literature. His poetry was not published during his life time. However his spiritual ideology became accepted by the church by reading his writings and this came to shower light on his works. He was glorified as a saint in 1726 by Pope Benedict XIII.

The poetical mind of the St. John of the Cross is the central theme in this paper. His psychic quest has been defined as the direct experience or the efforts for experiencing the ultimate intuition and the vision of the soul, self and nature in love. He includes the sense of union of the self or psyche with accompanied by melancholy, solitude, renunciation, meditation and inner contemplation. The faith in a divine principle or soul in which he forgets both the personality and the cosmos participate, is directly related in the quest for the union with the divinity. He forgets the torture and trial in the period of his imprisonment and writing his masterpiece "The dark night of the soul". It manifests itself into human consciousness of eternal insights.

It is not uncommon to hear religious people say that they're going through a Dark Night of the Soul. The Dark night of the Soul is a poem and its theological commentary, written by the poet himself, describes the arduous path, appropriately calls a "dark night," which the soul travels to reach mystical love. The psychic stage of the poet in the quest for the union with God. It is depicts in passionate joyous verses such as the following:

"I abandoned and forgot myself,
laying my face on my Beloved;
all things ceased;
I went out from myself,
leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies."

In seeking God he goes through the various phases of spiritual experiences. Through a path of difficulty he reaches the throne of grace. His psyche was of a denying self, he forsakes all, choosing the way to be with his beloved, the way of separation from the world, and the way of loneliness and suffering ect. His psyche is in the ultimate quest in the search of union with God. His path was filled with many obstructions that are conflict

between basic sensuousness and intense religious faith. He enters into the dark night of the soul, a period of desolation. Here he getting the triumph over his anxiousness. The spiritual consolation, patience and joy leading him to a mystical union with God.

Psychologist Erich Fromm befittingly explains that love is not merely a feeling but is also actions. In his book named "The Art of Loving" explain the fact, the "feeling" of love is superficial in comparison to one's commitment to love via a series of loving actions over time. In this sense, Fromm held that love is ultimately not a feeling at all, but rather is a commitment to, and adherence to, loving actions towards another, oneself, or many others, over a sustained duration. Fromm also described love as a conscious choice that in its early stages might originate as an involuntary feeling, but which then later no longer depends on those feelings, but rather depends only on conscious commitment. (Fromm, Erich; The Art of Loving, Harper Perennial (5 September 2000), Original English Version, ISBN 978-0-06-095828-2)

The poem "The Living Flame of Love" as an expression of psyche in the state of an elevated union within the intimate depths of the spirit. The subject matter is exalted psyche rather a passive state in the search of beloved in his love, so that John taunt to speak of it only with a deeply recollected love. The image of flame, working on the wood, dispelling the moisture, turning it black, then giving it the qualities of fire, appeared first in the Dark Night. In the Canticle it turns up again in the serene night toward the end of the poem, a flame that is painless, comforting, and conformed to God. This flame, John told us there, is the love of the Holy Spirit. Now, having grown hotter and sometimes flaring up, it impels the Carmelite friar to write more verses about the sublime communion taking place in his deepest center.

How gently and lovingly
you wake in my heart,
where in secret you dwell alone;
and in your sweet breathing,
filled with good and glory,
how tenderly you swell my heart with love.

The psyche of the poet awakened by the love of God. This awakening of the Son of God that the soul wishes to refer to here is one of the most elevated and beneficial because of his psychic quest for his ultimate aim that is the being with the being in union. For this awakening is a movement of the Word in the substance of the soul, containing such grandeur, dominion, glory, and intimate sweetness that it seems to the soul that all the balsams and fragrant spices and flowers of the world are commingled, stirred, and shaken so as to yield their sweet odor, and all the kingdoms and dominions of the world and all the powers and virtues of heaven are moved; not only this, but it also seems that all the virtues and substances and perfections and graces of every created thing glow and make the same movement all at once.

Conclusion.

John of Cross's used poetry as his one of the most powerful medium to reflect the psychic aspiration in a sound manner. Today, the psychological world considers the poetry as therapeutic to eradicate the psychic distress and anxiety . John of the cross was a person of high piety and an ideologist of the reformation in the church. The Church opposed him for his spiritual reformative actions. Then he went through different stages of difficulties. He became imprisoned and tortured by the authorities. At this juncture, he composed his masterpieces. His poetry reflect his psychic-quest for the union with God through the love. The poet never depressed. But he was anxious for the union with his beloved. Finally he achieves the goal. The psychic-quest was the driven force in the poet.

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