

**The Emergence of a Psychologically
Dynamic Christian Understanding of Self
Identity Based on a Reflective Dialogue
between St. John of the Cross and Donald
Winnicott**

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PhD Thesis

Abstract

This thesis finds its origins in my work as spiritual director and psychotherapist and centres on the fundamental search for a sense of self identity that can incorporate a deep Christian life of faith within the individual. The historical development of the spiritual understanding of the self as it evolved from St. Augustine's vision through to St. John of the Cross was superseded by a more specific and empirical definition that became the hallmark of the main psychological interpretations of the self, particularly the psychoanalytic. The school of object relations offers a psychodynamic understanding of the self that can engage in dialogue with John of the Cross' spiritual perspective and this finds a creative opportunity in the works of Donald Winnicott. I survey parallels between John's vision of personal transformation within the soul that leads to loving union with God, in Christ, and Winnicott's understanding of the way an individual develops the True Self identity. I focus on two central themes in their respective teaching, the pivotal role of Christ in the process of spiritual growth in John, and the presence of the transitional object in Winnicott that facilitates movement into relational maturity. I show that we can use Winnicott's understanding of psychological development to discover a transitional role in the way Christ engages the soul that then activates the dynamic search for an authentic sense of identity, fulfilling both psychological and spiritual criteria that we have seen respectively operating in the vision of both authors.

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Abbreviations

In the following chapters where citations from the Works of John of the Cross are included in the footnotes the title of each work will be referred to as follows:

S	<i>Subida del Monte Carmelo</i>	(Ascent of Mount Carmel)
N	<i>Noche oscura</i>	(Dark Night)
C	<i>Cantico spiritual</i>	(Spiritual Canticle) (B redaction)
L	<i>Llama de amor viva</i>	(Living Flame of Love) (B redaction)
R	<i>Romances</i>	(Romances)

They will then be followed by (i) chapter; (ii) paragraph; (iii) page number in the English edition: *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. and intro. Kieran Kavanaugh O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez O.C.D, Washington D.C., ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979; (iv) page number in the Spanish edition: *Obras Completas de San Juan de la Cruz*, ed. Lucinio Ruano de La Iglesia, Madrid, Biblioteca Autores Cristianos, 2005.

Introduction

Self Identity – Central Theme

The subject of this thesis, *The Emergence of a Psychologically Dynamic Christian Understanding of Self Identity Based on a Reflective Dialogue between St. John of the Cross and Donald Winnicott*, has its origins in the two different aspects of my priestly ministry with individuals, in spiritual direction and in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Continual observation from my work and that of my colleagues has shown that the authentic search for self identity will inevitably confront an individual with both human and spiritual issues that are integral to the life of both the psyche and the spirit. This truth is echoed by David G. Benner, in his illuminating study of the whole interface between Christian spirituality and therapeutic psychology, where he says, ‘Genuine Christian spirituality takes very seriously the knowing of oneself. This is the deep connection between spiritual and psychological wholeness’.¹ It is vital, therefore, that these two areas of experience can discover a complementary relationship that fosters truly creative insight which can then lead to genuine growth and a real sense of creative fulfilment. This can only take place when initial conflicts of interpretation and meaning are clarified and are then placed within the context of a person’s own unique history of individual development. The history of this relationship between psychology and religion in many ways reflects this process of differentiation and definition, concerning not only the essential nature of these two worlds of experience, but also the ways in which they can collaborate effectively, without denying the specific contributions that both can bring to our understanding of human and spiritual development.

In recent years there have been several important contributions that have clarified this relationship, particularly in its application to important areas of human experience that emerge in spiritual direction and personal therapy. It was James Fowler who, in his seminal

¹ Benner, David G., *Care of Souls, Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel*, Grand Rapids Michigan, Baker Books, 1998. p. 99.

work, *Stages of Faith – The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, opened up the dialogue between the life of faith and the fundamental human dynamics of personal growth in a way that provided a model for others intent on bringing the worlds of psychodynamic theory and spirituality into a creative dialogue that, in its turn, could illuminate the call to spiritual maturity, particularly according to the Christian tradition of faith. Drawing on the post-Freudian structural developmentalist theories of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg and the presentation of faith found in the theological writings of H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, Fowler demonstrated ² how a creative dialogue could be found between human growth and the spiritual experiences of internal faith, faith being understood in the broadest sense, that could then shed light on key issues relating to personal development. Without replicating his theoretical approach in detail, his influence can be seen clearly operating in several subsequent important reflections concerning the development of spiritual identity within a psychodynamic framework: Elizabeth Liebert's *Changing Life Patterns, Adult Development in Spiritual Direction*; Peter Feldmeier's *The Developing Christian, Spiritual Growth Through the Life Cycle*; Walter E. Conn's *The Desiring Self, Rooting Pastoral Counselling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence*; and finally, in Robert Davis Hughes III's fascinating presentation of the development of spiritual theology, *Beloved Dust, Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life*.

In his very comprehensive and original synthesis of different currents of spirituality Hughes' primary intention is to develop a new vision of spiritual growth centred on the dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit, in a manner that incorporates insights that have come not only from Fowler's *Stages of Faith* but also from other contemporary influential thinkers such as Bernard Lonergan, Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Rahner, while at the same time keeping the Christian Mystical Tradition discretely within the frame. All these writers demonstrate clearly how psychological theory can be woven into a spiritual understanding of the nature of growth

² Fowler James W., *Stages of Faith, The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, San Francisco, Harper, 1995. p. 98.

deep within the person, without distorting the essential tenets of their individual component belief systems. This thesis, in its psychological dimension, will also utilise, like Fowler, a post-Freudian model - that of object relations theory, a movement, however, much closer to the original psychoanalytic model of Freud than that of the structural developmentalist models that Fowler, and the subsequent Christian writers, already referred to, drew upon. This movement will subsequently be examined more closely later in both this chapter and in more detail in Chapter Three.

William Meissner, in his *Life and Faith, Psychological Perspectives on Religious Experience* demonstrated how the world of psychology, understood from a psychoanalytic perspective could likewise be drawn into a very profound and fruitful encounter with the world of religious faith, beginning, as he does, with a reflection on the 'Nature of Grace' that then moves towards what he describes as a 'Psychology of Grace.'³ Within this process Meissner recognises the importance of a person's ability to develop relationships with others, and here he draws upon Donald Winnicott's object relations theory as an important part of his argument,⁴ seeing this as a key component in an individual's ability to open himself out to a living relationship with God, which then becomes the context for all relationships of love that can promote growth, emotionally and spiritually. In his presentation, Meissner also draws upon a highly significant work of Anna Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God, A Psychoanalytic Study*,⁵ concerning the intricate psychological aspects of the way this relationship with God evolves, that reflects, among many aspects of psychological experience, upon Winnicott's understanding of the place of the transitional object in relational development. This will emerge, later on, as a major theme when the dialogue between John and Winnicott is developed in Chapters Four and Five. What I want to emphasise here is that

³ Meissner, William W., *Life and Faith, Psychological Perspectives on Religious Experience*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1987, pp. 53-60. and 'The Psychology of Religious Experience, in *Communio*, 4i, 1977b. pp. 36-59.

⁴ Meissner, *Life and Faith, Psychological Perspectives on Religious Experience*. pp. 38-41.

⁵ Rizzuto, Anna-Maria, *The Birth of the Living God, A Psychoanalytic Study*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1979, pp. 177-180.

the subject of this thesis is rooted in this powerful interaction between the experience of faith and the psychoanalytic processes, presented by Meissner and enriched by Rizzuto, and will attempt to illuminate further the implications of this relational dimension with reference to our understanding of the development of self identity. Furthermore, I hope to demonstrate how the choice of John of the Cross, as a powerfully creative and inspirational partner in this reflective dialogue, will become manifest of its own accord as the thesis develops, and will justify Peter Feldmeier's judgement that John is still 'considered, in the Roman Catholic Tradition, as one of the greatest expositors of the contemplative, mystical path.'⁶

In their study of *Religion and the Unconscious*, Ann and Barry Ulanov acknowledge that although the world of religion and depth psychology 'are possessed of many interrelationships and analogies they rarely share exactly the same ground.'⁷ This does not, in their opinion, preclude the possibility of an interaction that can be productive, but it does require a very clear understanding of the particular contribution that each discipline can bring to the experience of human development and growth. This is clarified when an interplay between the realms of psychic and religious experience are clearly defined in a way that can recognise 'the real place religion has in the economy of the life of the psyche, the abundant grace that an open psyche provides to a searching soul, and the countless other ways in which the two worlds meet and remain attached, or as a result of the meeting recognise how much they must remain apart.'⁸ This Introductory Chapter will, therefore, will first of all explore the whole question of the search for self identity in its historical and psychological context, with reference to the initial encounter between the world of religion and psychology, highlighting its contemporary relevance. This will then be followed in the Chapter One by a brief survey of the development of a sense of personal and spiritual identity within the Western Christian tradition, out of which John's teaching has emerged. Chapters Two and Three will examine,

⁶ Feldmeier, Peter, *The Developing Christian, Spiritual Growth Through the Life Cycle*, Mahwah N.J., Paulist Press, , 2007. p. 76.

⁷ Ulanov Ann & Barry, *Religion and the Unconscious*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, The Westminster Press, 1975. p. 23.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 24

in closer detail, John's and Winnicott's thought, respectively, concerning the growth in self identity. Chapters Four and Five will then, on the basis of this exposition of their thought, open up a reflective dialogue in which John's and Winnicott's insights can enrich our understanding of the central theme of this thesis.

Historical Background

In the opening chapter of their edited study, *Psychology and Christianity*, Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones point out that psychological thinking received its first development 'with unusual sophistication by Greek philosopher-therapists like Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus. These thinkers explored topics like the composition and inner structure of human beings – memory, reason, sensation, appetite, motivation, virtues and vices, and various ideals of human maturation.'⁹ They then go on to show how the influence of this philosophically reflective tradition permeated the thinking of the great Christian thinkers of the West, and 'though largely concerned with matters of faith and life, people like the desert fathers, Tertullian, Cassian, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Great, wrote sometimes with penetrating insight into the nature of the soul and soul healing.'¹⁰ However, it was with Augustine, powerfully influenced by the philosophical tradition inspired by Plato, and his treatment of the great themes of human experience - love, sin, grace, memory, mental illumination, wisdom and volition - that the basis for a more psychological treatment of faith could be found. Strongly influenced by Augustine, but much more systematic in his thinking, was Thomas Aquinas who drew heavily on the work of Aristotle¹¹ and produced an influential body of psychological thought covering the appetites, the will, habits, the emotions, the memory and the intellect. In his own way he clarified the inner workings of the soul/psyche

⁹ Johnson, Eric L., & Jones, Stanton L., 'A History of Christians in Psychology', in Johnson, Eric L., & Jones Stanton L., *Psychology & Christianity*, Downers Grove, Illinois, Intervarsity Press, 2000, p. 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹¹ McGinn, Bernard, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, New York, The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2005. p.31.

and initiated a form of spiritual and psychological dialogue within an intellectual context that was totally related to the life of faith.

This then received further expression during the Middle Ages in the works of other leading Christian thinkers ‘who wrote on psychological topics...Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, Symeon the New Theologian, Anselm, ...and William of Ockham, who typically focused on concerns like the structure of the soul, knowledge and spirituality and spiritual development.’¹² It was this movement, as we shall see later, that contributed, along with other sources, to the description of spiritual development found in St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, articulated, according to Johnson and Jones ‘with unparalleled depth.’¹³ When, on the basis of this specifically Catholic foundation, we observe the later emergence of a particularly practical form of pastoral psychology within the Reform movement of Christian Europe, and the continued incorporation of a sustained in-depth reflection on the nature of human experience among philosophical thinkers, i.e. René Descartes, Giovanni Vico, Thomas Reid, Gottfried Leibniz, Blaise Pascal, reaching an apex in the works of Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety*, it is clear that the late nineteenth century’s scientific interest in psychology faced an already established tradition of reflection on human experience that had embraced both the human and spiritual dimensions of the psyche.

The Initial Encounter between Psychology and Religion

Robert Crapps, in his *Introduction to Psychology of Religion*, is clear that a strictly scientific psychology had its roots in an intellectual milieu that followed the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859. It was subsequently in 1879 that Professor Wilhelm Wundt established a laboratory in the University of Leipzig to design and utilize experimental

¹² Johnson & Jones, *Psychology & Christianity*, p. 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

methods suited to the study of human behaviour. According to Crapps, during the formative decades of scientific psychology, religion did not occupy a significant place in the concerns of researchers.¹⁴ However, as Johnson and Jones point out,¹⁵ it was a Catholic psychologist, Edmund Pace, who had studied with Wundt and began teaching psychology courses at the Catholic University of America in 1891, who initiated a dialogue between an empirically based psychology with a psychology that was grounded in a belief and respect for the spiritual dimensions of the person and the soul. We subsequently see this dialogue developing in such works as R. E. Brennan's *General Psychology: An Interpretation of the Science of Mind based on Thomas Aquinas*, M. Maher's *Psychology: Empirical and Rational* and T.V. Moore's *Dynamic Psychology*. The psychological study of religion was then further systematised in the two major American publications, Edwin D. Starbuck's *The Psychology of Religion*, published in 1899 and, perhaps the most famous of all, William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in 1902, both are seen as pioneering the psychological examination of religious phenomena in creating a positive attitude towards the possibilities of such studies.

These two works, certainly in the English-speaking world, established a tradition of interaction between psychology and religion that was further consolidated by James Leuba in his major work *A Psychological Study of Religion and the Psychology of Religious Mysticism*. As Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi points out in his article, 'The Psychology of Religion 1880-1930: The Rise and Fall of a Psychological Movement,' these writers not only followed the traditional view that religion was something necessary to human society but also demonstrated an 'attitude of deference and reverence to basic religious dogmas.'¹⁶ This positive phenomenological beginning of the relationship between religion and psychology has

¹⁴ Crapps, Robert, *An Introduction to Psychology of Religion*, , Macon, Mercer University Press, 1986 p. 4.

¹⁵ Johnson & Jones, *Psychology & Christianity*, p.32

¹⁶ Beit-Hallahmi, Benjamin, 'Psychology of Religion 1880-1930: The Rise and Fall of a Psychological Movement.' in H. Newton Malony (ed) *Current Perspectives in Psychology of Religion*, ,William B. Erdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids Michigan, 1977. p. 20.

since had to face many interesting and conflictual challenges which have become part of the continued dialogue between these two vital areas of experience. It was with the advent of psychoanalysis and its very specific understanding of religious experience that the conflictual aspect of this dialogue found one of its most potent adversaries.

The Challenge of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis, initially developed in the thinking of Sigmund Freud,¹⁷ posed its complex challenge to the religious world by relocating the pastoral care of souls, placing it in a context that emphasised its adherence to a scientific method of empirical observance of human experience rather than one that bore continual reference to the world of supernatural causes and points of reference. For Freud, psychoanalysis' central insight into religion is that its developmental origins are found in the vicissitudes of the oedipal complex, the young child's struggle both to maintain a relationship with and safely assert himself against the omnipotent and rivalrous father.¹⁸ By subordinating the world of religious belief and experience to the drama of personal relationships, or, in the words of John McDargh, to 'the sexual and affective drama of the family romance,'¹⁹ with all its intertwined emotions, fears and longings, a person has to remain in a world of infantile fixation. According to Freud, religion is a protective barrier that prevents an individual from accessing and integrating the forces of primary process, the world of the unconscious, which in the words of A & B Ulanov, 'may be likened to a rushing river of being – a tumult of unformulated, strongly felt wishes, of partial images, affective impulses, pulsating instincts, insistent urges, compelling drives.'²⁰ In other words, the God of the Judeo-Christian religion is a projection of the oedipal father who is

¹⁷ The main corpus of Sigmund Freud's writings is to be found in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, London, Hogarth Press, 24 Volumes, 1954-73. A brief outline of fundamental psychoanalytic principles can be found in Sigmund Freud, *Metapsychology*, London, Penguin Books, 1984. Vol. 11. pp 35-57.

¹⁸ Freud Sigmund, 'Totem and Taboo', in *The Origins of Religion*, London, Penguin Books 1990, Vol. 13, p. 209.

¹⁹ McDargh, John, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion, On Faith and the Imaging of God*, New York & London, University Press of America Inc, 1983. p.138.

²⁰ Ulanov, A.&B., *Religion and the Unconscious*, p. 26.

hostile to all the creative forces of life, and who demands the segregation of them within a person through repression and rejection.²¹ Religion then degenerates into all kinds of moralizing about what one should and should not do.²²

The answer, for Freud, was the psychoanalytic process that enabled a person to access the deepest levels of primordial unconscious life by consciously working within the psychoanalytic understanding of the human psyche, which includes the reality and pleasure principles, the laws of repression, regression, transference and resistance, and the world of dreams, of fantasy and the imagination. This was one of the most serious shaping factors behind many theologians' mistrust of all forms of psychological theory which, of course, embraced the whole psychoanalytic world. To dismiss religious beliefs as illusions, forms of powerful wish fulfilments and unacceptable neuroses, while embracing reason and the primacy of consciousness as the essence of fulfilment, was bound to create conflict with those who adhered to a profoundly spiritual perspective of human destiny. However, Stephen Spinks in his article 'Study of Psychology and Religion', accedes that while 'the validity of spiritual truths is a matter upon which no psychologist qua psychologist can pronounce an opinion...nonetheless, the fact that religion is an active element in human life at all levels makes it imperative that we should attempt to estimate its nature and activities in terms of contemporary psychology.'²³ For Spinks, psychology is concerned with body and soul (psyche). It cannot just remain within the sphere of biological, instinctual and emotional responses to a person's environment. It must incorporate in its vision the end (telos) towards which a person strives and is attracted, and this must involve the intentionality and the will, formed within the network of primary relationships. It is then within this searching context that the desire for spiritual fulfilment will be located.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 34.

²² Horney, Karen, 'The Tyranny of the Should', in *Neurosis and Human Growth*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1950. pp. 64-85.

²³ Spinks, George Stephen, 'Psychology and Religion', in M. Gorman (ed) *Psychology and Religion: A Reader*, . New York /Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1981 .p.50.

Post Freudian Developments in Psychological Thinking

Freud's psychopathic classification of religious practices and beliefs, rooted in his own childhood experiences of religion, was quickly superseded within the analytical world by one of his earliest disciples, Carl Gustav Jung. It is not my intention here to give an in-depth survey of Jungian theory but rather to point out two very important aspects of Jung's thought that are relevant to this thesis. Jung, both as a theorist and clinician, became very much aware of the positive religious dimension, as he saw it, of the psyche and the important part religion played in the healing of his patients.²⁴ He found that the development of what he termed a 'religious attitude,' a profound inner disposition that came to birth when a person experienced what Rudolf Otto described as 'the numinous',²⁵ which releases a dynamic energy that 'seizes and controls the human subject, who is always rather its victim than its creator'²⁶, was an integral part of psychological growth. It underpinned, for Jung, the inner movement towards wholeness - the process of psychological maturation that he termed "individuation",²⁷ a dynamic process of growth that 'means becoming an "individual", and, in so far as "individuality"' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate "individuation" as "coming to selfhood" or "self-realization."²⁸ The second observation on Jungian theory follows on from this.

For Jung the psyche incorporated two dynamic centres of activity, the ego and the self.²⁹ The ego, Jung posited, is the centre of consciousness concerned with such aspects of a person as

²⁴ Jung., Carl Gustav, *Psychology and Religion: West and East, Collected Works*, London, Routledge, 1969, Vol. 11, (second edition) par. 509, p. 334.

²⁵ Otto ,Rudolf, *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923. p. 56.

²⁶ Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, Vol.11, par.6, p.7.

²⁷ Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious: Collected Works*, London, Routledge, 1968, Vol. 9i., (second edition), par.83, p 40.

²⁸ Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology: Collected Works*, Princeton N.J., Princeton University Press, 1966, Vol. 7, (second edition), par. 226, p.173.

²⁹ Jung, *Psychological Types: Collected Works*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1971, Vol. 6. par. 706, p. 425.

the maintenance of the personality, personal identity, continuity over time, the state of 'being in the world' in its concrete aspects, but most important of all the mediation between conscious and unconscious realms of experience. Centring its energy on action, rooted in will power and the exercise of free will³⁰, Jung saw the ego arising out of the clash between a child's bodily limitations and environmental reality. The frustration caused brought to birth what Jung referred to as 'islets of consciousness, an archipelago that coalesces into the embryonic ego'³¹, hence the ego's powerful referential commitment to the external world. It is the other central aspect of the psyche, the self, which is the psychic component that enables the unconscious, the deeper dimension of the psyche, which contains the forces of the primary process referred to earlier, to experience a dynamic encounter with the consciousness of the ego. For Jung, the self is the concept, symbol, and internal image of a person's fullest potential and the unity of the personality as a whole.³² It is above all the unifying principle of the whole psyche which embraces both consciousness and the unconscious.³³ What is important in relation to the theme of this thesis is that the Self is not only described as the drive towards wholeness and fullness of life but it is also that aspect of the person that Jung described as the God-image, the *imago Dei* in the psyche³⁴ which is expressed by the urge to co-ordinate, unify and mediate the tension of opposites.

The God-image, for Jung, was whatever an individual claimed to experience of God - that which represented the person's highest value whether expressed consciously or unconsciously. He was always careful to distinguish between the actual objective reality of who God is in Himself and the God-image that an individual experienced within their own

³⁰ Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self: Collected Works*, London, Routledge, 1968, Vol. 9ii. (second edition), Par 9, p. 5.

³¹ Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche: Collected Works*, London, Routledge, 1966, Vol. 8, (second edition), par. 387, p. 198.

³² Jung, *Psychological Types*, Vol. 6. par.789. p. 460.

³³ Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy: Collected Works*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1968, Vol. 12, (second edition), par. 44 p. 26.

³⁴ Jung *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, Vol. 9ii par. 60, p. 31.

inner world.³⁵ However, what is of the greatest significance for us is that according to Jung it is the figure of Jesus Christ who is the most potent symbol of the God-image and the self. Jung developed this concept of Christ as a symbol of the self in some detail.³⁶ According to Andrew Samuels, 'Jung saw Christ as a symbol of the self in his reconciliation of the divine/human and the spirit/body pairs of opposites. And in Christ's resurrection he transcends and mediates the opposition of life/death.'³⁷ The Christ figure, for Jung, represented the fullness of the self as symbol since it incorporated the figure of the historical Jesus who symbolised the very essence of the individuation process.³⁸ Jung's instinctively positive attitude to religious instincts and beliefs enabled him to make these important and creative links between religion and the search for fulfilment at the deepest level of a person's experience, without compromising the essential integrity and intrinsic validity of both areas of experience - the psychological and the spiritual. In his understanding of growth and psychological maturation he offered a very tangible way out of the negative psychopathological interpretation of religion given to us by Freud. The dynamic connections which we see that Jung made between the world of the unconscious, the search for wholeness that embraced the spiritual reality of human experience, the intrinsic presence of the imago Dei, expressing the fullness of the self within the psyche, and the dynamic symbolism of the person of Christ as the model for individuation, will all be themes that will re-occur within a different psychological context later within this study. Suffice it is to say at this stage that they were put firmly on the psychological/religious map by Jung as he developed his own system of analytical psychology and alternative guidelines for creative dialogue.

Crapps, in his *Introduction to Psychology of Religion*, points out that although many of Jung's psychoanalytic contemporaries found his approach to religion too subjective and

³⁵ For a discussion of this theme see here Dourley, John P. 'The Religious Significance of Jung's Psychology.' in *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. 5. (2) 1995.

³⁶ Jung *.Psychology and Alchemy*, Vol. 11, par.222.p.149.

³⁷ Samuels, Andrew *Jung and the Post-Jungians*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985, p. 98.

³⁸ Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, Vol 9ii par. 118, p.64.

romantic,³⁹ wishing to stay within the strict empirical and scientific guidelines of Freud, his influence can be seen slowly having an impact on the second generation of psychoanalytic thinkers, not so much in the details of his theory but in the positive recognition of the place of religion and personal faith. Eric Fromm, who was born, educated and spent his early years in Germany, emigrated to the United States in 1934 and linked up with a group that called themselves 'neo-Freudians' and developed a system of treatment that he chose to call 'humanistic psychoanalysis.' Without following Jung's example completely and developing a new system of psychological theory, he nevertheless moved away from a totally negative and strictly oedipal interpretation of religious belief and in one of his major works Fromm has this to say, 'There is no one without a religious need, to have a frame of orientation and an object of devotion...The question is not religion or not, but which kind of religion, whether it is one furthering man's development, the unfolding of his specific human powers, or one paralysing him.'⁴⁰ According to Fromm, religion must be rooted in love, a love that is the channel through which human beings may experience oneness with themselves and others, 'The aim of life is to unfold man's love and reason and...every other human activity must be subordinated to this aim.'⁴¹ This resulted in the development of a humanistic understanding of religious faith leading to a rejection of theistic religion which could so easily be dismissed as authoritarian. As Crapps points out, 'For Fromm religion is to be understood in the context of this human potential to love. The historical religions are symbol systems that, like politics or psychoanalysis, serve their correct purpose when they support the humanistic enterprise'⁴². Any attempt, therefore, to hold on to or cultivate God images that came to birth during childhood must ultimately be dispensed with. The mature person accepts God as a symbol in which humanity, at an earlier stage of evolution, has expressed commensurate yearnings for truth, love and justice. Becoming an adult, however, means dispensing with these childish associations and being willing to affirm their own humanity as the ultimate value.

³⁹ Crapps, *An Introduction to Psychology of Religion*, p. 81.

⁴⁰ Fromm, Erik, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, New York, Harper, 1966. pp. 25-26.

⁴¹ Fromm, Erik, *The Sane Society*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955. p. 173.

⁴² Crapps, *An Introduction to Psychology of Religion*, p. 83.

Negative as Fromm's appraisal of institutional religion is, it is clear that he does recognise the religious instinct in a person as a positive dimension of human experience, and lifts it out of the entirely closed world of oedipal tensions, linking it to the world of human affectivity and mature relationships with all their demands for growth and personal development. This more outward dynamic interpretation of psychoanalytic thinking is likewise reflected in the work of Eric Erikson, who, while accepting the Freudian view that infancy is crucial in personal developmental experience, also sees the later stages of life as having their own developmental significance. Among several influential publications his *Childhood and Society* stands out as the key study on his understanding of personal growth. In it he sets forth an eight stage model within which personality development is to be understood. Each stage has its own psychodynamic tension, the resolution of which produces its own 'virtue' or character strength. What is significant for our consideration is that although religion and religious faith do not receive direct treatment in Erikson's developmental approach, they nonetheless receive explicit application in his study of Martin Luther's spiritual journey in his book *Young Man Luther; A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* where Erikson explores the interrelationship between Luther's personal experience and the development of his religious vocation.⁴³

Crapps definitely sees here in Erikson's intriguing engagement with Luther's pilgrimage a demonstration of a sympathetic application of a psychoanalytic model to religious experience,⁴⁴ and certainly a creative connection between the drama of psychological growth and the call to spiritual maturity.⁴⁵ Heije Faber, in his *Psychology of Religion*, while reflecting on Erikson's study of Luther's spiritual journey, makes this observation that 'Both in Jung and Erikson the view taken of religion is partly determined by the religious implications of therapeutical work. Man's growth to maturity, to himself, is experienced as a religious event and the human help which is received in the process has a religious character. It aims to help

⁴³ Erikson, Erik, *Young Man Luther, A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, New York, Norton 1958.

⁴⁴ Crapps, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion*, p. 89.

⁴⁵ Hughes III, Robert Davis, *Beloved Dust, Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life*, New York, Continuum, 2008. p. 174.

man find his place in the mystery of life...To become adult is to become man in the sense of self-realization; and this self-realization is 'divine' in kind; it can be termed a realization of God in us.⁴⁶

Object Relations Theory – Introducing Winnicott

These three examples of Jung, Fromm and Erikson, demonstrate clearly that a movement out of a negative and very restricted interpretation of religion is possible when the search for healing and creative fulfilment embraces the totality of a person in a positive way. As has already been stated at the beginning of this Introduction, this thesis will be rooted in another psychological movement, one that had moved away from a strict scientific interpretation of the internal world of psychoanalysis, as rooted in Freud's adherence to drive theory and the centrality of the oedipal experience, namely that of object relations theory. This will be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter. It will be one of the important objectives of this thesis to build on the connections that have been made, through considering the theories of Jung, Fromm and Erikson, between the place of religion in its personal interpretation and the dynamics of psychological growth, as it enriches a person's deepest level of self awareness. Here particular reference was given to the themes of the imago Dei, the God Image, and the person of Christ, as the 'living symbol' of the call to grow in a personal capacity to love and experience the self in relationship with others.

Now the object relations 'school' of psychology does not specifically deal with the place of religion and spirituality in human experience, its focus being on the objective drive for relationships as the motivating force behind the search for psychological healing and growth.⁴⁷ However, in the thinking of D. W. Winnicott, whose work will provide the

⁴⁶ Faber, Heije, *Psychology of Religion*, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1976. p.122.

⁴⁷ There have nonetheless been a growing number of studies that have begun to bring the object relations school of psychoanalysis and religion into a fruitful encounter, for example: Hall, Todd W., Brokaw, B.F. et al., 'An empirical exploration of psychoanalysis and religion: Spiritual maturity and object relations development.' in *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion*. 37 (2), 1998. pp. 303-313.

psychological focus of this thesis, we will see how three very important developments in his thought do, in fact, create openings for dialogue and fruitful encounter between religion and psychological development. The first, as we will see in more detail later, concerns the intermediate/transitional space where creative spiritual development can take place both interiorly and in an externally relational sense. The other two developments stem from two very interesting observations that have received particular attention in an essay of Paul W. Pruyser entitled, 'Some Trends in the Psychology of Religion.'

In the psychoanalytic assessment of religion, that he presents, he first of all has this to say, 'To me, the statement that God is a father figure may also imply its complement – that biological fathers have numinous qualities. In other words, approaching a psychoanalytic interpretation of the inner world of an individual, one can easily see that psychoanalysis has established a new affinity (not identity) between God and man which cuts across the technical distinction between God's transcendence and his immanence.'⁴⁸ Secondly, Freud's term 'illusion', denoting the formal psychological status of religious belief, has given rise, as we have noted, to bitter opposition among many theologians and even psychologists. Pruyser points out that 'religious beliefs are illusions in the sense that they are not pure products of experience or end results of thinking but fulfilments of the oldest, strongest, and most urgent wishes of mankind. An illusion is not a mistake...An illusion is not necessarily false, that is, incapable of realization or contradictory to reality. The great question is: If illusions are needed, how can we have those that are capable of correction; how can we have those that will not deteriorate into delusions?'⁴⁹ In other words, how can illusions be understood as

Hall, Todd W. 'The Relationship of Spiritual Maturity to Level of Object Relations Development and God Image.' in *Pastoral Psychology*. 43 (6), 1995. pp. 373-391.

McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion, On Faith and the Imaging of God*, Lanham New York, London, University Press of America, 1993.

Rizzuto, Anna-Maria, 'Object Relations and the Formation of the Image of God', in *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, (47) 1974. pp. 83-94.

Ulanov, Ann Belford, *Finding Space, Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality*, Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press., 2001.

⁴⁸ Pruyser, Paul W., 'Some Trends in the Psychology of Religion' in *Current Perspectives in the Psychology of Religion*, Grand Rapids MI, Willam B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1977, p. 58

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

creative interior movements that, through clarification, can lead to a deeper encounter with the world of inspiration and meaning. Pruyser, in his assessment of these two very important aspects of Freud's firmly held psychoanalytic theories of religion, offers new creative starting points from which religious belief can be re-assessed and developed.

Winnicott, for his part, in his understanding of the psychological landscape, shifts the emphasis away from the figure of the oedipal father as the pivot of psychological growth to the pre-oedipal mother whose role, as we shall see, can, through a religious perspective, acquire a numinous quality that is of great spiritual value. This combined with his positive understanding of the place of illusion in the dynamic quality of the transitional space and the development of object relations, not only mirrors Pruyser's re-evaluation of key points of Freudian theory but, as this thesis hopes to demonstrate, lays the foundation for a truly creative dialogue between religion and psychology that will illuminate the whole development of self-realization and the understanding of personal identity.

The Religious Context for Dialogue

Turning now to the specific religious context that has been chosen to provide the opportunity for dialogical interaction with the object relations theorist D. W. Winnicott, I wish first to refer to Robert C. Roberts' significant comment in his article 'A Christian Psychology View' where he makes this very important point, 'Our task as Christian psychologists, as I see it, is in large part to retrieve the Christian psychology of the past, understand what these writers have to say, sift it for what has enduring Christian importance and to present it to our contemporaries in a form that can be understood and used.'⁵⁰ Earlier on, at the beginning of this chapter, I quoted E. Johnson and S. Jones in their appraisal of the development of the classical philosophical influence on such Medieval thinkers as Augustine, Gregory the Great

⁵⁰ Roberts, Robert C. , 'A Christian Psychology View', in Eric L. Johnson & Stanton L Jones (eds) *Psychology & Christianity*, Downers Grove Illinois. IVP Academia, 2000, p. 153.

and Aquinas, and how they saw this philosophical integration in their works as providing a basis for a form of psychological concern expressed in the care of the life of souls. This they then went on to show continued to be a feature in the teaching of some of the leading figures of spiritual inspiration through the Medieval period right up until the Counter Reformation, particularly in the works of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, who manifested ‘unparalleled depth’,⁵¹ in the quality of their teaching. All these spiritual teachers clearly revealed a deep connection between the psychological dynamics of personal growth with all the different elements contained in the call to spiritual maturity in Christ. Growth in an awareness of self identity was therefore rooted in this Christological dimension of personal development and it will be my intention in Chapter One to demonstrate how this movement reached a particularly compelling articulation in the teaching of John of the Cross. John provided, in his writings, as we shall see, a certain consummation of several of the key themes that were developed in the first millennium. It was these that dealt with the subtle combination of spiritual experiences that facilitated a development of an understanding of self identity as integral to the experience of personal conversion. They were then blended with John’s own personal experiences, and presented in his four major works that have continued to have a profound and dynamic effect on the spiritual life of the Church: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*; *The Dark Night*; *The Spiritual Canticle*; and *The Living Flame of Love*.

Therefore, in this thematic survey I hope to reveal and emphasise the unique part John has played in bringing together both the human and spiritual elements of this rich spiritual tradition and how his own personal vision, based upon this foundation, can offer a dynamic opening for the dialogue with one of the most influential contributors to post-Freudian psychoanalytic psychology.⁵² By drawing together the theoretical perspectives of Winnicott and the spiritual insights of John I hope to demonstrate how this finds a particular relevance

⁵¹ Johnson & Jones, ‘A History of Christians in Psychology’, p.17

⁵² The contextual theme of this thesis finds a very interesting parallel in K. R. Barron’s, *A Study of St. John of the Cross’ Theology of Transformation from the Perspective of Psychoanalytic Object relations Theory*, Ph.D. diss., the Catholic University of America. 1989.

in the contemporary search for a new way of defining the self that can embrace the personal, social and spiritual dimension of experience without distorting their unique characteristics. We will now situate the whole question of the search for self identity in its historical context bringing out its contemporary relevance for our own day.

The Need to Rediscover Self Identity

In a very thought provoking article, 'The Social God and the Relational Self, Towards a Theology of the Imago Dei in the Postmodern Context,' Stanley J. Grenz highlights the present day dilemma that confronts many people as they struggle to gain a coherent sense of self in their lives. It was Heinz Kohut who highlighted the issue from a psychoanalytic perspective with his pioneering work, *The Analysis of the Self*, followed shortly afterwards by its sequel *The Restoration of the Self*, in which he began to move reflections of the self out of a strictly psychoanalytic framework into one that could include more empirical considerations. Since then there have been other significant studies concerning the self that are rooted in this empirical approach, the most significant being Robert Keegan's *The Evolving Self, Problem and Process in Human Development*. In this highly acclaimed phenomenological treatment of the experience of the self, Keegan, drawing upon the works of Erikson and Piaget, sets out to present a dynamic concept of the self and its developmental associations with human experience that can be of assistance, as he says in his Preface, 'for students and teachers of psychology; theorists and researchers of personality; psychotherapists, counsellors, teachers, pastors, and all professionals who concern themselves with another's growth.'⁵³ Grenz likewise begins the presentation of his argument within an empirical framework but, as we will see, leads us towards a deeper spiritual horizon that then places the experiences of the self within a faith context.

⁵³ Keegan, Robert E., *The Evolving Self, Problem and Process in Human Development*, Cambridge MA Harvard University Press, 1982. Preface ix.

His starting point is the experiences of a young teenager who spends many of her waking hours on the Internet. She lives in a private world where the opinions of friends and others are crucial to her formation of some sense of personal identity. However, this world of public opinion is always changing and the possibility of forming long term stable relationships in which the individual can experience some semblance of continuity is slight. To quote Grenz himself, 'The fluidity characteristic of the contemporary ethos is epitomised by the Internet chat room. Here the participants are able to be whomever they want, to try on new identities with ease, even to the point of becoming a different person with each foray into cyberspace.'⁵⁴ Here Grenz is clearly touching directly upon an existential phenomenon that has now become a commonplace and indicates shaping forces that he then goes on to point out have had serious spiritual consequences. He does this by giving a brief synopsis of the way the concept of the self, in the Western philosophical tradition, has undergone a continual transmutation that has resulted in our post-modern destabilised experience of self identity that is constantly looking to external relationships for clarity and meaning. This has frequently resulted in a highly unstable impermanent self that is ' little more than a bundle of fluctuating relations and momentary preferences'⁵⁵, as Grenz graphically expresses it. Furthermore, in the words of Fredric Jameson, this leads to 'psychic fragmentation'⁵⁶ for growing numbers of people that arouses not only intense anxiety, but also a hunger for stability and meaning in which personal growth and development can once again take place.

The Rise and Demise of the Self' Experience

What is significant is that Grenz begins his survey of the rise and the demise of the self by referring to St. Augustine who, in his own life, experienced a fragmentation not only of

⁵⁴ Grenz, Stanley J., 'The Social God and the Relational Self, Toward a Theology of the *Imago Dei* in the Postmodern Context', in R. Lints, M. Horton & M. Talbot (eds), *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI/ Cambridge U.K. 2006, p. 70.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.77.

⁵⁶ Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1995, p. 90.

identity, but also of desire, that was the prelude to his religious conversion. This, as we will examine more closely in the next chapter, established the self as an integral part of the development of spiritual identity that was gradually developed, by subsequent thinkers, who enabled a concept of the self to embrace both interior and exterior reality in a way that offered a cohesive vision of the person. Grenz, in his article, demonstrates how the gradual breakdown of the Christian vision of the person resulted in a series of interpretations that dislocated the concept of the self from its objective spiritual context and laid it open to powerful subjective interpretations. Also, with the gradual infiltration of the Protagorean concept of ‘man as the measure of all things,’ a potent theme of Renaissance culture, into European thought, the concept of the rational self so powerfully promoted by the core thinkers during what we now designate as the Age of Reason, gradually exerted its power through its capacity ‘to objectify the world in the cause of gaining mastery and exercising instrumental control over it.’⁵⁷ Furthermore, as Giorgio de Santillana has pointed out in his fascinating book *The Age of the Adventure*, this resulted in the emergence of a ‘restless, discontented self as the transformer of the world,’⁵⁸ a self without a stable inner core of identity.

When we link this with the devolution, marginalisation and external pathologisation of the spiritual concept of the self, it is understandable how the concept of personhood by the latter part of the nineteenth century was found to be in an increasing state of crisis. In what is an illuminating article concerning the crisis in selfhood, Roy Baumeister has this to say, ‘During the Victorian era (roughly 1830-1900) there were crises with regard to...four problems of selfhood...how identity is actively or creatively defined by the person, what is the nature of relationship between the individual and society, how does the person understand his or her potential and then fulfil it, and how well do persons know themselves...early in the 20th

⁵⁷ Grenz, *ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁸ de Santillana, Giorgio, *The Age of the Adventure*, New York, New American Library of World Literature, 1956, p. 46.

century, themes of alienation and devaluation of selfhood indicated concern over the individual's helpless dependency on society.'⁵⁹

The Limitations of the Psychoanalytic Response

It is in the light of the gradual destabilisation of the meaning of the self that Jeffrey Rubin examines the emergence of psychoanalysis which he describes as 'the pre-eminent discourse of the 20th century for investigating the nature and vicissitudes of self-expression.'⁶⁰ However, for Rubin there can be distinct limitations in the psychoanalytic response which can 'overemphasise a reified, egoistic individualism'⁶¹ that leads to the promotion of 'an excessive self-centredness and eclipses certain possibilities and features of subjectivity, such as self-transcendence and spirituality or non-self-centric modes of being'⁶² The latter Rubin, in particular, understands as an important component of healthy living, and he describes it as a 'non-self-centred subjectivity ..a psychological-spiritual phenomenon that is implicated in a wide range of adaptive contexts, from psychoanalytic listening to creating or appreciating art to emotional intimacy...It is characterized by heightened attentiveness, focus, and clarity, attunement to the other as well as the self...a self-annulling immersion in what ever one is doing in the present.'⁶³

Here we are immediately reminded of certain aspects of Maslow's self-actualising psychology⁶⁴ in which he developed his widely known hierarchy of needs⁶⁵ which facilitated a self generated understanding of human fulfilment. Rubin makes the point that for many

⁵⁹ Baumeister, Roy, 'How the Self Became a Problem: A Psychological Review of Historical Research', in *Journal of Personality and Social Studies* 1987, 52, p. 163.

⁶⁰ Rubin ,Jeffrey, 'Psychoanalysis is Self-Centred', in (eds) Charles Spezzano & Gerald. J. Gargiulo, *Soul on the Couch, Spirituality Religion & Morality in Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, The Analytic Press, London, 1997. p.79.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.80.

⁶⁴ Maslow, Abraham, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, New York, D. Van Nostrand, 1969, pp. 189-190.

⁶⁵ Maslow, Abraham, *Motivation and Personality*, New York, Harper and Row,1954, pp.80-92.

psychoanalysts non-centric modes of being have been interpreted as symptoms of psychopathology, often viewed as attempts to merge with the pre-oedipal mother.⁶⁶ However, he contests this argument, suggesting that the experience of self-transcendence, in which there is non-self-centring and at least a transient loss of self-differentiation, which includes the permeability of self-boundaries and alterations in self-cohesion, does not only indicate an absence of psychopathology but a self-enriching transformatory process that leads to greater self-awareness and autonomy of the individual.⁶⁷ For, as Rubin says, ‘when we are open to the moment without a sense of time, un-self-conscious, but acutely aware, highly focused and engaged yet relaxed and without fear, in non-self-centric subjectivity we experience a sense of self-vivification, self-renewal and self-transformation, and we live, relate and play with greater creativity, joy and efficiency than we normally experience.’⁶⁸ Non-self-centred subjectivity is a source of rejuvenation, sanity and health and it is in the movement of self-transcendence that the true identity of a person comes alive in a way that enables it, in the words of Hans Loewald, ‘To get lost in the contemplation of a beautiful scene, or face, or painting, in listening to music, or poetry, or the music of a human voice... We become absorbed in a deeply stirring play or film ...in the intimate closeness of a personal encounter.’⁶⁹ These sentiments will be echoed later on when we examine the impact of the transitional space in a person’s growth that Winnicott understands as crucial for personal development.⁷⁰ Suffice it is at this stage to acknowledge the value of non self-centric being, non-self-centred subjectivity, and its essence within a contemporary psychoanalytic discourse.

What is interesting is that Grenz refers to this movement towards a less clearly defined sense of self-centred subjectivity, but with certain reservations, and describes it as a ‘sense of a

⁶⁶ Rubin, *ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶⁷ Rubin, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Rubin, *ibid.*, p. 84

⁶⁹ Loewald, Hans, *Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual*, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 1978, p. 67

⁷⁰ Winnicott, Donald W., *Playing and Reality*, London, Tavistock, 1971, p. 47.

free-floating self without any semblance of a fixed identity.’⁷¹ He then goes on to quote Jacques le Rider’s description of this form of self as ‘an endless, unpredictable interplay of conscious and unconscious identities,’⁷² but with the proviso that ‘opposition between reality and fantasy is meaningless in any attempts to understand a personality.’⁷³ Movement away from rigid over definition of the self, that is rooted in control and egoistic mastery, is essential for creative development, but, for Grenz, it is clear that there have to be elements that can provide boundaries and clearly defined goals for the subjective world of inner desires and instinctual needs to be contained and fruitfully experienced. Accordingly, the post-modern expression of the self retains ‘a semblance of the self,’ or perhaps better still, ‘a trace of the now absent self.’⁷⁴ This is still present in the need for an ‘organising’ element but which, in the post-modern context, tends to be orchestrated by a person’s social group or network of relationships, both real and virtual.

The profound internal need for an inner stable identity is, therefore, left unresolved. Grenz’s answer, as the title of his study indicates, is the rediscovery of a profound dynamic inner core of spiritual identity which he describes as the rediscovery of the *Imago Dei*. This, for him, comprises the living presence of Christ, united with the individual, who opens up the relational inner world of the Trinity that then both stabilises a person and enables them to experience the freedom of continued growth.⁷⁵ It is within this Trinitarian context that a balance between inner and outer reality is maintained while subjective awareness of the self is continually informed by the objective presence of an ‘other’, thereby retaining the social dimension. We will be returning to this theme in due course.

⁷¹ Grenz, ‘The Social God and the Relational Self, Towards a Theology of the *Imago Dei* in the Postmodern Context’, p. 76.

⁷² Le Rider, Jacques, trans. Rosemary Morris, *Modernity and the Crisis of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Ciecle* Vienna, New York, Continuum. 1993. p. 43.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Grenz, ‘The Social God and the Relational Self’, p. 76.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.92.

Psychological Developments: The Emergence of Objects Relations Theory

Rubin's argument, cited earlier, that the strictly psychoanalytic response to the issue of selfhood, emphasising a reified egoistic individualism, needs to be countered by a clearly articulated concept of the non-self-centric being, found a response within the psychoanalytic field through one of the most important post-Freudian movements, that of object relations theory. Freud's early thinking, following the scientific models of his day was expressed in terms of causal influences and effects. Within a rigid deterministic framework of scientific causality, he described intrapsychic forces, based on the theory of instincts,⁷⁶ libidinal and aggressive, that interacted in complex patterns within the psyche, giving rise to dreams, character formation patterns, and neurotic symptoms. These libidinal and aggressive forces, however, as William Meissner points out, operate 'almost completely intrapsychically, with little external input.'⁷⁷ Even in the later phase of Freud's thought, which W. Ronald D. Fairbairn dates from the publication of the *Ego and the Id*⁷⁸, in which Freud's attention was predominantly directed towards the growth and internal evolution of the ego, the underlying need for libidinal satisfaction as the central feature of development was still clearly present.

John McDargh, in his important study of psychoanalytic object relations theory and the study of religion, is quite clear about the essential nature of this new development away from libidinal emphasis. He states that, 'Object Relations theory is not properly a discrete school within psychoanalytic thought though it clearly involves a revision of some of Freud's work and does have implications for the practice of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. I take the term to refer to a broad ranging development within psychoanalytic theory which has turned away from the more physicalist or "energy" models of mental

⁷⁶ Freud Sigmund, *On Sexuality, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, London, Vol. 7, Penguin Books, Vol. 7, 1977. pp. 82-84

⁷⁷ Meissner, *Life and Faith*, p.22.

⁷⁸ Fairbairn, W. Ronald D., *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*, London, Tavistock/Routledge. 1986.p.59.

operation that characterised early Freud in particular, and appropriated instead those insights of Freud which gave pride of place to personal relationship as the matrix within which the human psyche is found, and as the model for its subsequent operation. The insight central to this perspective is that the person is not constituted by the isolated play of impersonal instinctual energies but by the interplay of human persons.’⁷⁹

It is now generally accepted that the significant shift away from Freud’s ‘libidinal theory’ occurred through the extensive theoretical studies of Melanie Klein that were the fruit of her work with children. Without totally jettisoning the fundamental psychodynamic structure of Freud’s central understanding of the interplay between the id, the superego and the ego, coming to a specific climax during the oedipal conflict,⁸⁰ Klein focused her attention on the world of internal ego-object relationships that had been repressed in fantasy. For Klein, this constituted the secret heart of a person’s mental life revealing the structure and meaning of the whole personality. She demonstrated specifically how human beings live in an inner secret world organised around the twin fantasies of the internal good and bad objects, and above all how this fantasy life forms a second world competing with the first external world of outer reality. As H. Guntrip, in his study of *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and the Self*, points out: ‘It is in Klein’s work that object relations first begin to replace instincts as the focal point of theory....making possible a subtle but enormously important change of ‘atmosphere’ in psychoanalytic thinking from the mechanistic to the personal, from the study of mental phenomena, the clash of psychic forces, to the study of the human being’s struggle for self-realisation as a person in personal relationships.’⁸¹

This new focus was carried forward within the thematic framework of two key figures in the post-war psychoanalytic world, W. Ronald D. Fairbairn and Donald Winnicott. Fairbairn, in

⁷⁹ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, p.17.

⁸⁰ Freud, Sigmund, *The Ego and the Id*, London, Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 11, 1957, pp. 371-374.

⁸¹ Guntrip Harry, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and the Self*, London, Karnac Books, 1992, pp. 407-408.

his paper, *A Revised Psychopathology of the Psychoses and the Psychoneuroses*, which deals with the nature and aetiology of the schizoid condition, powerfully states his adherence to the ‘recasting and reorientation of the libido theory together with a modification of various classical psychoanalytical concepts.’⁸² As with the case of Klein, Fairbairn does not devalue the libido theory in itself, the merit of which, as he says, ‘has been proved by its heuristic value alone.’⁸³ However, as he states very clearly, ‘it would appear as if the point had been reached at which, in the interests of progress, the classic libido theory would have to be transformed in a theory of development based essentially upon object relationships.’⁸⁴ Commenting two years later on the overall content of this paper, he reinforces his point when he says, ‘Amongst the conclusions formulated in the above mentioned paper two of the most far-reaching are the following (1) that libidinal ‘aims’ are of secondary importance in comparison with object relationships (2) that a relationship with the object and the gratification of impulse is the ultimate aim of libidinal striving.’⁸⁵

This movement, therefore, opened up the internal psychological world of the experience of the self, presenting it with new opportunities for development in precisely the way that Rubin outlined in his article, referred to earlier. The non-self-centric mode of being that can be energised by self-transcendence and a new sense of autonomy, that in itself promotes a new level of self-awareness through engaging the affect and imagination, finds its primary stimulus from outside the individual through the external object. It is this process that engages the instinctual drive for fulfilment that nonetheless still remains the central feature at the core of a person’s being. This new development, that had its roots in Klein’s internal object theory, had a profound influence on one of her most gifted supervisees, Donald Winnicott. He was a young paediatrician, who at the time of meeting her, was undergoing a classic Freudian psychoanalysis with one of Freud’s closest English protégés, James Strachey. Brett Kahr, in

⁸² Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*, p. 28.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

his biographical portrait of Winnicott, points out that Klein's publication of the *Psychoanalysis of Children* had a profound effect on Winnicott as it related directly to his own work with small children.⁸⁶ As Kahr makes clear, what particularly fascinated Winnicott was Klein's 'elucidation of the first years of life and the way in which she emphasised the intensity of the erotic and sadistic forces that govern the minds of young babies and are focused on the mother's breast.'⁸⁷ Within the classic Freudian perspective, the oedipal conflict, that developed gradually through childhood and reached a climax during early puberty⁸⁸ was not only the 'mis en scene' for feelings of intense fear (castration anxiety) but also the developmental instigator for future psychological development and the nature of object choice.

Winnicott never denied the existence of castration anxiety but, influenced by Klein's shift of emphasis towards the pre-oedipal early experience of infant and mother, focused on what he considered the more petrifying agony for the child, that of being dropped from the arms of the breast-feeding mother, falling interminably in a chaotic abyss, experiencing disintegration and what he called unthinkable anxiety and the dread of death.⁸⁹ This we will return to later in our close examination of Winnicott's theories surrounding the mother/baby relationship in Chapter Three. What is important to recognise here is the resultant intensity of desire within the infant for tangible corporeal contact with the mother and specifically her breast which, for Winnicott, is the origin of object seeking,⁹⁰ that movement for personal fulfilment that lies outside the immediate confines of the self, in the response of 'the other'. It is this earliest experience of desire that activates the innate capacity within the person for the dynamic affective relationship which an individual carries on throughout life with the complex of memories, images and mental representations that arise from the earliest experience of human

⁸⁶ Kahr, Brett, *D. W. Winnicott A Biographical Portrait*, London, Karnac Books, 1997, p. 58.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59

⁸⁸ Freud, *On Sexuality Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, pp. 150-152

⁸⁹ Winnicott, Donald W. *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, London, Karnac Books, 1987. p. 303.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.99.

relations⁹¹. It is here, precisely within the context of the developmental processes of human growth, that accompanies the experience of entering into relationships with others, that the crucial dimensions of self-transcendence, the experience of illusion and disillusionment and the authentic experience of self-fulfilment become integral to the discovery of self identity. It will now be one of the central themes of this thesis to demonstrate how, within this dynamic relational context, an opening can be found that will facilitate a creative encounter with the world of spiritual development that is so powerfully enunciated in the works of John of the Cross.

Structural Outline of the Thesis

The thesis will consist of five chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter I will conduct a brief survey of the development, within the Western Christian tradition, of a sense of personal and spiritual identity, referring to certain key thinkers who prepared the way for the teaching of John of the Cross. In the second and third chapters I will then be looking respectively at the teachings of John of the Cross and the psychological theories of Donald Winnicott, relating to the growth of self identity. In the fourth and fifth chapters I will bring these two authors into a reflective dialogue and thereby demonstrate how their teachings, when brought together in a creative encounter, can illuminate both our spiritual and psychological understanding of the development of self identity. The thesis will end with a conclusion.

⁹¹ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, p. 18.

Chapter One

The Development of Personal and Spiritual Identity within the Western Christian Tradition

Augustine: Conversion and the Birth of the Imago Dei

The teaching surrounding the growth of personal identity that we will be considering in the works of John was rooted in the development of a corporate spiritual identity that had its roots, in the words of Bernard McGinn, ‘in a distinctive notion of Christendom, Christianitas, a term found in Augustine (ca. 400) and in other fifth-century texts, notably the Codex of Theodosius’.¹ Grenz, as quoted earlier, pinpoints, in a particular way the person of Augustine of Hippo as one of the key figures to whom Western culture looks for the birth of a recognisable and cohesive concept of the self.² The questions that must now be asked are, firstly, what exactly is Augustine’s vision of the self that emerges from his teaching; and secondly, how did other subsequent spiritual writers contribute to a deeper elucidation of some of the key elements that are present in his vision. This will hopefully not only clarify the spiritual sources of inspiration that had such a shaping effect on John’s own vision of the soul’s journey, but will also highlight the broader landscape of human and spiritual experience that will later find a resonance in Winnicott’s exploration of the links between inner and outer reality that need to be cultivated if personal development can take place.

Augustine, as we know from *The Confessions*, experienced a resurrection of a sense of personal identity which he understood primarily in connection with the rediscovery of the presence of God in his life, but in a totally new and dynamic sense. This interaction of

¹ McGinn, Bernard, *The Growth of Mysticism*, New York, Crossroad Publishing, 2005, p. 5.

² Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, p. 71.

discovery is beautifully summed up as Augustine reflects on his experience: ‘But where was I when I looked for you? You were there before my eyes, but I had deserted even my own self. I could not find myself, much less find you.’³ His experience of conversion, in the words of Grenz, ‘launched the process that led to the concept of the self as the stable abiding reality that constitutes the individual human being.’⁴ Now, for Augustine, this stable and abiding reality had to be rooted in the living awareness of a profound and intimate relationship that could, on the one hand, respond to the interior need for healing and integration and, on the other, facilitate the capacity for external relationship and an openness to the transcendent. Conversion for Augustine, as Rowan Williams puts it, was ‘a beginning not an end, an entry into a perilous and confused world.’⁵ It was perilous and confusing for Augustine because he had been opened up and connected with his wounded and fragmented experience of himself, both interiorly and exteriorly, and hence dynamic self- realisation could only take place through an experience of healing. As Augustine himself says in Book X of his *Confessions*, ‘You see how my heart trembles and strains in the midst of all these perils and others of a like kind. It is not as though I do not suffer wounds, but I feel rather that you had healed them over and over again.’⁶

Healing, for Augustine, is rooted in a deepening acceptance of a need for God in the face of human instability and uncertainty. Healing of disorders and wounds is not a once and for all experience but prepares a person for further healing experiences in the deepest recesses of their wounded humanity, keeping alive a yearning for God’s love that can never be fully embraced or comprehended in this life. In a memorable comment taken from his commentary on Psalm 38, Augustine tells us ‘that the only way you can be perfect in this life is by knowing that you cannot be perfect in this life.’⁷ Knowledge of self, therefore, is an ongoing

³ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, London, Penguin Books, 1961, Book V,v.2, p. 92.

⁴ Grenz, *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵ Williams, Rowan, *The Wound of Knowledge*, London, Darton Longman & Todd, 2001, p. 73.

⁶ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X ,39. p. 248

⁷ St. Augustine, trans. E. B. Pusey, H Walford, Charles Marriot, Exposition on the Book of Psalms, in *A Library of Fathers of the Church*, London, J. G. Rivington, 1847, Vol. 2 Psalm 38,16.

journey which is rooted in the desire for healing that opens up a desire for God Himself.⁸ ‘When at last I cling to you with all my being, for me there will be no more sorrow, no more toil. Then I shall be alive with true life, for my life will be wholly filled by you.’⁹ No one who is on the journey of salvation can escape being dissatisfied, ‘disquieted within.’¹⁰ It is an integral part of growing with a sense of self identity that is energised through an opening out of the soul beyond itself into the unknown. The concept of self, therefore, for Augustine is a state of being that is in a continual process of evolution as an internal unity grows and develops through deeper communion with God who heals and, above all, who reveals Himself in the experience of intimacy.

In this interior journey that nurtures true self-knowledge and communion with God, two essential aspects, which Augustine developed, must be kept in mind. The first is the experience of a profound inner healing that, as we have seen, awakens desire within the self for deeper encounters with God. The second is the process of transformation of being in which the experience of healing is slowly blended with the experience of desiring to see God, as He really is. In one of his greatest treatises, *The Trinity*, Augustine sees this transformation of being realised as the image of God, the *Imago Dei*, is restored in a person, and he investigates the way in which ‘the human is the *Imago Trinitatis*, the image that participates in the inner life of the three Persons’¹¹ Conversion is the initiation into the mystery of the Christian faith which, in essence, is a spiritual therapy designed to help restore the image of God in us so that we can more fully share in the experience of the divine presence.¹² Augustine shows how this becomes possible as a genuine experience of the love of God brings alive a love for one’s neighbour, and indeed, for Augustine, the love of neighbour is a total reflection of the love of God present within the soul. However, as Augustine repeatedly

⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 27. p. 232.

⁹ St. Augustine, *Confessions* X, 28. p. 233.

¹⁰ St. Augustine, *Exposition of the Book of Psalms*, Vol. 2. 41,10.

¹¹ McGinn, Bernard, *The Foundations of Mysticism, Origins to the Fifth Century*, New York, Crossroad, 2005, p.244.

¹² . McGinn, *Ibid.*, pp. 224-245.

reminds us, we cannot love unless we know, unless the intellectual self-consciousness of the person is rooted in the true self- knowledge a person has of himself. This is the foundational context for the intentionality of the will which, when activated, enables loving and knowing to be brought into a new harmony which then enables the soul, in its existential experience of being, to participate in the life of the Trinity. It is this that gradually restores the Trinitarian image which is then continually authenticated through the selfless love for one's neighbour.

This restoration, however, is facilitated in a very profound and specific way. The experience of conversion for Augustine was totally centred on the intervention of Christ, Who penetrated the clamour and disorder of his self- will and brought to birth a new reality. 'How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of these fruitless joys which I had feared to lose and was now glad to reject! You drove them from me you who are the true and the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place...I began to talk to you freely, O Lord my God, my Light, my Wealth and my Salvation.'¹³ It is when a person's humanity is bonded through love with the humanity of Christ that deification, the coming alive of the Trinitarian image, takes place. This is a love that seeks unity with us in our suffering and darkness. For Augustine, Christ in His Incarnation has identified himself totally with the experience of every human being. As R. Williams points out so clearly, 'Christ not only identifies with humanity but identifies especially with those of weak will tormented by fear; this is the point of the Gethsemane story. (in Ps. 93.19)'¹⁴ It is this communion of love in suffering which is not only the basis of all healing but also the essence of the communion of love that all members of the Body of Christ are called to as members of the Church.¹⁵

This ecclesial dimension is strengthened through another aspect of the mediating presence of the healing Christ that centres on the transformation of desire within the human heart. One of the major leitmotifs of the *Confessions* is the stress given to the importance of personal desire

¹³ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1X, 1. p.181.

¹⁴ Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p. 82.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.83.

that has begun to centre on the love of God. It appears very powerfully at the conclusion of perhaps Augustine's most famous passage from the *Confessions*, 'I tasted you and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love for your peace.'¹⁶ It is the person of Christ as Saviour that directs the innate flow of desire, and this can only become a true reality when we experience in the depths of weakness, both physical and moral, the healing outreach of Christ Himself, and are subsequently brought into loving communion with Him. Unless this takes place, the movement of desire operates in a contrary spirit to the desire of God for the soul. As R. Williams puts it, when referring to 'the mens', the intellect of the human subject, in its operation, 'the mens is Godlike in its making God its object. If its willing and loving are turned upon itself it is infected with 'amor potestatis suae', love of its own power, which is inimical to God',¹⁷ and 'it is beyond the power of any fallen soul to do anything about it without the intervention of the "Mediator of God and humanity, the man Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5)."'¹⁸

It is through the mediating presence of the healing Christ that Augustine is restored, in McIntosh's words, not simply 'to a self-gratified wholeness in which he knows God by knowing what a fulfilled individual he, Augustine, is in himself; nor on the other hand by simply abetting Augustine in a total flight from the exigencies of himself, but rather by drawing Augustine into converted and authentic personhood.'¹⁹ This is brought to fulfilment through the power and energy of the Holy Spirit who 'draws individuals into the relational existence opened up to them in Christ enabling them to discover true personal being in the mutual love of Father and Son in their Spirit.'²⁰ The experience of selfhood, lived as a dynamic experience of love for 'the other', therefore, finds its profoundest existential definition when empowered by the indwelling presence of the Spirit, whose essence is described by R. Williams thus: 'and Sapientia exists by being, quite simply, love in search of

¹⁶ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 27. p.232.

¹⁷ Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p. 85.

¹⁸ McGinn, *The Foundations of Christian Mysticism, Origins to the Fifth Century* p. 248.

¹⁹ McIntosh, Mark A., *Mystical Theology*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 165.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

an object, it has its being as the act of everlasting love which is given from but not exhausted by the mutual gift of Father and Son: the Spirit is concretely and actually God by being from or through the Father and the Son, in the sense of being the agency that constitutes their relation itself active or productive.²¹ For Augustine, this very particular kind of love draws a person ecstatically out of himself towards another in a way that enables both parties to experience most fully who they are in themselves, in other words, it is the life of the Trinity being lived out in the concrete reality of human relationships.

This is a crucial point of understanding as we bring this reflection on the Imago Trinitatis in Augustine, which for him is at the heart of Christian identity, to a close. Trinitarian self-gift is the movement within the soul that unites the person to the eternal movement of love between the Father and the Son, whose individual identities are celebrated in a kenotic movement of love. Authentic self identity is ,therefore, in no way an accumulation of knowledge that is introverted and static but is a continual experience of self-realisation that is dynamically linked to relationship that expands the capacity for love and self-gift. And this, as we have seen, can only be generated through the spirit of genuine love for the other that is the fruit of the healing presence of Christ. It is in this comprehensive way that Augustine played a pivotal role in the development of Christian thought as it pertains to both spiritual and theological development. In McGinn's words, 'The bishop of Hippo, the undisputed master of Latin Christian thought, did more than any other figure to shape the new religious world of the next millennium in Western Europe,'²² and therefore, having given such powerful personal witness, it is understandable that he should be referred to as 'the Prince of Mystics' and 'the Father of Christian Mysticism.'²³ The strength of Augustine's vision thus lies in its depth of integration of all aspects of religious experience with the human search for meaning, spoken

²¹ R. Williams, 'Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections of the De Trinitate' ed. B. Bruning *Collectanea augustiniana: melanges T. J. van Bavel*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, , 1990. p. 171

²² McGinn ,Bernard *The Foundations of Christian Mysticism, Origins to the Fifth Century*, p. 231.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

with a personal authenticity, that gives his teaching an immediacy and power that draws others into their own inner conversion of faith.

Dionysius the Areopagite - Divine Eros and the Movement of Self Transcendence **the Apophatic Journey**

In the millennium following Augustine, as Johnson and Jones pointed out in their historical survey of psychological development, already quoted, the internal dynamics of spiritual growth were developed in certain key areas by particular spiritual writers that offer important points of reference for understanding the spiritual essence of self identity from a more psychological perspective. The following selection of authors has been chosen to highlight essential themes which we will see are not only present but have been creatively developed by John in his spiritual vision of personal growth. It is not clear exactly how far John would have been directly acquainted with all their writings; however, as we will see with the Victorine tradition, their influence in a general more diffused way, would certainly have shaped John's spiritual perspective and, as this thesis hopes to demonstrate, enabled his own works to present a vision of spiritual development that could, through its incorporation of these essential themes, provide a context for an authentic dialogue with the world of psychotherapy.

Our first author, in this post-Augustinian survey, is the late fifth or early sixth century unknown writer 'who identified himself with an Athenian convert of St. Paul's, one Dionysius the Areopagite, who is mentioned along with a woman convert named Damaris in Acts 17.34.'²⁴ It was Dionysius who, in McGinn's words, was 'the one who not only created the term "mystical theology", but also gave systematic expression to a dialectical view of the relation of God and the world that was the fountainhead of speculative mysticism for a

²⁴ McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, p. 44.

thousand years.²⁵ Where Dionysius is particularly important in this historical survey of foundational themes is in his presentation of a very clear understanding of the nature of self-transcendence which develops within a person through God's own initiative. In Dionysius God's revelation of Himself is centred on a productive eros, and 'this desire for the other, for there to be other to love, 'stirs' God to extend existence to otherness, including the other which is the cosmos. But that is not all. For this eros does not leave the giver of love/existence aloof from the beloved recipient. Rather it includes an ekstasis, a standing outside oneself to be more available to the beloved.²⁶ This eros, in the words of R. Williams, 'sets at the foundation of Christian discourse and Christian experience the divine passion to love and be loved.'²⁷

Moreover, Dionysius presents the created order as a hierarchy, an ordered society whose members participate in the divine light of God's self-communication. Andrew Louth, in his study of Dionysius, clarifies this vision further when he says, 'The world (for Dionysius) is a theophany, a manifestation of God, in which beings closer to God manifest God to those further away.'²⁸ The cosmos is a community or group of communities whose members participate in the movement of desire within God, who are not only seeking to draw nearer to God themselves, but desire to draw others into the experience, a visible expression of spiritual relationality. This is achieved as individuals and communities undergo the interior process of purification, illumination and perfection, which enables God Himself not only to take hold of individual lives in a private solitary experience but in a way that can move them to reach out to others.²⁹ This desire, therefore, is an active participation in and a mediating agency for God's desire for the ultimate good of all his creatures and it finds its total expression through the person of Jesus Christ Who expressed this movement of desire in God most powerfully,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49

²⁷ Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p. 121.

²⁸ Louth, Andrew *Denys the Areopagite, Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1989. p. 85.

²⁹ Louth, *Ibid.*, p. 41.

and in the words of M. McIntosh, did this through ‘the unfathomable mystery of rescuing love.’³⁰ It is, therefore, Christ’s presence within the soul that enables a person to ascend to God through contemplating the mystery of God’s love in scripture and in the liturgy of the Church enabling the individual to enter into the life of the Trinity itself.

This, according to Dionysius, involves a gradual leaving behind the security of human knowing and rational discourse, and in his work *Mystical Theology* he opens with a prayer asking that God ‘will lead us up beyond unknowing and light up to the highest peak of mystic scripture.’³¹ The cataphatic outreach of God in his erotic movement of love and desire for his creatures slowly transforms into a momentous yet correlative apophatic movement that means that a person must leave behind the certainties of knowing, in a purely human sense, and carry them into that place of ‘unknowing’ in order to participate in the fullness of God’s hiddenness and mystery. In Dionysius’ words, ‘Now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing.’³² It is divine eros, therefore, that orchestrates the whole process of individual growth through self-transcendence which can only find fulfilment by totally participating in the reality of ‘the other’, a theme that will be most powerfully echoed, as we will see, not only in John’s writings but also in Winnicott’s.

St. Maximus the Confessor – Human Nature Transformed in the Paschal Mystery of

Christ

The vision of Dionysius had a profound influence on probably his most important interpreter, St. Maximus the Confessor, who carried forward Dionysius’ concept of ascent of the soul into the divine life by opening up the role of Christ in the process of interior transformation and

³⁰ McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, p. 52.

³¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, trans. Colm Luibheid & Paul Rorem *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works, Classics of Western Spirituality*, New York, Paulist Press, 1987. p. 135.

³² *Ibid.*, p.139.

the specific nature of fellowship that He offers the believer. For Maximus, this ascent into the divine life of the Trinity is made possible by an authentic participation not only in the death but also the Resurrection of Christ, the fullness of the Paschal Mystery, that clarifies the meaning of the Incarnation. The one who is called to be Christ's follower, in other words, the one who prays, will be drawn into this journey which will lead to a total transformation of the person in Christ: 'If we follow Him, we also pass through all things with Him and come beside Him if we know Him not in the limited condition of His descent in the Incarnation but in the majestic splendour of His natural infinitude.'³³

As McIntosh states clearly, the mystical presence of Christ in the soul reconstrues Dionysius' notion of God, arousing the soul 'to stand outside itself and so journey into the hidden presence...it is Christ who awakens the believer and sets in motion the mystical passage into the depths.'³⁴ Now Maximus, commenting on the Lord's Prayer, tells us that Christ 'sets in movement in us an insatiable desire for Himself who is the Bread of life, wisdom, knowledge and justice.'³⁵ This means that our own human desire is taken up into the desiring heart of Christ, and through this participation in the divine pattern of the Son's desirous movement of love we ourselves are drawn into His mission which of its essence is that of the Father. In this inclusion in the Trinitarian ecstasies of loving desire the soul is then transfigured by God 'who takes it up becomingly and fittingly as only He can, penetrating it completely without passion (*apathos*) and deifying all of it and transforming it unchangeably to Himself.'³⁶

The nature of this transformation, which Maximus describes as "unchangeable", is of great significance, as we shall see later on when we reflect upon John's understanding of mystical union. A person who is called to share in the death and Resurrection of Christ is not only able

³³ Maximus, Chapters on Knowledge, II. 18, trans. George C. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings, Classics of Western Spirituality*, New York, Paulist Press, 1985, p. 151. *Patrologia Graeca* 90, II33BC.

³⁴ M McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, , p. 60

³⁵ Maximus, 'Commentary on the Our Father', *Ibid.*, p.118. PG 91 701C

³⁶ *The Church's Mystagogy* in *Maximus Confessor* ,p.206. PG91, 701C.

to retain the essence of their humanity but also experience the truth of this essence, the very nature of personal identity. As one shares in the divine mission of Christ, in the Paschal Mystery, and participates in the fullness of Christ's life in the Trinitarian love, body and spirit discover a new transcendent relationship, which, as we will see later, is reflected in John's understanding of the new experience of communion that comes to birth between the life of sense and spirit.³⁷ Furthermore, in this new state of divine union the soul, in its new identity, becomes God by participation, once again a central theme in John,³⁸ expressed by Maximus in a key passage when referring to the nourishment that the Body of Christ alone can give the soul, 'When it receives through this food eternal blessedness indwelling in it, it becomes God through participation in divine grace by itself ceasing from all activities of mind and sense and with them the natural activities of the body which become Godlike along with it in a participation of deification proper to it. In this state only God shines forth through body and soul when their natural features are transcended in overwhelming glory.'³⁹ This passage is of great significance within the overall thematic context of our reflection of the development of self identity. McIntosh points out that, 'God shines forth, as in Christ, precisely through the perfections of human existence – and these have ever included the perceptivity of our bodies, the linguisticity of our minds and the sensitivity of our feelings.'⁴⁰ Furthermore, referring to the reception of the Eucharist, this process of transformation takes place within the setting of the community's participation in Christ and thus, through both the relational and communal dimensions, which are complimentary, the physical and spiritual reality of the person discovers a new impetus for growth and self –realization.

³⁷ In John's description of purification in the last chapter of *The Spiritual Canticle* he makes it clear that the sensory lower part of the individual soul finds its place, albeit transformed, in the experience of divine union: "La cuarta y la quinta, que ya está la parte sensitiva e inferior reformada y purificada, y que está conformada con la parte espiritual, de manera que no sólo no estorbará para recibir aquellos bienes espirituales, mas antes se acomodará a ellos, porque aun de los que ahora tiene participa según su capacidad." C. 40.1. (583/897)

³⁸ "Estando unida como está aquí con El y [asimismo] absorta en El – es Dios por participación de Dios." L. 2.34. 606/966.

³⁹ Maximus, '*Chapters on Knowledge*', in *Maximus Confessor*, p. 167.

⁴⁰ McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, p. 61

Self- Oblation – the Essence of Love

The understanding of the evolution of self identity that we see evolving through the teachings of Augustine, Dionysius and Maximus, enable us at this juncture to pinpoint some key elements that have a direct bearing on this thesis. What is absolutely central is the overwhelming desire in the heart of God the Creator to be united with His creature through a shared experience of love. Indeed, this takes place as God reveals Himself in a loving encounter with a person precisely as a Being of desire, that expresses itself through a movement of kenotic love that takes Him outside of Himself towards the one He loves. It is this divine experience of love, as we have seen so clearly in Augustine, that stimulates movement in the soul to move out of itself towards this God Who has already made the first move. This cataphatic initiative finds its most powerful embodied expression in the person of Christ, Who expresses in His Incarnation, the desire in the Creator's heart to be at one with His creatures. Furthermore, it is then in the union with the person of Christ Himself, specifically in His death and Resurrection, that the soul is able to respond with a reciprocal movement of love. It is within this context that the soul is liberated to make the apophatic ascent into the embrace of the Father where love and knowledge of God, empowered by desire, enables the individual to experience their true identity 'in Christ.' This, as we have seen, involves a leaving behind of the certainties of rational discourse and an entry into the world of unknowing to discover a participation in the wisdom, the Sapientia, of God through the action of the Holy Spirit. Knowledge of self is, therefore, intimately linked to the transformation of the human capacity to love, which is continually expanded through growing communion with the person of Christ. It is from the heart of this union that a new love for others is discovered, so that the interior love and knowledge of God is not just an exclusive private experience of personal devotion but has a relational dimension that must always be present to authenticate and nurture the interior journey. The capacity for self-donation to 'the

other' is, after all, the essence of the life of the Trinity whose image Augustine sees at the very heart of self identity.⁴¹

St. Gregory the Great – the Importance of the Affect in Contemplation

According to Maximus, initiation into the Paschal Mystery of Christ transforms the essence of human nature which is centred on the human capacity to love in all the depth of its vitality and mystery. This transformation must include, therefore, not only the interior world of the affect and the very nature of human desire, but also a profoundly truthful encounter with the inner world of human suffering and sin that experientially is linked with this interior world of loving and feeling valued. We see this understanding of the human dimension of transformation specifically present in the writings of St. Gregory the Great. He very effectively illuminated, in his fragmentary commentary on the Song of Songs, the language of personal intimacy and longing, 'how love, desire, searching knowledge, vision and contemplation are all brought together in the experience of sacred encounter.'⁴² In his Commentary on Song 3:1-4, Gregory particularly highlights the interior drama of feeling and inner experience that characterises the Bride's pursuit of the lover that, for him, encompasses the essence of the contemplative encounter. As McGinn states in his reflections on Gregory's commentary, 'the dialectic of absence, which increases longing, and presence, which increases love, marks the soul's ascent to the heights of contemplation.'⁴³ With Gregory, therefore, there is a connection, through the language of human experience, with a spousal yearning for completion in 'the other' which situates the concept of Trinitarian fulfilment of the self very vividly in the concrete reality of human experience and desire.⁴⁴

⁴¹ .McGinn, *The Foundations of Christian Mysticism, Origins to the Fifth Century*, pp 249-251

⁴² McGinn, Bernard *The Growth of Mysticism, Gregory the Great through the 12th. Century*, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999. p. 63.

⁴³ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, p. 61.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.75-77.

Bernard of Clairvaux – the Fusion of the Humanity of Christ with the Humanity of the Individual – the Discovery of the Self in Spousal Union

What is of particular significance in this survey is that Gregory's understanding of mystical transformation that embraces the whole movement of personal affective experience made a profound impression on his most famous disciple, Bernard of Clairvaux. As with Augustine and Gregory, Bernard's unequivocal starting point is the incarnate presence of Christ, Who, in the mystery of our redemption, 'takes on our bondage to the fallen fleshly condition in order to free us from imprisonment and restore the original human possibility of attaining spirit through what is bodily.'⁴⁵ For Bernard, therefore, the interaction of the humanity of Christ and the humanity of the individual clearly forms the basis for the transformation of the individual soul into the life of the spirit. What is new in the Abbot's development of the theology of redemption is the emphasis he places on the necessity of the carnal as the starting place for our appreciation of saving grace. As McGinn points out, 'For Bernard, Jesus, the God-man, is lovable on the basic level of human attraction, that of the flesh...The sweetness of carnal love of Christ is needed in order to drive out the false sweetness of illicit loves – as nail expels nail (Sermon 20.4)...carnal love cannot be merely denied or rejected, but must be accepted and redirected to the sensible or carnal love of Christ's humanity, the necessary starting point on the road to the spiritual love of his divinity.'⁴⁶

Bernard makes explicit the message that the spiritual call to holiness does not mean a rejection of the human experience of love but rather an invitation to allow it to be integrated into the divine love of the living Christ. This is reflected in his famous statement which opens his Third Sermon on the Song of Songs, 'Today the text we are to study is the book of our own experience. You must therefore turn your attention inwards, each one must take note of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.167.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.174.

his own particular awareness of the things I am about to discuss.’⁴⁷ This interior movement, for Bernard, is directly linked to a growing awareness of God’s presence within the soul through contemplation, and he sees the growth of this awareness directly linked to its capacity to love. Then, ‘as the soul progressively enlarges in love toward the goal of full liberty of spirit, it becomes a more commodious home for its Divine Guest.’⁴⁸ The divine guest, of course, is the person of Christ Who comes as spouse to slowly take possession of the soul gently, but firmly, by degrees. In Bernard’s memorable words, ‘He is life and power (Heb. 4:12) and as soon as He enters He stirs my sleeping soul. He moves and smoothes and pierces my heart (Sg 4:9) which was as hard as stone and riddled with disease (Sir 3:27; Ez 11:19, 36:26) And he begins to root up and destroy, to build and plant, to water dry places and light the dark corners (cf. Jer 1:10), to open what was closed, set what was cold on fire, to make the crooked straight and the rough places smooth(Is 40:4), so that my soul may bless the Lord and all that is within me praise His holy name.(Ps 102.1)’⁴⁹ Healing transformation is the fruit of the interplay of desire between the soul and God Who has Himself set up this movement, ‘so that every soul among you which is seeking God will know that He has gone before and sought you before you sought Him.’⁵⁰

‘For the Abbot of Clairvaux, our experience of life is one of an almost unbearable tension between what we are meant to be and what we are - between the grandeur and misery of the human condition.’⁵¹ For Bernard, this tension finds its focus in an inability to love freely which can only be fully realised through freedom of choice. This, according to Bernard, ‘is something clearly divine which shines in the soul like a jewel in a setting of gold. From this the soul derives her power to judge and to choose between good and evil, life and death, and

⁴⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, trans. Kilian Walsh *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux, Vol. 2, On The Song of Songs* 1, Cistercian Fathers Series n. 4, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications 1981, Vol. 3, 1. p. 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, New York Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1987, Sermons.74. 11.6. p. 255.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Sermon 84. 2. p. 275.

⁵¹ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, p. 172,

no less between light and darkness, and to make any other choices which present themselves to her,⁵² and as McGinn points out this can only be realised ‘through the soul’s bond with the human manifestation of the Word in Jesus Christ.’⁵³ It is His presence that can then enable the soul to acquire full knowledge of the nature of sinfulness. Self-knowledge for Bernard, comes alive, is clarified, deepened and continues to grow as the nature of deformed choice is recognised and experienced in the body as it is perceived as separate from the spirit. The living presence of Christ is, therefore, both the catalyst for the activation of desire through sharing His own living desire to be united with the wounded soul, at the same time becoming a deepening source of illumination for the soul’s self understanding of its deformation and its need for the transforming power of the Bridegroom’s liberating presence.

It is here, in a very vivid sense, that we encounter powerful echoes of the Augustinian experience of conversion, and it is here, in the experience of spousal love, which facilitates a mutuality of desire between the soul and God, that a continuing process of growth in self-awareness takes place within the soul. This movement into the very centre of loving desire will never end even in eternity. ‘Even in heaven, when we will enjoy a vision of the Trinity and loving union with the Verbum beyond the dreams of this life, we will be ever moving forward into the inexhaustible mystery of God.’⁵⁴ This will be so, according to Bernard, since, ‘even when it has found Him the soul will not cease to seek Him. God is sought not on foot but by desire. And the happy discovery of what is desired does not end desire but extends it.’⁵⁵ The significance, therefore, of the whole movement of self-transcendence, which resides at the centre of human identity, is given this powerful reinforcement as its eternal function is clarified.

⁵² Bernard of Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, Sermons, 80.2. 111.6. p.266

⁵³ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, p. 172.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, Sermons, 84. p. 274.

The Franciscan Tradition - Personal Identification with the Sufferings of Christ

As we have seen, Bernard was very clear that conscious self-awareness, rooted in personal experience, was an integral part of the movement of the soul in response to God's loving desire. It is the clarity and depth of this conviction, concerning the place of experience, that had such a powerful effect not only on his immediate listeners and literary audience but also on the wider religious world of the late Middle Ages. As McIntosh points out, for Maximus the Confessor, it was clear that the processes of knowing and the development of awareness of self both found their reciprocal integrity in the person of Christ, leading to a dynamic understanding of personhood rooted in the Paschal Mystery.⁵⁶ Bernard's acknowledgement of the carnal aspect of desire and the importance of personal experience as co-operative and integral elements of the exercise of this desire, both in God and the individual, opened up the possibility of understanding the relationship with Christ in His death and Resurrection in much more intimate and personal terms, that could hold together all the different levels of physical and spiritual experience.

This understanding, which could include the whole nature of human suffering and physical pain, was carried forward in a very specific way through a new movement of spiritual inspiration that had its origins in St. Francis of Assisi, who literally experienced a physical identification with the crucified Christ in the acquisition of His stigmata. Now self-transcendence involves growth and movement that expands a person's capacity for engagement with others and the world around them, and this only becomes possible through an emotional and spiritual purification of all that prevents this from taking place deep within a person's spirit. From Augustine, through Dionysius, Maximus, Gregory and Bernard, we have seen how the dynamic love for the person by Christ makes this possible as the inner world of desire within the individual is gradually aligned with the reciprocal desire that already exists in the heart of Christ Himself; it is through this identification that the capacity

⁵⁶ McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, p. 61.

for love and relationship is then expanded. Within the Franciscan tradition, in the writings of the seventh successor of St. Francis, as Minister General, St. Bonaventure, this theme of identification finds a very specific focus within the sufferings of Christ in his passion and death.

Bonaventure – Self-Transcendence and the Passion of Christ

What places Bonaventure in such an influential position regarding the development of mystical reflection is the clarity with which he joins the apophatic movement of self-abnegation, that we have seen expressed especially in Dionysius and Maximus, with the passion and death of Christ, which finds particular expression in his most famous work *The Soul's Journey into God*. He directly situates the sacrificial dimension of self-transcendence and all its consequences within the context of Christ's personal physical and mental anguish. This must be so, for Bonaventure, since the ultimate state of encounter with God involves the soul in a reciprocal ecstasy, a going out of self in response to the self-emptying of God. This is achieved when the mind of a person, having contemplated everything that the world of sense has to offer, finally concentrates on the mediator of God and man, Jesus Christ, transcending the world of sense, and entering into the experience of Christ hanging on the Cross, thereby celebrating 'the Pasch, that is, the Passover, with Christ.'⁵⁷

Bonaventure understands this movement, this Passover, as a passing over into spiritual ecstasy which comes as an invitation from God, offered, as he says, 'to all spiritual men.'⁵⁸ Moreover, if it is to be perfect, all intellectual activities must be left behind and the height of our affection must be totally transferred and transformed into God, and this in Bonaventure's words, 'is mystical and most secret, which no one knows except him who desires it, and no one desires it except him who is inflamed in his very marrow by the fire of the Holy Spirit

⁵⁷ Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, New York, Paulist Press, 1978. p112.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

whom Christ sent into the world.’⁵⁹ We see here powerful echoes of the Dionysian vision of the cataphatic outreach of God’s desire that finds fulfilment in the apophatic ascent of the soul into the hidden mystery of God’s wisdom. However, in Bonaventure, this apophatic ascent is vividly connected with the personal involvement in the suffering and death of Christ whereby intellectual activity is transcended and the world of affect is transformed, not in an isolated mechanical sense, but as an integral part of the discovery of a new identity in God as the person consciously participates in the passion of Christ. According to Bonaventure, ‘we leave behind sense and intellectual activities, sensible and invisible things, and in the state of unknowing...restored, in so far as is possible, to unity with Him who is above all essence and knowledge.’⁶⁰ It is the fire of God’s love that makes this possible and ‘Christ enkindles it in the heat of His burning passion which only He truly perceives who says: My soul chooses hanging and my bones death.’⁶¹

This choice fired by the grace of the Holy Spirit initiates a whole new state of being where love and a new kind of knowledge, based on ‘the absolute and unchangeable mysteries of theology’⁶², come together in a relationship that then reflects the ecstatic life of the Trinity. It is this movement of total self-transcendence, in which the inner world of all the wounded aspects of a person’s affect become incorporated with the passion of Christ, that then brings to birth a whole new sense of identity which is inseparable from the experience of Christ in the Resurrection. What is of particular importance in relation to the main theme of this thesis is that Bonaventure’s Paschal vision, so vividly expressed, is clearly present, as we will see, in John’s understanding of the purification that takes place in the Nights of sense and spirit, where the inner transformation of the person is completed within the living context of the crucified and Risen Christ. This particularly comes through in John’s description of the soul’s experience of purgation in the Dark Night of contemplation, that we will see in the second

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.113.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.115.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.114.

book of *The Dark Night*, where he vividly alludes to the sufferings of the individual undergoing purification in language that is so starkly reminiscent of the Lord's passion.⁶³

The Influence of the Victorine Tradition on St. John of the Cross

In his study of St. John of the Cross, Peter Tyler, when reflecting on the nature of John's mysticism, cited the development of what he refers to as "Affective Dionysianism", a movement of theological reflection that initially began towards the end of the twelfth century among a group of theologians associated with the Abbey of St. Denis near Paris.⁶⁴ It subsequently became centred on the Abbey of St. Victor and the members of its theological school became known as Victorines. Drawing on a retranslation of the Dionysian corpus by Sarracenus and Robert Grosseteste, they began to explore the 'affective' dimension of Dionysian studies. Influenced by the vision of Augustine, William of St. Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Gallus, a Victorine canon resident in northern Italy, commenting, in the spirit of Bernard, on the Song of Songs emphasises the centrality for him, Gallus, of the affect as the main receptacle of God's self-revelation: 'The voice of my Beloved beating. While I am thus engaged in spiritual practices, the voice, that is, the influx of the Beloved beating (I cannot express it in any other way) sounds in a super-intellectual manner in the ears of my experience. It does not say that he is speaking, or persuading, because by the fire of his ray he beats upon the highest door, not of intelligence, but of the affection.'⁶⁵ McGinn, in his treatment of Gallus in *The Flowering of Mysticism*, shows how Gallus inserted the affective erotic language of his commentaries on the Song of Songs, very much inspired by Bernard, into the vision of cosmic eros described by Dionysius: 'He followed through on this reinterpretation by infusing the whole Dionysian ascent process with the language of yearning desire, as well as by adding a new upper floor, or level, to the powers of the soul, the "high

⁶³ " De manera que si a uno suspendiesen o detuviesen el aire que no respirase." 2N 6. 5. 339/531.

⁶⁴ Tyler, Peter, *St. John of the Cross*, London, Continuum 2009. p.61.

⁶⁵ Gallus, Thomas, ed. Jeanne Barebet 'Cantica Cantorum ierarchice exposita', *Thomas Gallus: Commentaire du Cantique des Cantiques*, Paris: Commentarium 1967, 11. 1.1-5:8. p. 108

point of the power of attraction”....that is, the affective summit “which alone is capable of being united with the Divine Spirit.”⁶⁶

This affective interpretation by Gallus received further clarification by Jean Gerson, sometime Chancellor of the University of Paris, who, making the distinction between speculative and mystical theology, has this to say: ‘theologia mystica is an experimental cognition of God through the union of the spiritual affectus with Him...as the blessed Dionysius states this takes place through ecstatic love.’⁶⁷ What is important here for our reflection is that this movement brought into the mainstream of theological discussion, during the late Medieval life of the Church, the subtle combination of themes that we have been reflecting upon in this chapter regarding the nature of spiritual encounter with God. This Victorine, school together with the Franciscan tradition, so clearly enriched by Bonaventure and promoted by Francisco de Osuna, would undoubtedly have had a deep effect on John during his time of study at the University of Salamanca.⁶⁸ Official recognition of the Dionysian corpus in a way that did not divorce it from the teaching of Augustine but rather presented it as an important developmental compound of it, clearly enabled John to develop his own inspirational vision. As Tyler points out, it was the strategy of unknowing that carried a person beyond the world of rational discourse into the silent encounter with the ‘unknown’ God. It was this, above all, combined with the strategy of embodiment,⁶⁹ the experience of human desire, eros, drawing a person into that place of divine encounter, that enabled John, as we will see, to develop his own understanding of mystical union so powerfully enunciated in the *Ascent/Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love*.

⁶⁶ McGinn Bernard, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, New York, Crossroads, 1998, p. 82.

⁶⁷ J. Gerson, ‘De Theologia mystica’, Unpublished translation by B. McGuire, in Tyler, *St. John of the Cross*, p. 63

⁶⁸ Tyler, *St. John of the Cross*, p.64.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

**The Christological Personalism of St. John of the Cross as the Creative Opening for
Dialogue with Winnicott.**

In our historical survey we have seen how it is the movement of divine eros that initiates the opening up of the inner dynamics of the soul and carries it through the apophatic purification that then leads to total communion with God. It is within this internal movement of purification, and the consequent expansion of a person's spiritual capacity to know themselves in a more authentic way, that a dynamic form of inner healing takes place which then provides an opportunity for a psychological perspective to evolve. What the survey also revealed was the conjunction between the movement of inner purification and the growing internal relationship between the individual and the person of Christ that we have seen clearly enunciated in Maximus and subsequently developed, in many of its creative aspects, through Gregory, Bernard and Bonaventure. This was presented to us in a particularly vivid way through understanding the relationship with Christ within the spousal image that enhanced its personal and intimate nature by drawing the physical and emotional dimensions of human desire right into the centre of the spiritual encounter. This, as we saw, is articulated with particularly imaginative depth by Bernard, in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, in which he acknowledges the unique place that an individual's personal experience has in the whole economy of spiritual growth. The survey was finally completed with a brief presentation of Bonaventure's powerful vision in *The Soul's Journey into God* that highlighted the importance of the physical and mental agony of Christ in His passion and death. It revealed how His personal sufferings offer a place of identification for all the facets of wounded affectivity that confront the individual who is called to grow into spiritual maturity in communion with the Risen Christ.

One of the implicit themes of this thesis will be to demonstrate how this intensely personalist vision of spiritual growth, that integrated the whole movement of self-transcendence into the life and death of the crucified and Risen Christ had profound effect on the vision of John. As

we will see in Chapter Two, John sees the whole of the spiritual journey as the process whereby the entirety of the personality is uncovered and then slowly, but delicately, drawn into a deepening union with the person of Christ Who is able ‘to work out His dying and rising’⁷⁰ within the very tissues of a person’s humanity, thus opening it up to the action of the Holy Spirit, Who alone can lead the individual into loving union with the Father in the heart of the Trinity.⁷¹ As Tyler points out, this opening up touches the very depths of the human affect and takes the form of a wound of love, that sense of the hiddenness and absence of God and His love, that must be sought for and re-found.⁷² It is this, as we will see, that takes the person into that mysterious world of unknowing and, most significantly, enables them to be identified with and encounter the person of Jesus Christ, Who, in John is present in so many different guises: brother, shepherd, health, ransom, medicine, mountain goat, stag, lion, garden, fountain, rock, mine, well, lily, prisoner, nightingale and, most important of all, in the designation of Bridegroom and Beloved.⁷³ It will be precisely here, in the engagement with the different shades of encounter with the person of Christ, at different stages of developmental need and growth, that we will discover the starting point for dialogue with the psychological perspective of human growth that is central to Winnicott’s understanding of the person.

As we saw earlier, the demise of the concept of the self, that had originally incorporated a dynamic Christological centre, had embraced all the different aspects of affective experience, and had then undergone a transformation in the faculty of knowing and experiencing the self in the light of God’s love, facilitated not only the disappearance of all these essential characteristics but also, in a particularly powerful way, the removal of the self -transcending element that was understood as central to the growth of self identity. All this gradually

⁷⁰ Matthew, Iain, *The Impact of God*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1995 p. 133.

⁷¹ “El Espíritu Santo, el cual a manera de aspirar con aquella su aspiración divina muy subidamente levante el alma y la informa y habilita para que ella aspire en Dios la misma aspiración de amor que el Padre aspira el Hijo y el Hijo en el Padre.” C. 39.3. (558/891)

⁷² Tyler, *St. John of the Cross*, p. 40.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p.48.

opened the way for the power of reason to become the arbiter of human identity and, as we have seen, led to the emergence of the post-Cartesian self of the Enlightenment that directed the energies of the personality into self-mastery and organisational control of all inner and outer reality. In this thesis I hope to show how Winnicott's understanding of relational development can provide a new link between the experience of desire and self-transcendence in a way that incorporates the reality of psychological and spiritual growth, while enabling the transformatory presence of the person of Christ to provide the essential channel through which a person moves between inner and outer reality. By bringing together the theoretical perspectives of Winnicott with the spiritual insights of John of the Cross, as contained in his major works, I hope to demonstrate how this finds a particular relevance in the contemporary search for a new way of defining the self that can embrace the personal, social and spiritual dimensions of experience without distorting their unique characteristics.

Chapter Two

The Discovery of Self Identity through the Journey towards Loving Union with God according to St. John of the Cross.

The Literary Context

In the writings of St. John of the Cross, and, as we will see later on in Chapter Three, when we examine Winnicott's theoretical writings, there is no systematic presentation of the development of a sense of self and the implications that this has for experiencing personal identity. The central task of this chapter will be, therefore, to draw out this essential theme from the different aspects of John's doctrine relating specifically to growth in loving union with God that is presented in his four main commentaries, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticle* and *the Living Flame of Love*.¹ There will also be a brief reference to one of *The Romances*, a set of poems in which we find 'the great themes of John's theological and spiritual thought,'² communicated with an appealing and gentle simplicity. Bede Frost, in his classic study of John and his teaching, is quite clear that 'the four extant works of John must be read as one, the describing and mapping of a single continuous process, each stage of which is related to that which has gone before and to that which follows, all being initiated and continued by God who, as the Final End, draws souls to Himself.'³ This is a very important consideration in the light of the specific tenor of each of John's commentaries that have often been read as single works. As Frost points out, 'The failure to recognise the unity has often led readers of *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night* to recoil in dismay, and indeed, with much misunderstanding from the teaching contained in the first

¹ Although John's commentaries are traditionally placed under four headings they actually relate to three main poetical works, *Cantico Espiritual*, *Llama de Amor Vita*, and *Noche Oscura* in which is contained both *Subida del Monte Carmelo* and *Noche Oscura*.

² St. John of the Cross, trans. K. Kavanaugh O.C.D. and O.Rogriguez O.C.D., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Washington D. C., ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991 p. 43.

³ Frost, Bede, *Saint John of the Cross, Doctor of Divine Love, An Introduction to His Philosophy, Theology and Spirituality*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1937. p. 24.

two works and has gained for St. John the title of Doctor of Nada in place of that which is much more fitting, Doctor of Divine Love.⁴

This more appropriate epithet becomes clear when the first two commentaries are seen as preparatory works whose function is to reveal how souls, touched by divine grace, are able to journey towards that end which John describes in the Prologue to *The Ascent* as ‘that divine light of perfect union with God, which is achieved in so far as possible in this life through love.’⁵ This, as we will see, is the core of his teaching and provides the unifying theme that can maintain the vital link between commentaries that can, at first sight, be seen to be only distantly related. The powerful insistence in *The Ascent* on the need for renunciation and detachment that then moves the soul into the purifying night of sense and spirit in *The Dark Night* is, according to John, a preparation, for the prayer of contemplation described towards the end of Book Two of *The Dark Night* as ‘a science of love, which as we said is an infused loving knowledge, that both illumines and enamors the soul, elevating it step by step unto God, its Creator.’⁶ It is precisely this state of union, that is then expanded and placed within the intimate dynamics of a loving relationship between the Bridegroom and the beloved in *The Canticle*, that then prepares the soul for the Trinitarian experience of love when the Holy Spirit’s movement of the soul brings this spiritual journey to completion. This is expressed with great clarity right at the end of *The Living Flame*, ‘But in this awakening of the Bridegroom in the perfect soul, everything that occurs and is caused is perfect, for He is the cause of it all. And in that awakening, which is as though one were to awaken and breathe, the soul feels strange delight in the breathing of the Holy Spirit in God, in which it is sovereignly glorified and taken with love.’⁷

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵ “La divina luz de la unión perfecta del amor de Dios cual se puede en esta vida.” 1S Pr.1 (69/254)

⁶ “Es ciencia de amor, lo cual, como habemos dicho, es noticia infusa de Dios amorosa, que juntamente va ilustrando y enamorando el alma, hasta subirla de grado [en grado] hasta Dios, su Criador.” 2N 18, 5. (372/568).

⁷ “Mas en este recuerdo que el Esposo hace en este alma perfecta todo lo que pasa y se hace es perfecto, porque lo hace El todo; que es al modo como cuanda uno recuerda y respira: siente el alma un

The commentaries are structured reflections that are based on John's three great poetical works which, according to Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'are the decisive statement'⁸ in John's personal theology. Colin Thompson, in his detailed study of John's poetry, makes clear, when describing the essential nature of his poetical writings, that 'the cause of the poetry is intense mystical experience which cannot be captured by words which...is not beyond their power to represent, however inadequately.'⁹ John does this through an array of literary skills that place him in the forefront of the Golden Age of Spanish Literature in which he draws freely on the resources of biblical language and imagery, classical and Renaissance poetry, popular love songs and devotional literature, fusing their distinctive characteristics but nevertheless transcending them and 'reworking them into his own distinct and original poetic voice.'¹⁰ In all these poems John powerfully expresses the many different levels of human experience, not only in relation to the inner world of deep personal emotions and impulses, that generate a whole variety of hopes and fears, but also to the external world with all its enticing images, its contrasts of light and darkness, movement and stillness, tranquillity and turmoil.

The Presence of Eros that Leads to Transformation

What is particularly present, however, in all of John's poetry, is a strong erotic element that has clearly flowed from his own deep personal attachment to the Old Testament text, The Song of Songs, that we have seen, in Chapter One, was a major source of inspiration for spiritual writers during the early and later Medieval Church, particularly St. Gregory and St. Bernard. It is this connection that implicitly places John in the great mystical tradition of Western spirituality, providing, as it does, the springboard for John's commentaries on his three major poems which focus the reader on the eternal experience of divine eros as seen

extraño deleite en espiración del Espíritu Santo en Dios, en que soberanamente ella se glosifica y enamora." L 4, 16. (649/1038-1039).

⁸ Urs von Balthasar, Hans, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 111, Edinburgh, T.& T. Clark, 1982, p. 120.

⁹ Thompson, Colin, *St. John of the Cross, Songs in the Night.*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002. p. 276.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

through the lens of human transformation. Thompson understands the erotic nature of John's imagery and language as one of the most interesting and creative ways in which the poetry verifies the insight of von Balthasar, already quoted. He first points out that in its representation of human love with its mutual self-giving, tenderness, intimacy and joy, it highlights the beauty and mystery of human sexuality as opposed to its negative expression of possessiveness, abuses and self-gratification.¹¹ In this way, therefore, it affirms the highest ideals of Christian teaching on human love and sexuality. Thompson then goes on to demonstrate how this very positive representation of erotic relationship by John can clearly be seen as a metaphor for human spiritual love, which then enables one to discover 'that the worlds of matter and spirit are bound together: spiritual truths cannot be articulated apart from physical realities, nor can the material realities exclude the spiritual, because God has bound himself to the world and to humanity in the Incarnation.'¹²

It is this truth that John opens up in his commentaries as the Second Person of the Trinity, the historical Christ, as we will see, weaves His presence into the very tissues of an individual's humanity. This enables Him to activate the capacity within the individual to enter into union with Himself thereby enabling the person to experience the fullness of love in their humanity as it participates in the life of His spirit. It will be here that we will discover John's vision of mystical transformation, the journey through faith to loving union, that offers the authentic context in which it will be possible to trace a person's evolving experience of unique self identity as it grows through this deepening spiritual encounter with Christ into the very heart of Trinitarian life. It will then be precisely here, in the way that this will engage the psychological reality of the person's inner world of growth, that we will discover the opportunity to engage with the dynamic vision of Winnicott in regard to the development of relationships and the experience of creative being.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 280.

Eros as the Movement of Love

John's understanding of the mystical journey is described in the language of movement from one state to another, always on the move, 'the soul never remains in one state, but everything is ascent and descent.'¹³ There is a constant interplay between the perfect love of God and contempt of self, creating on the one hand a sense of exaltation, and on the other, humiliation, which slowly evens out 'through the acquisition of perfect habits, for the soul will then have reached God and united itself with Him.'¹⁴ This movement is generated by the exclusive love of God, hence 'If anything pleases Him, it is the exaltation of the soul. Since there is no way by which He can exalt her more than by making her equal to Himself, He is pleased only with her love.'¹⁵ The method God uses to achieve His objective is the imposition of grace whose purpose is to bring a new order into the soul that brings 'true freedom, the freedom to love,¹⁶ which springs from a 'fathomless desire for union with God.'¹⁷ This is gradually stimulated through a combination of approaches by God towards the soul in which 'He usually bestows some secret touches of love, which like fiery arrows pierce and wound it, leaving it wholly cauterized by the fire of love. And these wounds, mentioned here, are properly called wounds of love. They so inflame the will in its affection that it burns up in this flame and fire of love.'¹⁸ John places this process of transformation right at the centre of the soul's journey into God, a transformation initiated by God outside of the soul's compass of control. It is,

¹³ "Que nunca permanencia en un estado, sino todo es subir y bajar." 2N 18:3 (372/568)

¹⁴ "Adquiridos los hábitos [perfectos] cese ya [e]l subir y bajar, y habiendo ya llegado y unídose con Dios..." 2N 18 :4 (372/568)

¹⁵ "Y así, si de algo se sirve es de que alma se engrandezca, y como no hay otra cosa en que más la pueda engrandecer que igualándola consigo, por so solamente se sirve de que le ame." C 28: 1 (520/851)

¹⁶ Cummins O.C.D., Norman , *Freedom to Rejoice, Understanding St. John of the Cross*, London HarperCollins, 1991. p. 18.

¹⁷ "Deseo abisal por la unión con Dios." C 17: 1 (479/807)

¹⁸ "Suele hacer unos encendidos toques de amor que, a manera de saeta de fuego, hieren y traspasan el alma y la deyan toda cauterizada con fuego de amor; y éstas propiamente se llaman heridas de amor, de las cuales habla aquí el alma. Inflaman éstas tanto la voluntad en afición, que se está el alma abrasando en fuego y llama de amor." C 1: 17 (422/748)

according to Edward Howells, ‘a force for unity in the soul, changing it, but changing it by degrees rather than into something wholly unconnected from the state in which it started.’¹⁹

The Conflict of Desire

Transformation has two fundamental consequences. It brings the soul into contact with the loving desire of God for union, while at the same time, confronting the presence of desire in the soul itself of all that is not God.²⁰ As John says clearly at the beginning of *The Ascent*, ‘To undertake the journey to God the heart must be burned and purified of all creatures with the fire of divine love.’²¹ The journey of the soul into God not only involves total transformation through the experience of being loved, that is, being the object of desire, but also engagement with a particular form of inner conflict contained within the experience of desires already present in the soul. ‘Contraries rise up at this time against contraries – those of the soul against those of God which assail it...They war within the soul, striving to expel one another in order to reign. The virtues and properties of God, extremely perfect, war against the habits and properties of the soul, extremely imperfect; and the soul suffers these two contraries within itself.’²² In other words, the loving desire of God for the soul, enkindling a reciprocal desire within it, will immediately have to contend with an already established inner world of desire, which is defining the person’s identity, to which the person himself is totally attached. If movement and transformation are to be achieved there can be no co-existence of these

¹⁹ Howells, Edward, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Mystical Knowing and Selfhood*, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002, p.41.

²⁰ Fitzgerald O.C.D. Constance, ‘Transformation in Wisdom, The Subversive Character and Educative Power of Sophia in Contemplation’, in *Carmelite Studies VIII Carmel and Contemplation, Transforming Human Consciousness*, Washington DC, ICS Publications, 2000, p.290

²¹ “Para comenzar a ir a Dios, se ha de quemar y purificar de todo lo que es criatura con el fuego del amor de Dios.” 1S 2:2 (75/ 260).

²² “Levántanse en el alma a esta sazón contrarios contra contrarios; los de el alma contra los de Dios, que...y hacen la guerra en el sujeto de el alma, procurando los unos expeler a los otros por reinar ellos en ella, conviene saber: las virtudes y propiedades de Dios en extremo perfectas contra los hábitos y propiedades del sujeto del alma en extremo imperfectos, padeciendo ella los contraries en sí.” L 1:22 (587-588/929-930).

contrary desires.²³ In *The Spiritual Canticle* John makes it clear that the soul's self-definition is rooted in its attachment: 'the soul lives where she loves more than in the body she animates; for she does not live in the body, but rather gives life to the body, and lives through love in the object of her love.'²⁴ Hence, the movement of life and the experience of meaning flow directly from relationships that engage the deepest desire in the soul for 'the other'.

This, as we will see later, will be reflected in Winnicott's understanding of the necessary development of a person's capacity for objective relationships which is integral to psychological growth. Again, in the words of Howells, 'It is not the faculty of knowing, or any other power in the soul in itself, which defines the self for John, rather to what the soul is oriented, the 'other' that it desires and tends towards.'²⁵ The key is the very nature of human desire which manifests itself not only in the arena of the experience of possession and being possessed, but also at the deeper and more fundamental level of identification. John refers to this important phenomenon at the beginning of *The Ascent* where he says, 'it ought to be kept in mind that an attachment to a creature makes a person equal to that creature; the firmer the attachment, the closer is the likeness to the creature, and the greater the equality...He who loves a creature, then, is as low as that creature, and in some way even lower, because love not only equates, but even subjects the lover to the loved object.'²⁶

It therefore stands to reason that the impact and challenge that the desire of God poses for the person raises central questions that relate to the whole life experience: identity, capacity for change, personal autonomy, and above all the freedom to love 'the other' as 'other' and not as some personal possession or object of addiction. All these aspects of personal experience, as

²³ "La razón es porque dos contraries, según nos enseña la filosofía, no pueden caber en un sujeto...De aquí es que en el alma no se puede asentar la luz de la divina unión si primero no se ahuyentan las afecciones de ella." 1S 4:2 (78/263).

²⁴ "El alma más vive donde ama que en el cuerpo donde anima, porque en el cuerpo ella no tiene su vida, antes ella la da al cuerpo, y ella vive por amor en lo que ama." C 8:3 (441/768).

²⁵ Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila*, p.41

²⁶ "La afición y asimiento que el alma tiene a la criatura iguala a la misma alma con la criatura, y cuanto mayor es la afición tanto más la iguala hace semejante, porque el amor hace semejanza entre lo que ama y ed amado." 1S 4:3 (78/263).

we will see later, will find echoes in the whole movement towards creativity and real personal freedom to love and engage with others that is central to Winnicott's understanding of genuine human maturity. For John, the soul remains captive to its own passions, appetites, and attachments, rooted in the natural drives of the body, until a new process of liberation is initiated.²⁷ This process, spear-headed by the touches of God's desire, will not result in the disappearance of appetites and the instinctual drives of the senses but rather their re-integration in the life of the spirit. This will be achieved through mortification and the expansion of God's love in the soul bringing alive its capacity to respond to God's loving initiative. John concludes the first Book of *The Ascent* with precisely these sentiments. 'Until slumber comes to the appetites, through the mortification of sensuality, and until this very sensuality is stilled in such a way that the appetites do not war against the spirit, the soul will not walk out to genuine freedom, to the enjoyment of union with its Beloved.'²⁸

The Inner Structure of the Person

In order to understand fully this process of transformation and the manner in which this 'force for unity'²⁹ gathers momentum, it is necessary to understand the way John perceived the inner structure of the person. In his study on John, E.W. Trueman Dicken makes clear that 'For St. John of the Cross a human being may be regarded schematically as a tripartite and as it were stratified entity, at bottom a creature of flesh and blood, capable nevertheless at his highest point of development of reaching to God himself.'³⁰ However, as John puts it, he is also a unified single entity,³¹ in which body and soul enjoy a continuity of being. This fundamental concept in John will be reflected later in Winnicott's understanding of the importance of

²⁷ Mallory, Martin M. *Christian Mysticism: Transcending Techniques: A Theological Reflection on the Empirical Teaching of St. John of the Cross*. Amsterdam, Van Gorcum, 1977. p. 11

²⁸ "Porque, hasta que los apetitos se adormezcan por la mortificación en la sensualidad, y la misma sensualidad esté y sosegada de ellos de manera que ninguna guerra haga al espíritu, no sale el alma a la verdadera libertad, a gozar de la unión de su Amado." 1S 15:2 (106/292).

²⁹ Howells, *Ibid.*, p.41.

³⁰ Trueman Dicken, E.W. *The Crucible of Love, A study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross*, London, Darton Longman and Todd Ltd., 1963, p. 328.

³¹ "Ser un solo supuesto" 2N 1:1 (330/521).

establishing a psycho-somatic unity within a person in order to experience personal autonomy and a genuine capacity to relate freely to others. The soul itself has two distinct strata which John defines when relating them to the nights of faith³², the lower sensory part of man's nature, the animal soul, and the superior part which contains the rational faculties, the memory, the understanding and the will. The former, lower part of the soul, designated the sensitive part, 'la parte sensitiva', is intrinsically allied to the body through the senses, which themselves are of two kinds. The first, the exterior bodily senses, 'los sentidos corporales exteriores', comprising the senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch³³, correspond to one of the sensory organs of the body, whose function is to receive impressions from the material world. The second kind relate to the two interior bodily senses, the imagination and the phantasy. 'They are of service to each other in due order, because the one is discursive and the other forms the image.'³⁴ As E.W. Trueman Dicken points out³⁵ that although it may seem strange that John places the faculty of imagination in the animal soul, as he puts it, he does so because of the scholastic theory of knowledge according to which imagination is an internal sense that simply combines any 'external' experiences we may have in different combinations, a process in which there is nothing essentially rational. The second interior sense, 'el sentido coporal interior', the phantasy, is simply the capacity to reflect upon an image from the imagination so that it can be interiorly contemplated at length.

This is all a preparation for the more serious aspect of human engagement, the activation of the higher functions of the soul that have already been referred to: the memory, understanding and the will. It is the memory, above all, that works in close co-operation with the imagination and the bodily senses. The memory is not only a storehouse of things perceived

³² "La primera, porque ésta pertenece a la parte inferior del hombre, que es la sensitiva y, por consiguiente más exterior, y esta segunda de la fe pertenece a la parte superior del hombre, que es la racional... o, por mayor decir, la ciega." 2S 2:2 (109/295)

³³ "Los sentidos corporales exteriores, que son: ver, oír, oler, gustar y tocar." 2S 11:1 (131/318).

³⁴ "Es, pues, de saber que los sentidos de que aquí particularmente hablamos son dos sentidos corporales [interiores] que se llaman imaginativa y fantasía, los cuales ordenadamente se sirven el uno al otro, porque el uno discurre imaginando, y el otro forma la imaginación o lo imaginado fantaseando." 2S 12:3 (137/323).

³⁵ Trueman Dicken, *Ibid*, p.329.

by the exterior sense and the imagination, but also a receptacle of knowledge deduced from these sources of understanding. John refers to this when he says, ‘This interior sense, the phantasy coupled with the memory, is for the intellect the archives or receptacle in which all the intelligible forms and images are received.’³⁶ Hence, the memory not only retains former experiences but looks forward and anticipates the future based on material that has been received from the past. The understanding is the forum for intellectual activity and can be distinguished from the memory and the will by its perceptive ability. It is the centre of logical thinking and discursive reasoning. Finally, the third faculty of the soul, the will, is as Trueman Dicken points out, ‘the final arbiter and governor of the whole personality,’³⁷ since it draws together and directs all the powers of the soul.³⁸ Human action differs from that of animals and other inanimate creatures as they are rooted, however imperfectly, in a person’s capacity for choice. The latter is conditioned, as we have stated already, by the interplay of desires that flow from the internal infrastructure of attachments and identifications. Hence, the will is not independent either of the lower part of the soul or of the body, ‘la parte sensitiva’, which is the principle informant of the imagination that, in turn, nurtures the phantasy, the staple diet of the memory.

These faculties are thus continually operating to stimulate the world of desire providing a living context for the exercise of personal choices. Since the acquisition of knowledge that informs the intellect is also integral to the process of the activation of the will, it is clear that the human person is indeed a unit of sensation and response. In reflecting on John’s composite picture of the human being, body and soul, as one single entity, Trueman Dicken remarks: ‘One might liken the human soul to a rainbow in which is present a great variety of colours, not separated from one another, but each emerging into the next without lines of

³⁶ “Porque este sentido de la fantasía, junto con la memoria, es como un archivo y receptáculo del entendimiento, en que se reciben todas las formas y imágenes inteligibles,” 2S 16:2 (150/336-337)

³⁷ Trueman Dicken, *Ibid.*, p.332.

³⁸ “La fortaleza del alma consiste en sus potencias, pasiones y apetitos, todo lo cual es gobernado por la voluntad.” 3S 16:2 (237/426).

demarcation.³⁹ It is this interrelationship of senses, appetites and faculties that enables John to approach the process of transformation in a way that enables the faculties to discover this freedom and spiritual identity while integrating the life and dignity of the body's whole experience, physical, interior and spiritual.

God's Initiative of Transforming Love – Engaging the World of Desire

John, right at the beginning of *The Ascent*, states clearly that a soul, 'fired with love's urgent longings',⁴⁰ must pass through two principle kinds of night (which spiritual persons call purgations or purifications of the soul) relating to the sensory and spiritual part of the soul respectively.⁴¹ It is only through God's initiative that the soul will have the strength to begin the process of change that requires purification. However, it must be clearly stated that God's grace does not enter a totally inert and passive being which is completely stationary. John understands the person, whom God touches with his grace, as already experiencing movement in the form of desires. As John says, 'A love of pleasure, and attachment to it, usually fires the will towards the enjoyment of things that give pleasure.'⁴² Hence, it is God's task to engage this world of desire in a way that is going to pierce the very centre of human identity. He does this through the enkindling of another love, which John refers to as 'love of one's heavenly Bridegroom',⁴³ and with 'more urgent longings for spiritual things'.⁴⁴ In other words, the desire for spousal fulfilment that embraces the whole of a person's world of sense experience, affect, and physical desire is combined with the engagement of the spiritual faculties from the start, embryonically contained in this experience of grace. Therefore, according to John, the capacity for relationship that is rooted in the depths of the heart, can

³⁹ Trueman Dicken, *Ibid.*, pp .341-342.

⁴⁰ "Con ansias, en amores inflamada." Capitulo 1 (73/258).

⁴¹ "Que un alma llegue al estado de perfección, ordinariamente ha pasar primero por dos manera principales de noches, que los espirituales llaman purgaciones o purificaciones del alma." 1S 1: 1 (73/258).

⁴² "Para vencer todos los apetitos y negar los gustos de todas las cosas – con cuyo amor y afición se seule inflamar la voluntad para gozar de ellos..." 1S 14:2 (105/291).

⁴³ " Otro amor mejor, que es el de su Esposo," *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ " Con otras ansias mayores de lo que es espiritual." *Ibid.*

only find ultimate fulfilment when the spiritual potential of the person seeks this in union with God. However, before describing in more detail the nature of purification in the soul, that takes place in the night of sense and spirit, it will assist and clarify the nature of the soul's transformation if the dynamics of love within God Himself are examined more closely.

In *The Living Flame* John, describes the cauterization of the soul with the fire of love in what he calls 'the substance of the soul, where neither the centre of the senses, nor the devil can reach.'⁴⁵ He emphasises that 'the more secure, substantial and delightful the more interior it is, because the more interior it is, the purer it is.'⁴⁶ John presents God as the prime mover⁴⁷ in the depths of the soul whose primary occupation is to receive from God, and what it receives is an impulsion, an experience of love, that opens up the desire to find its centre which John states clearly is God Himself.⁴⁸ As it experiences a more intense love transforming and clarifying it, 'in its whole being, power, and strength...until it appears to be God',⁴⁹ the fullness of the soul's, the person's, experience of itself can only be realised in a state of total surrender. This surrender is facilitated when, as John puts it, the soul is placed in God 'in a high state and union of love...This state is called spiritual espousal with the Word, the Son of God.'⁵⁰ It is the time when 'God communicates to the soul great things about Himself, beautifies her with grandeur and majesty, adorns her with gifts and virtues.'⁵¹ It is, however, only a preparatory stage, albeit one of intense enrichment, when, in one of John's most powerful and evocative images, the soul is conscious 'that the torrent of God's spirit is

⁴⁵ "La sustancia del alma, donde ni el centro del sentido ni el demonio puede llegar..." L 1.9. (582/921)

⁴⁶ "Tanto más segura, sustancial y deleitable [es] cuanto más interior ella es, porque cuanto más interior es más pura." *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ "Porque es Dios el obrero de todo, sin que el alma haga de suyo nada." *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ "El centro de el alma es Dios." L. 1.12.(583/923)

⁴⁹ "Todo el ser y potencia y virtud de ella...que parezca Dios" L.1.13. (584/924)

⁵⁰ "Se denota un alto estado y unión de amor...al cual llaman desposorio espititual con el Verbo Hijo de Dios." C. 14-15. 2.(463/790)

⁵¹ "Comunica Dios al alma grandes cosas de sí, hermoseándola de grandeza y majestad y arreándola de dones y vitudes." *Ibid.*

besieging and taking possession of her so forcibly that all the rivers of the world seem to have flooded in upon her and to be assailing her.’⁵² Preparing her for what?

When John begins to describe the union which God ultimately desires with the soul in the spiritual marriage, he reveals, in the spousal imagery, an intensity in God’s desire which involves not only a conjugal submission of the soul to God, the Bridegroom, but also an experience of ‘total transformation in the Beloved in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain consummation of the union of love. The soul thereby becomes divine, becomes God through participation.’⁵³ There is a level of mutuality expressed here that is further amplified in John’s description of God as one Who goes beyond the depth of love expressed by a mother for a child, a brother for a brother, a friend for a friend, to a love that yearns for an equal and mutual exchange of love.⁵⁴ It is a love that reverses the natural order, that only finds total fulfilment when God places Himself in a position of total vulnerability and dependence on His Beloved, ‘as solicitous in favouring her as He would be if He were her slave and she His god.’⁵⁵

Participant Transformation

The key, therefore, to understanding the nature of God’s love for the soul is participant transformation, which is rooted in the very nature of God Himself.⁵⁶ In an illuminating passage John spells out for us the interior dynamic that exists within God’s experience of His love in relation to Himself: ‘He does not love things because of what they are in themselves

⁵² “El alma asiente, es de saber que de tal manera se ve el alma embestir del torrente del espíritu de Dios en este caso y con tanta fuerza apoderarse de ella, que le parece que vienen sobre ella todos los ríos del mundo que la embisten” C 14-15. 9. (465/793)

⁵³ “Una transformación total en el Amado, en que se entregan ambas las partes por total posesión de la una a la otra, con cierta consumación de unión de amor. en que está el alma hecha divina y Dios por participación...” C.22.3. (497/827)

⁵⁴ “Comunicarse Dios en esta interior unión al alma con tantas veras de amor, que no hay afición de madre que con tanta ternura acaricie a su hijo, ni amor de hermano ni amistad de amigo que se le compare.” C. 27.1.(517/848)

⁵⁵ “Y está tan solícito en la regular, como si El fuese su esclavo y ella fuese su Dios.” *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ “ Y así se puede hacer pura transformación por participación de unión. aunque no esencialmente.” 2S 5.5. (117/303)

but because of what He is in Himself. Thus love is the purpose for which He loves. With God, to love the soul is to put her somehow in Himself and make her His equal. Thus He loves the soul within Himself, with Himself, that is, with the very love by which He loves Himself.⁵⁷ In his *Romance sobre el evangelio "In principio erat Verbum", acerca de la Santísima Trinidad*, the poetic reflection on the Trinity, the internal experience of love is clearly delineated, 'As the lover in the beloved/ Each lived in the other/ And the love that unites them/ Is one with them'⁵⁸ The nature of this love reveals an equality of loving, of being, and of total unity. Surrender to the love of God is a surrender to a love that empowers 'the other' to love in return.

It is an experience of reciprocal empowerment that is a veritable celebration of dynamic love that is of its very essence infinite: 'Thus it is a boundless/Love that unites them.'⁵⁹ This dimension of empowerment is beautifully captured by John when he says that the soul is not meant to be just the recipient of love, but the one whom God 'will show her how to love Him as perfectly as she desires...Besides teaching her to love purely, freely, and disinterestedly as He loves her...Transforming her into His love...He gives her His own strength by which she can love Him.'⁶⁰ This love of its very essence is totally personal and specific, relating to the intimate nature of God in Himself, as John expresses it in *The Living Flame*, 'The soul does not love Him only because He is generous, good and glorious to it, but with greater force it loves Him because He is all this in Himself essentially'⁶¹

⁵⁷ "No ama las cosas por lo que ellas son en sí. Por tanto, amar Dios al alma es meterla en cierta manera en sí mismo, igualándola consigo, y así ama el alma en sí consigo con el mismo amor que El se ama." C. 32. 6 (536/868)

⁵⁸ "Como amado en el amante/ Uno en otro residía,/Y aqieste amor que los une/En lo mismo convenía." *Romances Sobre El Vangelo "In principio erat Verbum"* (725/85)

⁵⁹ "Por lo cual era infinito/El amor que las unía" *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ "La *mostrará* cómo le ha de amar ella con la perfección que pretende...demás de enseñar Dios allí a amar al alma pura y libremente sin interese como El nos ama....transformándola en su amor..en lo cual le da su misma fuerza con puede amarle." C. 38.4.(554/888).

⁶¹ "No le ama sólo porque para sí misma es largo, bueno, gloria,etc., sino mucho más fuertemente, porque en sí es todo esto esencialmente." L. 3.82 (642/1026)

The Agency of the Holy Spirit

John understands participant transformation, whereby the soul becomes integral to the very life of God within Himself, as a process initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit, since John is ever mindful of God as the Mystery of Three Persons, a Trinity of love. To love God in His very essence means a participation in the internal communication between Father, Son and Spirit, and it is through the union that takes place between the soul and Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, that the soul finds its identity within this community of love. However, the agency of the Spirit is crucial for this movement to take place⁶² and, in certain key passages, John enables us to grasp the dynamic nature of the Spirit's facilitating role. When describing the night of contemplation in Book Two of *The Dark Night*, John makes a fundamental link between the secrecy attached to the acquisition of wisdom, that is infused into the soul through love in contemplation, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. He says, 'This communication is secret and dark to the work of the intellect and the other faculties. Insofar as these faculties do not acquire it but the Holy Spirit infuses it and puts it in order in the soul, as the bride says in the Cantic of Canticles [Ct. 2:4], the soul neither knows nor understands how this comes to pass and thus calls it secret.'⁶³

During the state of spiritual espousal, when the soul is confronted with the dryness and intense pain that accompanies a sense of the Bridegroom's absence, this infused wisdom induces an invocation that comes from the depths of the soul to the Holy Spirit, Who is then revealed more and more clearly as the one who brings to birth the union between the bride and the Bridegroom. As John makes clear, 'He it is Who will dispel this dryness and sustain and increase her love for the Bridegroom...She invokes the Holy Spirit because her entire aim

⁶² Dubay S. M., Thomas, *Fire Within*, San Francisco Ignatius Press, 1989. p. 183.

⁶³ "Lo cual acaece secretamente a oscuras de la obra del entendimiento y de las demás potencias; de donde, por cuanto las dichas potencias no la alcanzan, sino que el Espíritu Santo la infunde y ordena en alma – como dice la Esposa Santo en los Cantares (2,4) – sin ella saberlo ni entenderlo cómo sea, se llama *secreta*." 2N 17. 2 (368/563-564)

is to please her Bridegroom.’⁶⁴ However, it also gradually becomes clear that the Holy Spirit and the love of the Bridegroom for the soul are not separate entities but intertwined, as they both draw the soul into the state of union. When describing the soul’s invocation through the poetic demand, ‘breathe through my garden,’⁶⁵ the garden referring to the soul, John indicates a subtle form of collaboration, an interplay between the Bridegroom and the Spirit. ‘In this breathing through the soul, which is the Holy Spirit’s visit of love, the Bridegroom, the Son of God, is Himself sublimely communicated. He sends His Spirit, as He sent His Apostles (Lk. 22.8), to act as His quartermaster, to prepare His dwelling, the bride–soul, by raising her up in delight and adorning this garden, opening its flowers, uncovering the gifts, and decorating her with the tapestry of graces and riches.’⁶⁶

The Spirit is the one, therefore, who is constantly shaping the disposition of the soul, stimulating her desire and yearning for her Lord, the Bridegroom, and preparing her to receive His love and blessings when He comes. The Spirit is the facilitator of spiritual espousal, the divine matchmaker, who enables the bride-soul and the Bridegroom to find reciprocal delight in pleasing ‘the other.’⁶⁷ It is precisely because this delicate process can only take place in the spiritual depths of the soul, unimpeded by the force of sensory desires and spiritual attacks from the devil, that the ‘secret’ element is paramount. John is clear that the spiritual espousal does not entirely eliminate the strength of the sensory part of the soul and, as he puts it, ‘a bad servant or appetite, sometimes an inordinate movement, sometimes other sensory rebellions, rise up in the lower part to impede this good.’⁶⁸ Hence, during the crucial phase of spiritual espousal, ‘the soul in this state becomes such an enemy of the lower

⁶⁴ “Que hace es invocar el Espíritu Santo, que es el que ha de [a]huyentar esta sequedad del alma y el que sustenta en ella y aumenta el amor del Esposo...porque toda su pretensión es dar contento al Amado” C. 17.2 (479/808)

⁶⁵ “Aspira en mi huerto” C. 17.5.(480/809)

⁶⁶ “En esta aspirar el Espíritu Santo por el alma, que es visitación suya en amor a ella, se comunica en alta manera el Esposo Hijo de Dios, que pore so envía su Espíritu primero (como a los apóstolos) que es su Aposentador, para que le prepare la posada del alma esposa, levantándola en deleite poniendole el huerto a gesto, abriendo sus flores, descubriendo sus dones, arrenandola de la tapicería de sus gracias y riquezas.” C. 17. 8. (481/810)

⁶⁷ Tyler, Peter, *St. John of the Cross*, London, Continuum, 2009. p. 53.

⁶⁸ “Luego se levanta en la parte sensitive un mal siervo de apetito, ahora un esclavo de desordenando movimiento, ahora otras rebeliones desta parte inferior, a impedirle este bien.” C. 18.1. (483/812).

part and its operations that she does not want God to communicate to it any of the spiritual good He gives to the higher part.”⁶⁹ This deep seated response finds powerful expression when the bride-soul declares to the Bridegroom, ‘My dear Spouse, withdraw to the innermost part of my soul... manifest your hidden wonders, alien to every mortal eye.’⁷⁰

The resolution of this division between the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul is ultimately one of the most important and significant aspects of the process of participant transformation. Its achievement is totally outside of the soul’s control and is orchestrated from within the very heart of the Trinity, and it comes as the soul moves from the state of spiritual espousal to spiritual marriage. According to John, it has at its centre the powerful and intimate bond effected between God and the soul in which ‘the soul obtains not only a very lofty purity and beauty, but also an amazing strength,’⁷¹ that then enables a totally new and divine form of integration of the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul to take place. However, in order to achieve this union it is necessary for the soul ‘to attain an adequate degree of purity, fortitude, and love.’⁷² It is here that John again brings the Holy Spirit back into the centre of the process by describing a conversational initiative made by the Holy Spirit on behalf of the soul: ‘The Holy Spirit, He Who intervenes to effect this spiritual union, desiring that the soul attain the possession of these qualities in order to merit this union, speaks to the Father and the Son in the Canticle: *What shall we do for our sister on the day of her courtship, for she is little and has no breasts? If she is a wall, let us build upon it silver bulwarks and defences; and if she is a door, let us reinforce it with cedar wood.*’⁷³

⁶⁹ Está tan hecha enemiga el alma en este estado de la parte inferior y de sus operaciones, que no querría que la comincase Dios nada de lo espiritual cuando lo cominica a la parte superior.” C. 19.1.(485/814)

⁷⁰ “Querido Esposo mio, recógete en lo más interior de mi alma, comunicándote a ella escondidamente, manifestándole tus escondidas maravillas, ajenas de todos los ojos mortales.” C. 19.3.(486/816)

⁷¹ “porque no solamente en este estado consigue el alma muy alta pureza y hermosura, sino también terrible fortaleza..” C.20/21. 1 (488/817).

⁷² “Ha menester ella astar en el punto de pureza, fortaleza y amor competente.” C. 20/21 2 (488/817)

⁷³ “El Espíritu Santo – que es el que interviene y hace esta junta espiritual – que el alma llegarse a tener estas partes para merecerlo, hablando con el Padre y con el Hijo en los Cantares, dijo: *Qué haremos a nuestra hermana en el dia en que ha de salir a vistas y a hablar?; porque es pequeñuela y no tiene crecidos los pechos. Si ella es muro, edifiquemos sobre él fuerzas y defensas plateadas, y si es puerta, guarnezámosla con tables cedrinas (Ct. 8,8-9) C. 20/21.2 (488/ 817)*

These latter images are visual representations of the effects of the Bridegroom's response. The silver bulwarks and defences are the heroic virtues of the spiritual marriage, while 'the cedar wood applies to the affections and properties of lofty love'⁷⁴ Both are effected within the soul by the Bridegroom's presence, which has been made possible by the soul's welcoming 'yes' during the time of spiritual espousal, itself brought to fruition by the gift of the Spirit. The soul thus strengthened, as 'the peaceful Bridegroom rests in the strength of these virtues without any weakness disturbing Him,'⁷⁵ is able to give herself for the consummation of the spiritual marriage, the union of love in which the Bridegroom is able to complete the purification of the soul, 'strengthening and disposing her in both sensory and spiritual parts for this state.'⁷⁶ Thus, this purification comes as a gift of love, as the rational faculties and motives, with all their appetitive drives, are brought under the control of reason by the Bridegroom. Moreover, John includes here the phantasy and the imaginative powers, the two natural powers, the irascible and the concupiscible, as well as the four passions of joy, hope, fear and sorrow, whose power and influence the Bridegroom Himself mitigates, placing them under the control of reason. Finally, 'insofar as is possible in this life, He (the Bridegroom) perfects the three faculties (memory, intellect and will) in regard to their objects.'⁷⁷

It is the task of the Holy Spirit to constantly enrich this experience of mutual love. John emphasises this by reflecting on a brief passage from Psalm 35 (vv.9-10) '*They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Your house; and You will give them to drink of the torrent of your delight, because with you is the fountain of life...*' This torrent is the Holy Spirit... These waters, since they are the intimate love of God, flow intimately into the soul and give her to

⁷⁴ "las *tables cedrinas* las affeciones y accidents de alto amor." C. 20/21. 2. (488/818)

⁷⁵ "En cuya fortaleza ha de reposar el pacífico Esposo sin que pertube alguna flaqueza" C. 20/21. 2 (488/818)

⁷⁶ "Y hacerla fuerte y disponerla, así según la parte sensitive como según la espiritual..." C 20/21. 3. (488/818)

⁷⁷ "Y pone en perfección de sus objetos a las tres potencias de el alma, memoria, entendimiento y voluntad, según se puede en esta vida." C. 20/21. 4 (489/819)

drink of this torrent of love, which, as we said, is the Spirit of her Bridegroom.⁷⁸ The Spirit thus deepens and reinforces the desire in the soul ‘to be dissolved and to be with Christ. (Phil.1. 23),⁷⁹ so that, finally, total identification can enable that full incorporation into the life of the Trinity to take place, where total transformation becomes a permanent reality.

The facilitating role of the Holy Spirit is beautifully described by John in words that highlight its truly life-giving quality, ‘By His divine breath-like spiration, the Holy Spirit elevates the soul sublimely and informs her and makes her capable of breathing in God the same spiration of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father, which is the Holy Spirit Himself, Who in the Father and the Son breathes out to her in this transformation in order to unite her to Himself.’⁸⁰ In this spiration the full identification in love with the Son comes into effect in a relationship of total intimacy with the Father: ‘The Father loves them (souls) by communicating to them the same love He communicates to the Son...through union and transformation of love.’⁸¹ Hence ‘the souls possess the same goods by participation that the Son possesses by nature. As a result they are truly gods by participation, equals and companions of God.’⁸² These passages clearly reveal that vital as the facilitating action of the Spirit is to the process of transformation, the central pivot is the growth in union with the Son, the Bridegroom. It is here that the soul is prepared for its life of ecstasy in the Triune relationship of the Trinity. It is within this intimate reciprocal experience of personhood that the true spiritual identity of the soul comes to birth. It is now necessary to take a close look at

⁷⁸ “*Embriagarse han de la grosura de tu casa, y con el torrente de tu deleite darles has a beber; porque cerca de ti está la fuente de vida (Ps.35, 9-10)...El cual torrente es el Espíritu Santo...cuyas aguas, por ser ellas amor íntimo de Dios, íntimamente infunden al alma y le dan a beber este torrente de amor que, como decimos, es el Espíritu de su Esposo.*” C. 26. 1. (511/841)

⁷⁹ “*Desea el alma ser destinada y verse con Cristo (Phil 1 23) C. 37.1. (549/883)*

⁸⁰ “*El Espíritu Santo, el cual, a manera de aspirar, con aquella su aspiración divina muy subidamente levante el alma y la informa y habilita para que ella aspire en Dios la misma aspiración de amor que el Padre aspira en el Hijo y el Hijo en el Padre, que es el mismo Espíritu Santo que a ella aspira en el Padre y el Hijo en la dicha transformación para unirla consigo.*” C. 39 3. (558/891)

⁸¹ “*Que es comunicándoles el mismo amor que al Hijo...por unidad y transformación de amor.*” C. 39.5. (559/892)

⁸² “*De donde las almas esos mismos bienes poseen participación que El por naturaleza; por lo cual verdaderamente son dioses por participación , iguales y compañeros suyos de Dios.*” C. 39.6.(559/893)

the dynamics of the love between bride and Bridegroom, in order to pierce the very heart of the soul's identity that leads to a true sense of self.

Union with the Person of Christ

In the Book Two of *The Ascent* John states clearly, 'A man makes progress only through imitation of Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one goes to the Father but through Him, as He states Himself in St. John.[Jn.14.6] Elsewhere He says: *I am the door, if any man enter by Me he shall be saved* [Jn.10.9].'⁸³ He then goes on to elucidate how Christ is 'our model and light,'⁸⁴ and reminds us that not only did he die spiritually to the sensitive part of Himself but that 'at the moment of death He was certainly annihilated in His soul, without consolation or relief....And by it He accomplished the most marvellous work of His whole life...That is, He brought about the reconciliation and union of the human race with God through grace.'⁸⁵ Complete identification with Jesus Christ, in His passion and death on the Cross, is the scriptural symbol of the process of transformation that we must undergo if we are to experience that total union with God. It is an identification with the Christological paradox that is at the heart of the Paschal Mystery in which the most powerful and intense manifestation of union with the Father was revealed 'at the moment in which He was annihilated in all things.'⁸⁶ Hence, it follows, that when we experience annihilation for God in the sensory and spiritual parts of our soul we too will experience 'the highest degree of humility',⁸⁷ which is none other the spiritual union that comes to birth between the soul and God.

⁸³ "Porque el aprovechar no se halla sino imitando a Cristo, que es el *camino y la verdad y la vida, y ninguno viene al Padre sino por él*, según él mismo dice por san Juan (14,6) que es el mismo dice por san Juan (14,6); y en otra parte dice: *Yo soy la puerta; por mi, si alguno entrare, salvarse ha.*' 2S 7,8. (124/310).

⁸⁴ "Porque él es nuestro ejemplo y luz." 2S 7.9. (124/310).

⁸⁵ "Cierto está que al punto de la muerte quedó también anihilado en el alma sin consuelo y alivio alguno...en él hizo la mayor obra que en toda su vida...que fue reconciliar y unir al género humano por gracia con Dios.' 2S 7. 11. (124/310-311)

⁸⁶ "Al tempo y punto que este Señor estuvo más anihilando en todo." *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ "La suma humildad" *Ibid.*

John, by underpinning the process of purification in the nights of sense and spirit with the individual's configuration to the personal sufferings of Christ, defines the transformation of the soul, right from the start, in terms of personal intimacy with the second person of the Trinity.⁸⁸ Secondly, he makes it clear that the pain and suffering that the soul will undergo in order to grow and develop through union with the suffering Christ, will lead to the experience of joy in the glorified and risen Christ. This will eventually blend the themes of intimacy and joy with the spousal model of union that is achieved in the bride-soul's exclamation in *The Spiritual Canticle*, 'She even proclaims how she has acted and rejoices and glories in having lost the world and herself for her Beloved,'⁸⁹ and thus the movement for change will be generated from the mutual experience of reciprocal love. In the beginning, however, purification can only take place as the individual consciously engages with the process of self-mortification, and this has to start in what John designates as the lower sensory part of the soul where the appetites and senses are enslaved to external objects and sensual experiences.

At the beginning of this chapter we saw how the process of transformation is initiated by God Himself within the depths of the soul, and this begins very simply when the soul is 'enkindled with love for Him alone.'⁹⁰ The presence of this very specific desire, which of its nature is totally exclusive, immediately opens up a world of interior conflict that challenges the person to make personal decisions that will have a direct bearing on physical and emotional experience. In his natural raw state, John exclaims that 'a man by means of his appetite feeds and pastures on worldly things that gratify his faculties.'⁹¹ However, 'all of man's attachments to creatures are pure darkness in God's sight. Clothed in these affections a person will be incapable of the enlightenment and dominating fullness of God's pure and simple light

⁸⁸ Matthew Iain, *The Impact of God, Soundings from St. John of the Cross*, London, Hodder & Stoughton 1995. pp. 131-133.

⁸⁹ "Más antes ella misma lo confiesa en esta canción, y se precia y gloria de haber dado en tales cosas y perdídose al mundo y a sí misma por su Amado." C. 29.5. (525/856)

⁹⁰ "Solo por amor dél, inflamada en su amor..." 1S 1.4. (74/259).

⁹¹ "Así el alma mediante el apetito se apacienta, y ceba de todas las cosas que según sus potencias se puerden gustar." 1S 3.1. (76/261)

unless he rejects them.’⁹² Hence, the necessity of entering into the condition which John designates as ‘night’ to signify a deprivation of the gratification of the appetites in all things. This night, as we have already noted, has an active and passive dimension, the former involving the conscious efforts of the individual to achieve mortification, the latter being the exclusive presence of God, in which ‘an individual does nothing, for God accomplishes the work in him while he acts as recipient.’⁹³ When outlining the personal initiatives that must be taken, John’s response is totally Christocentric. He enjoins the reader, ‘First have a 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.’⁹⁴ He then follows this up by urging the reader to ‘renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honour and glory of God. Do this out of love for Jesus Christ.’⁹⁵

The Need for Purification

The tasks for the person engaged in this radical programme of asceticism are spelt out clearly. The first is the recognition that any inordinate acts of the appetites ‘cause two main areas of harm within the person in whom they dwell: they deprive him of God’s Spirit; and they weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken him.’⁹⁶ Concerning the voluntary and natural appetites, John makes an important observation. It is the former that need to be purified since ‘the natural ones are little or no hindrance at all to the attainment of union, provided they do

⁹² “Porque todas las afecciones que tiene en las criaturas son adelante de Dios puras tinieblas, de las cuales estando el alma vestida no tiene capacidad para ser ilustrada y poseida de la pura y sencilla luz de Dios, si primero no las desecha de sí.” IS 4.1 (77-78/263)

⁹³ “*Pasiva* es en que el alma no hace nada, sino Dios la obra en ella, y ella se ha como paciente.” IS 13. 1. (101/288)

⁹⁴ “Lo primero, traiga un ordinario apetito de imitar a Cristo en todas sus cosas, conformándose con su vida, la cual debe considerer para saberla imitar y haberse en todas las cosas como se hubiera él [Io 13, 15]” IS 13. 3. (102/289)

⁹⁵ “cualquiera gusto que se le ofreciere a los sentidos, como no sea puramente para honra y gloria de Dios, renúncielo y quédese vacío dél por amor de Jesucristo.” IS 13.4. (102/289)

⁹⁶ “Cómo estos apetitos causan en alma dos daños principales: el uno es que le privan del espíritu de Dios, y el otro es que alma en que viven la cansan, atormentan, oscurecen, ensucian y enflaquecen.” IS 6.1 (84/270)

not receive one's consent nor pass beyond the first movements in which the rational will plays no role.⁹⁷ John, however, gives particular emphasis to habitual voluntary imperfections that are not random acts of human weakness but those patterns of behaviour that have established themselves in a person's way of life. His particular concern is with small apparently insignificant attachments, and he gives as examples attachments to 'a person, to clothing, to a book, or a cell, or to the way food is prepared, and to other trifling conversations and little satisfactions in tasting, knowing, and hearing things, etc.'⁹⁸ Using one of his famous images he points out that all of these attachments can constitute the thin thread by which a bird is prevented from flying, and small and insignificant as it might be, it is as effective as a thick cord. John's response, in all these cases, is the same, that all voluntary appetites are to be put to death, since they create an immovability that prevents the healthy growth of virtue 'that produces in a man mildness, peace, comfort, light, purity, and strength,'⁹⁹ blessings that flow from the harmony and tranquillity of the four natural passions 'joy, hope, fear and sorrow,'¹⁰⁰ but above all renders the soul incapable of responding to the spousal love that is offered in Christ.

It is within this context that John presents his famous set of maxims¹⁰¹ to be implemented by those who wish to succeed in mortifying and purifying the passions, and subsequently, at the end of the same chapter, quotes the verses that accompany his drawing which depicts the Ascent of Mount Carmel that introduces and depicts the climbing of the summit.¹⁰² It is here

⁹⁷ "Porque los apetitos naturales poco o nada impiden para la unión al alma] cuando no son consentidos, ni pasan de primeros movimientos todos aquellos en que la voluntad racional antes ni después tuvo parte." 1S 11.2.(96/282)

⁹⁸ "Asi como a persona, a vestido, a libro, celda, tal manera de comida y otras conversacioncillas y gustillos en querer gustar de las cosas, saber y oír, y otras semejantes." 1S 11.4 (97/284)

⁹⁹ "Suavidad, paz, consuelo, luz, limpieza y fortaleza," 1S 12. 5. (100/287)

¹⁰⁰ "Gozo, esperanza, temor y dolor." 1S 13. 5. (102/289)

¹⁰¹ "Procure siempre inclinarse: no a lo más facil, sino a los más dificultoso/ no la lo más sabroso, sino a lo más desabrido/ no a lo más gustoso, sino antes a lo que da menos gusto/no a lo que es descanso, sino a lo trabajoso/ no a lo que es consuelo, sino antes al desconsuelo/ no a lo más, sino a lo menos/ no a lo más alto y precioso, sino a los más bajo y despreciable/no a lo que es querer algo, sino a no querer nada/ no andar buscando lo mejor de las cosas temporales, sino lo peor/ y desear entrar en toda desnudez y vacío y pobreza por Cristo de todo cuanto hay en el mundo." 1S 13.6. (102/289)

¹⁰² St John of the Cross, trans. K. Kavanaugh O.C.D and O. Rodriguez O.C.D., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Washington DC, ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979. pp 67-

in these maxims and verses that the essential themes of purification, centring on self-denial and the voluntary acquisition of nakedness of spirit, are boldly stated as the means to control ‘the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which, as St. John says, reign in the world and give rise to all the other appetites.[1 Jn. 2:16]’¹⁰³ Only by developing and then implementing a new spirit of renunciation will the soul succeed in freeing itself from a condition of ‘utter slavery, anguish, and captivity,’¹⁰⁴ and enjoy a new life of freedom which ‘cannot abide in a heart dominated by the appetites – in a slave’s heart; it dwells in a liberated heart, which is a son’s heart,’¹⁰⁵ truths that are given an eloquent contemporary rendition in Kieran Kavanaugh’s study of St. John of the Cross.¹⁰⁶

Renunciation of the Sensitive Faculties

The emphasis here at the beginning of *The Ascent* is on the world of concrete, physical experiences which have clear quantitative results relating to a person’s disposition. Renunciation is portrayed in its tough disciplinary aspect which certainly focuses on the theme of liberation but with the emphasis clearly placed on the evils from which a person needs to be liberated. The objective reason for this new freedom, intimate union with God, is not, of course, left out of the picture at any stage, but it needs to be stated that John’s treatment of this essential theme in *The Ascent* presents us with the stark and vividly uncompromising aspect of renunciation whose main function is to destroy and eliminate what is harmful . The gradual process of disarming the powers of the senses and the liberation from the appetites, through developing a spirit of renunciation, is, for John, only the preliminary

68, *San Juan del Cruz Obras Completas*,. Madrid, Bibioteca De Autores Cristianos, 2005, pp.191-195.

¹⁰³ “*La concupiscencia de la carne, y la concupiscencia de los ojos, y la soberbia de la vida, que son las cosas que dice san Juan reinan en el mundo (1.a 2,16), de las cuales proceden los demás apetitos.*” IS 13.8.(102/290)

¹⁰⁴ “*Servidumbre y angustia y cautiverio.*” IS 4.6. (80/265)

¹⁰⁵ “*La cual no puede morar en el corazón sujeto a querer, porque éste es corazón de esclavo, sino en el libre, porque es corazón de hijo.*” IS 4.6. (80/265-266)

¹⁰⁶ Kavanaugh O.C.D., Kieran *St. John of the Cross, Doctor of Light and Love*, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997. pp 64- 76.

stage for what he considers to be the essential experience of spiritual birth in the night of faith. It is here that the rational faculties, the intellect, memory and will discover ‘their proper supernatural objects’¹⁰⁷ faith, hope and love, where the deeper, richer, dimensions of renunciation are subsequently revealed and the act of renunciation in itself becomes the vehicle by which the authentic identity of the person can emerge through union with God. At the beginning of Book Two of *The Ascent*, in the second stanza of his poem, John refers to ‘the secret ladder, disguised,’¹⁰⁸ which ‘represents faith, because all the rungs or articles of faith are secret to and hidden from both the senses and the intellect.’¹⁰⁹ It is through faith that the person is led into that dimension of existence that cannot be defined through the varied categories of human experience.¹¹⁰ It is the world of the divine in which the spirit alone can respond, but in such a way that the lower sensory part of the soul, which includes the rational faculties, is finally transformed and is no longer a source of regression or enslavement. It is, in fact, totally at the service of the unifying power of God’s love.

Renunciation of the Spiritual Faculties – Understanding, Memory and Will

Faith is, therefore, consequently linked with the human search for knowledge, but a knowledge that is beyond the natural powers of receptivity,¹¹¹ and this effects a ‘supernatural transformation’ which ‘demands a darkening of the soul and an elevation above all the sensory and rational parts of nature.’¹¹² Once again, as in the depotentiating of the senses, an individual’s initial response must be a conscious renunciation of the instinct to grasp, as John

¹⁰⁷ Como propios objetos supernaturales” 2S 6.1. (119/305)

¹⁰⁸ “La secreta escala, disfrazada” 2S 1. (105/293)

¹⁰⁹ “Porque todos los grados y artículos que ella tiene son secretos y escondidos a todo sentido y entendimiento.” 2S 1.1.(107/293)

¹¹⁰ “ Que nos dice cosas que nunca vimos ni entendimos en sí ni en sus semejanzas, pues no la tienen;” 2S 3.3. (110/296-297)

¹¹¹ Wojtyła, Karol, (Pope John Paul II), ‘The Question of Faith in St. John of the Cross’, in ed. J. Sullivan OCD, *Carmelite Studies Contemporary Psychology and Carmel*, Washington DC, Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1982. p. 231.

¹¹² “La transformación sobrenatural, claro está que ha de oscurecerse y transponerse a todo lo que contiene su natural, que es sensitivo y racional” 2S 4.2. (112/298)

puts it, at knowledge, both ‘earthly and heavenly,’¹¹³ that is rooted in the intellect. The person is then commanded to empty himself in his affect, will, and desire with ‘all his might to attain what in this life is unknowable and unimaginable.’¹¹⁴ It is here, in this instruction, that John expands the purifying process by moving beyond the injunction to renounce what comes from natural perception, both sensory and rational, and introduces the whole question of desire that must counter-balance an attitude of renunciation. In order for this desire to find its true fulfilment in God, the other two faculties, the will and the memory, must likewise be freed from the tyranny of possessiveness and enslavement to their respective objects. As John puts it, ‘one has to follow this method of disencumbering, emptying, and depriving the faculties of their natural rights and operations to make room for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural.’¹¹⁵

This inflow takes the form, in the case of the purified memory, of the gift of hope and as John states, ‘Our aim is union with God in the memory; the object of hope is something unpossessed; the less other objects are possessed, the more capacity and ability there is to hope for this one object, and consequently the more hope.’¹¹⁶ Knowledge in the memory is acquired naturally through the corporal senses and ‘through supernatural apprehensions’¹¹⁷ forming images and distinct ideas to which a person becomes attached and seeks gratification. However, as John makes clear, ‘in the measure that a person dispossesses his memory of forms and objects, which are not God, he will fix it upon God and preserve it empty, in the hope that God will fill it.’¹¹⁸

¹¹³ “Ahora sea de arriba, ahora de abajo” 2S 4.2. (112/298).

¹¹⁴ “Ha de desear el alma con todo deseo venire a aquello que en esta vida no puede saber ni caer en su corazón” 2S 4.6. (114/300).

¹¹⁵ “Conviene ir por este estilo desembarazando y vaciando y haciendo negar a las potencias su jurisdicción natural y operaciones, para que se dé lugar a que sean infundidas e ilustradas de lo sobrenatural.” 3S 2.2. (215/403)

¹¹⁶ “Pues lo que pretendemos es que el alma se una con Dios según la memoria en esperanza, y que lo que se espera es de lo que no se posee, y que cuanto menos se posee de otras cosas más capacidad hay y más habilidad para esperar lo que se esperar. 3S 15.1. (236/424)

¹¹⁷ “Noticias sobrenaturales” 3S 7. 1. (224/413)

¹¹⁸ “Cuanto más el alma desaposeionare la memoria de formas y cosas memorables que no son Dios tanto más pondrá la memoria en Dios y más vacía la tendrá para esperar dél el lleno de su memoria.” 3S 15. 1 (236/424).

The same principle of renunciation applies most powerfully when we consider the third faculty, that of the will. For John, the strength of the soul comprises the faculties, passions, and appetites, as we have seen, and most specifically, ‘All this strength is ruled by the will.’¹¹⁹ He focuses specifically on the four feelings, or passions, of joy, hope, sorrow, and fear and when these passions operate autonomously, outside of a relationship with God, then a person ‘very easily finds joy in what deserves no rejoicing, and hope in what brings it no profit, and sorrow over what should perhaps cause suffering, and fear where there is no reason for fear.’¹²⁰ Furthermore, he refers to these passions as ‘brother-like’¹²¹ and tells us ‘you should keep in mind that wherever one of these passions goes the entire soul (the will and the other faculties) will also go, and they will live as prisoners of this passion.’¹²² In Book Three of *The Ascent* John specifically concentrates on the experience of joy that has become enthralled to all types of goods, sensory, temporal and spiritual. He continually repeats the need for detachment and a growth in an awareness of the spiritual damage that these inflict on the soul.

Reference has already been made to the sensory and appetitive world of desire that links in closeley with John’s exposition of the temporal objects that can elicit unhealthy passionate attachment. When dealing with the concept of joy, in relation to the purifying of the will, he extends the search for joy to include moral and spiritual gifts where ‘spiritual things serve only for the senses,’ and, therefore, ‘leave the spirit empty.’¹²³ Personal moral qualities, supernatural experiences in prayer, pastoral gifts, such as preaching, the use of religious objects and attachments to places of prayer and religious ceremonies, can all reduce the will to search for interior and exterior gratification. As John repeats again and again, ‘one will

¹¹⁹ “Todo lo cual es gobernado por la voluntad.” 3S 16. 2. (237/426)

¹²⁰ “ Porque entices con mucha facilidad se goza de cosas que no merecen gozo, y espera lo que no aprovecha, y se duele de lo que, por ventura, se había de gozar, y teme donde no hay que temer.” 3S 16.4.(238/426-427)

¹²¹ “Tan aunadas y tan hermanadas” 3S 16. 5.(238/427)

¹²² “Que dondequiera que fuere una pasión de éstas irá también toda el alma y la voluntad y las demás potencias, y vivirán todas cautivas en la tal pasión.” 3S 6 (238-239/427)

¹²³ “Servirse de las cosas espirituales sólo para el sentido, dejando al espíritu vacío.” 3S 33.1 (272/ 462)

never reach inward recollection of spirit, which consists in passing beyond all these sensory delights, making the soul forget them, entering into the living temple of spiritual recollection, and acquiring solid virtue.’¹²⁴ In John’s exposition of the will’s impulsive tendency to search for joyful satisfaction in all things we find the deepest potential for unitive alignment with God. He tells us that ‘the entire matter of reaching union with God consists in the purging of the will of its appetites and feelings, so that from a human and lowly will it may be changed into the divine will, made identical with the will of God.’¹²⁵ This is so since it is the will, above all, that orchestrates the life and contents of the faculties as it continually focuses a person’s ability to make choices, whether in relation to the search for knowledge or maintaining deep attachment, to the contents of the memory. Furthermore, its power does not just derive from its purely rational function but embraces the world of sense and appetite, ‘la parte sensitiva’, in a way that reinforces the relationship between the faculties themselves. This enables the process of transformation of both sense and spirit to come to its completion in a union with God in which the whole person is integrated.

The Spiritual Process of Purification – Transition from Meditation to Contemplation

As we have seen, John makes it clear, when introducing the concept of the ‘night of faith’ that, ‘passing beyond all that is naturally and spiritually intelligible or comprehensible, a person ought to desire with all his might to attain what in this life is unknowable and unimaginable.’¹²⁶ A fundamental transition has to be made that begins with renunciation and then moves into a mode of being that thrives on an attitude of personal dispossession of the spirit of attachment. It is only possible when a person ‘is courageous enough to pass beyond

¹²⁴ “Nunca llegará al recogimiento interior del espíritu, que consiste en pasar de todo eso, y hacer olvidar al alma todos estos sabores sensibles, y entrar en lo vivo del recogimiento del alma, y adquirir las virtudes con fuerza.” 3S 41.1 (284/474)

¹²⁵ “Porque todo el negocio para venire a unión de Dios está en purgar la voluntad de sus afecciones y apetitos, por que así de voluntad humana y baja venga a ser voluntad divina, hecha una misma cosa con la voluntad de Dios.” 3S 16.3 (238/426)

¹²⁶ “Ha de desear el alma con todo deseo venir a aquello que en esta vida no puede saber ni caer en su corazón.” 2S 4.6 (114/300)

the interior and exterior limits of his nature...enter within supernatural bounds – bounds that have no mode, yet in substance possess all modes.’¹²⁷ We must now ask where this drive, this courage, can be found and then sustained if personal renunciation is to discover its creative focus? Those beginning the spiritual journey, as we have seen, are encouraged to study the life of Christ in order ‘to imitate Him and behave in all events as He would.’¹²⁸ In other words, meditation is the means by which a person begins to engage dynamically with the person of Jesus and the life of the Spirit. John later defines meditation more specifically in Book Two of *The Ascent* where he sees it as an activity that combines the two interior bodily senses, the imagination and the phantasy: ‘Meditation is the work of these two faculties, since it is a discursive act built upon forms, figures, and images, imagined and fashioned by these senses.’¹²⁹ It is through meditation specifically on the life and death of Christ that John locates the source of inspiration for the renunciation that is necessary in both the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul.¹³⁰

However, just as renunciation is only a purificatory preparation for the transformation of desire that will later be effected in loving union with God, so meditation is only a remote means for disposing the spirit for that secret personal communication of God that comes through the gift of contemplation. In the words of John, ‘These considerations, forms and methods of meditation are necessary to beginners that the soul may be enamored and fed through the senses...They are suitable as the remote means to union with God, which beginners must ordinarily use for the attainment of their goal and the abode of spiritual repose.’¹³¹ However, the moment comes when God ‘wishes to lead the soul to more spiritual,

¹²⁷ “Porque, teniendo ánimo para pasar de su limitado natural, interior y exteriormente entra en límite sobrenatural que no tiene modo alguno, teniendo en sustancia todos los modos.” 2S 4.5. (114/300)

¹²⁸ “ la cual debe considerar para saberla imitar y haberse en todas las cosas como se hubiera él (Io 13,15)” 1S 13. 3 (102/289)

¹²⁹ “ Y así, a estas dos potencias pertenece la meditación, que es acto discursivo por medio de imágenes, formas, y figuras, fabricadas e imaginadas por los dichos sentidos” 2S 12.3 (137/324).

¹³⁰ Kavanaugh, *John of the Cross*, p. 101.

¹³¹ “Aunque a los principiantes son necesarias estas consideraciones y formas y modos de meditaciones par ir enamorando y cebando el alma por el sentido.....y así le sirven de medios remotos para unirse con Dios – por los cuales ordinariamente han de pasar las almas para llegar al término y estancia del reposo espiritual.” 2S 12. 5 (138/324)

interior, and invisible graces by removing the gratification derived from discursive meditation.’¹³² He moves the individual to become ‘engrossed in one general, pure act,’¹³³ where he remains alone ‘in loving awareness of God without particular considerations, in interior peace and quiet and repose, and without acts and exercises (at least discursive, those in which ones progresses from point to point) of the intellect, memory and will; and that he prefers to remain in the general loving awareness and knowledge we mentioned, without any particular knowledge or understanding.’¹³⁴

Contemplation

It is within this context that John starts to develop his understanding of the initiative that God begins to take in response to an individual’s efforts to renounce the drive for sensory and spiritual gratification. He presents God’s outreach in love as a response that is subtly tuned to the character and rhythm of human nature itself. As John points out, God must do this ‘with order, gently, and according to the mode of the soul...(He) must begin by touching the low state and extreme of the senses...And from there He must gradually bring the soul after its own manner to the other end, spiritual wisdom which is incomprehensible to the senses.’¹³⁵ Furthermore, John makes it clear that this is a slow process that is totally geared to the personal reality of each individual, ‘a person only obtains this little by little after its own manner, and by means of the senses by which he has always been attached.’¹³⁶ It establishes the complementary movement of personal dispossession of the search for gratification, working in tandem with God’s intervention of love, hence, ‘In the measure that a man

¹³² “Queríéndolos Dios recoger [a bienes] más espirituales interiores y invisibles, quitándoles ya el gusto y jugo de la meditación discursiva.” 2S 12.6. (138/325)

¹³³ “Porque se pone ella más en un acto general y puro,” 2S 12.6. (138/325)

¹³⁴ “Si el alma gusta de estarse a solas con atención amorosa a Dios sin particular consideración, en paz interior y quietud y descnaso, y sin actos y ejercicios de las potencias, memoria, entendimiento y voluntad – a los menos discursivos, que es ir de uno en otro - ; sino sólo con la atención y noticia general amorosa que decimos, sin particular inteligencia y sin entender sobre qué.” 2S 13. 4 (141/327)

¹³⁵ “ Halo de hacer ordenadamente y suavemente y al modo de la misma alma...ha de comenzar y tocar desde el bajo y fin extremo de los sentidos del alma, para así irla llevando al modo de ella hasta el otro fin de su sabiduría espiritual, que no cae en sentido.” (2S 17.3 (156/342)

¹³⁶ “No puede llegar el alma sino muy poco a poco, a su modo, por el sentido, a que siempre ha estado asida.” 2S 17.5 (157/344)

approaches spirit in his dealings with God, he divests himself and empties himself of the ways of the senses, of discursive and imaginative meditation. When he has completely attained communion with God he will be voided of all sensory apprehensions concerning God.¹³⁷

Finally, it is worth relating here one of John's most touching images in which he describes the transition from meditation to contemplation in terms of the weaning of a child from the mother's breast. He says, 'I reply in regard to discursive meditation in which an individual begins his quest for God, that it is true that he must not turn away from the breast of the senses for his nourishment until he arrives at the time and season suitable for so doing – that is, when God brings the soul to a more spiritual converse, to contemplation.'¹³⁸ So just as the natural weaning process of the child does not sever the intimacy with its mother but prepares it for a more truly personal and objective relationship, so it is with contemplation. It is the mode of spiritual attentiveness where, 'the divine calm and peace with a wondrous sublime knowledge of God, enveloped in divine love, will be infused into the soul.'¹³⁹

This movement, as we have stated many times before, is, in John's words, 'sheer grace,'¹⁴⁰ a gift that highlights the real truth of the human condition, a powerlessness to effect radical change and growth that will bring ultimate fulfilment. John gives this powerful expression when he says, 'A man is incapable of reaching this sublime knowledge through any comparison or imagining of his own, because it transcends what is naturally attainable. Thus God effects in the soul what it is incapable of acquiring.'¹⁴¹ Renunciation of the power of the

¹³⁷ "Y así, a la medida que va llegando más al espíritu acerca del trato con Dios, se va más desnudando y vaciando de las vías del sentido, que son las del discurso y meditación imaginaria. De donde, cuando llegare perfectamente al trato con Dios de espíritu, necesariamente ha de haber evacuado todo lo que acerca de Dios podía caer en sentido." 2S 17.5 (157/344)

¹³⁸ "Respondo que, acerca de la meditación y discurso natural en que comienza el alma a buscar a Dios, es verdad que no ha de dejar el pecho del sentido par air [se] sustentada hasta que llegue a sazón y tiempo que puede dejarle; que es cuando Dios pone al alma en trato más espiritual, que es la contemplación." 2S17.7 (158/345)

¹³⁹ "Se infundirá en su alma el divino sosiego y paz con admirables y subidas noticias de Dios, envueltas en divino amor." 2S 15.5 (149/336)

¹⁴⁰ "Oh dichosa ventura!" 1 N 1.1 Canciones Del Alma (295/483)

¹⁴¹ " Y a estas altas noticias no puede el alma llegar por alguna comparación ni imaginación suya, porque son sobre todo eso; y así, sin la habilidad del alma las obra Dios en ella." 2S 26.8 (195/383)

senses and appetites creates the space where the gift of God Himself can begin to satisfy the complex interplay of desires that are rooted in the senses and the spirit. The powerlessness that is revealed in contemplation is God's ultimate opportunity to exercise His power in a way that finally offers the soul the key to its authentic existence, the gift of self-surrender. John sees the exercise of this gift, operating in all its fullness, only taking place once all the resistances, rooted in the senses and the spirit, have been completely purified. Even when a person, through maximum effort of renunciation, has succeeded in disciplining sensory desires and appetites to the point where they appear to be virtually under control, until the complete purification of the spirit has been achieved, through divine grace, the person will never be totally free of sensory desire. This is rooted, as we have seen, in John's understanding of the person as 'solo suppositum' where the worlds of sense and spirit intercommunicate and nurture their respective functions. There must, therefore, come the time when the entire combination of sense and spirit has to undergo an even deeper experience of purification that can finally bring to birth the unity of the person in God. This process begins through the passive purgation of the senses which accompanies the transition that takes place in prayer from meditative discourse to contemplation.

We have already touched upon the experience of powerlessness which accompanies the prayer of contemplation where God 'binds the interior faculties and leaves no support in the intellect, nor satisfaction in the will, nor remembrance in the memory.'¹⁴² What also begins to appear, which can devastate a person who previously found great satisfaction in prayer, is a complete lack of any consolation and as John points out in Book One of *The Dark Night* 'these souls do not get satisfaction or consolation from the things of God, they do not get any out of creatures either.'¹⁴³ Particularly painful anxiety and fear consequently arise and centre on the person's inability to sense the presence of God, which had hitherto been unquestioned,

¹⁴² "Porque por eso la ata las potencias interiores, no dejándole arrimo en el entendimiento, ni jugo en la voluntad, ni discurso en la memoria." 1N 9.7 (315/505)

¹⁴³ "La primera es si, así como no halla gusto ni consuelo en las cosas de Dios, tampoco le halla en alguna de las cosas criadas." 1N 9.2 (313/503)

causing depression and disillusionment in the soul. John here evokes the image of the wilderness, the desert solitude of the children of Israel ‘when God began giving them the heavenly food which contained in itself all savors, and as is there mentioned, changed to whatever taste each one hungered after [Wis. 16:20,21]¹⁴⁴ This food, ‘dark and dry to senses.....hidden from the very one who receives it, imparts to the soul, together with the dryness and emptiness it produces in the senses, an inclination to remain alone and in quietude.’¹⁴⁵ And this is the point, that in the midst of the purificatory process, a new form of nourishment that empowers the soul to surrender, is given which bears spiritual fruit that is ‘quiet, delicate, solitary, satisfying and peaceful.’¹⁴⁶ Thus a new mode of being is acquired, through which, ‘softened and humbled by aridities and hardships and by other temptations and turmoils in which God exercises the soul in the course of this night, a person becomes meek toward God and himself and also towards his neighbour.’¹⁴⁷

In this way a person begins to acquire a new self-knowledge and knowledge of God, admittedly not ‘as plentiful and abundant as that of the other night of spirit,’¹⁴⁸ but a knowledge that brings humility and a deeper love for others. Personal vices, especially those of anger, envy and sloth¹⁴⁹, are purged and a person ‘purged of his sensory affections and appetites, he obtains liberty of spirit in which he acquires the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit.’¹⁵⁰ This all takes place while ‘God frequently communicates to the soul, when it least expects, spiritual sweetness, a very pure love, and a spiritual knowledge which is sometimes

¹⁴⁴ “Que luego que en el desierto les comenzó Dios a dar *el manjar del cielo*, que de suyo tenía todos los sobores y, como allí se dice, *se convertía al sabor que cada uno quería* (Sap 16, 20-21)” 1N 9.5 (314/504)

¹⁴⁵ “El cual manjar es principio de oscura y seca contemplación para el sentido.” 1N 9.6 (315/504)

¹⁴⁶ “La cual, como [es] espiritual y delicada, hace obra quieta, delicada, solitaria, satisfactoria y pacífica” 1N 9.7. (315/505)

¹⁴⁷ “Ablandada y humillada por estas sequedades y dificultades y otras tentaciones y trabajos en que a vueltas desta noche Dios la ejercita, se hace mansa para con Dios y para consigo, y también para con el prójimo” 1N 13. 7 (326/516)

¹⁴⁸ “Aunque no con la plenitud y abundancia que en la otra del espíritu.” 1N 12.6 (323/514)

¹⁴⁹ “Que son ira, envidia y acidia” 1N 13.7 (326/516)

¹⁵⁰ “Finalmente, por cuanto aquí el alma se purga de las afecciones y apetitos sensitivos, consigue libertad de espíritu, en que se van granjeando los doce frutos del Espíritu Santo.” 1N 13.11 (326/517)

most delicate.¹⁵¹ This, therefore constitutes ‘the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, in which God pastures and refreshes the soul without any of its own discursive meditation or active help’¹⁵²

Divine Union – Purification in the Night of the Spirit

The purification of the senses that God Himself effects in this mode of contemplative receptivity, is purely a preparation for what John considers as the ultimate and decisive initiative of God that will bring the soul into total union with Himself. It is the bestowal of the divine gift of love that penetrates to the very depths of the spirit, ‘the fire of love which, like material fire acting on wood, penetrates it in this night of painful contemplation.’¹⁵³ Its purifying power is indeed similar to what the soul has already experienced in the purgation of the senses, but ‘it is as different from it in another way as is the soul from the body or the spiritual part from the sensory part.’¹⁵⁴ The soul feels the impact of this love as a wound yet, at the same time, as an impassioning energy that enkindles in the soul an equally painful desire, and it is in this night of the spirit that the person begins to confront the immensity of love that God has for the individual. In order to respond to this love it is, therefore, necessary for God to gather ‘together all the strength, faculties and appetites of the soul, spiritual and sensory alike, that the energy and power of this whole harmonious composite may be employed in this love’¹⁵⁵ It is the recollecting, as John puts it, of these powers by God, freeing

¹⁵¹ “Cuando menos piensa, comunica Dios al alma suavidad espiritual y amor muy puro y noticias espirituales a veces muy delicadas.” 1N 13. 10 (326/517)

¹⁵² “Con que Dios de suyo anda apacentando [y] reficionando al alma, sin discurso ni ayuda activa de la misma alma.” 1N 14.1 (327/518)

¹⁵³ “El fuego de amor...que, a manera de el fuego material en el madero, se ve prendiendo en alma en esta noche de contemplación penosa.” 2N 11. 1 (352/546)

¹⁵⁴ “Es en alguna manera tan diferente de aquella esta que ahora dice, como lo es el alma del cuerpo o la parte espiritual de la sensitiva.” 2N 11. 1 (352/546)

¹⁵⁵ “Dios tiene recogidas todas las fuerzas, potencias y apetitos del alma, así espirituales como sensitivas, para que toda esta armonía emplee sus fuerzas y vitud en este amor.” 2N 11.4. (352/547)

them from their natural objects and centring them on Himself, that then enables the soul to ‘love God intensely with all its strength and all its sensory and spiritual appetites.’¹⁵⁶

Moreover, this loving fire of God’s love that penetrates the soul ‘produces two principal effects in the soul: it prepares the soul for the union with God through love by both purging and illumining it,’¹⁵⁷ which initially causes intense inner suffering. According to John, ‘the soul, because of its impurity, suffers immensely at the time this divine light truly assails it. When this pure light strikes in order to expel all impurity, a person feels so unclean and wretched that it seems God is against him and that he is against God.’¹⁵⁸ Feelings of intense unworthiness, fears of ‘being chastised and rejected by Him,’¹⁵⁹ and an awareness in the soul of ‘its own intimate poverty and misery,’¹⁶⁰ cause deep spiritual anguish and ‘it feels terrible annihilation in its very substance and extreme poverty as though it were approaching its end.’¹⁶¹

John points out, however, that this suffering has an intermittent rhythm as there are intervals ‘in which this dark contemplation ceases to assail the soul in a purgative mode and shines upon it illuminatively and lovingly...This illumination is for the soul a sign of the health the purgation is producing within it and a foretaste of the abundance for which it hopes.’¹⁶² John is continually at pains to describe the deep complexity of this experience that seems to engulf the soul as the piercing love of God gradually breaks through all defences, both purifying and

¹⁵⁶ “En que el alma [ha]de amar con gran fuerza [de toda las fuerzas] y apetitos espirituales y sensitivos del alma.” 2N 11. 3 (353/547)

¹⁵⁷ “Hace dos principales efectos en el alma, porque la dispone *purgándola* y *iluminándola* para la unión de amor de Dios.” 2N 5.1 (335/527)

¹⁵⁸ “Y esta pens en el alma a causa de su impureza es inmensa cuando de veras es embestida de esta divina luz, porque, embistiendo en el alma esta luz pura a fin de expeler la impureza del alma, siéntese el alma tan impura y miserable, que le parece estar Dios contra ella, y que está hecha contraria a Dios.” 2N 5.5 (336/528)

¹⁵⁹ “Y castigada y arrojada e [in]digna de El.” 2N 6.2.(338/530)

¹⁶⁰ “Que hay en ella de intima pobreza y miseria.” 2N 6.4 (338/531)

¹⁶¹ “Siente [en esto] este grande deshacimiento en la misma sustancia del alma con extremada pobreza, en que está como acabando.” 2N 6.6 (339/532)

¹⁶² “Puesto que en estos medios hay interpolaciones de alivios, en que por dipensación de Dios, dejando esta contemplación oscura de embestir en forma y modo purgativo, embiste iluminativa y amorosamente...lo cual es al alma indicio de la salud que va en ella obrando la dicha purgación y prenuncio de la abundancia que espera.’ 2N 7. 4 (342/534)

consoling, darkening and illumining, while all the time deepening the actual union of the soul with Himself. It is truly a rebirth for ‘a man suffers all these afflictive purgations of spirit that he may be reborn in the life of the spirit by means of this divine inflow, and through these sufferings the spirit of salvation is brought forth...’¹⁶³

The symbolism of birth and rebirth enables us to relate this purification to our main theme, that of growth in a personal sense of identity. Just as in physical birth the interior world of the psyche, with its capacity for anguish, fear and darkness can ultimately cause more disturbance than the actual physical process of birth, the same is true for the soul. As the ebb and flow of the purifying and consoling process takes place, so each time the purification is resumed it is more intense and powerful as it becomes more interior. Thus, ‘the fire of love returns to act more interiorly...The suffering of the soul becomes more intimate, subtle and spirtual in proportion to the inwardness, subtlety, spirituality and deep-rootedness of the imperfections which are removed.’¹⁶⁴ However, just as in the natural birth trauma, the awareness of the presence of the mother carries the baby through the physical and psychological pain enabling it to embrace its new life, so too with the soul’s experience of the presence of God.

John, having described the way in which the soul is engulfed on the one hand with spiritual darkness and yet is inflamed and stimulated by the wound of God’s love on the other, states clearly, ‘Nonetheless, in the midst of these dark and loving afflictions, the soul feels the presence of someone and an interior strength which so fortifies and accompanies it that when this weight of anxious darkness passes, it often feels alone, empty and weak.’¹⁶⁵ This, in so many ways, is the experience of the infant as it undergoes the intial terror of being born, of

¹⁶³ “Todas estas aflictivas purgaciones del espíritu, para re[e]ngendrarlo en vida de espíritu por medio desta divina influencia, las padece el alma y con estos dolores viene a parir el espíritu de salud” 2N 9.6 (348/541)

¹⁶⁴ “ Vuelve el fuego de amor a herir en lo que está por consumir y purifica más adentro; lo cual es más intimo y sutil y spirtual el padecer de el alma cuanto le va adelgazando las más intimas y delgadas y espirituales imperfecciones, y más arraigadas en lo [de] más adentro.” 2N 10.7 (351/545)

¹⁶⁵ “Pero en medio de estas penas oscuras y amorosas siente el alma cierta compañía y fuerza en su interior, que la acompaña y esfuerza tanto, que, si se le acaba este peso de apretada tiniebla, muchas veces se siente sola, vacía, y floja.” 2N 11.7. (354/548)

being separated from the security of the womb, and yet experiences for the first time the visible physical presence of the mother and her love. The new born baby can then be overwhelmed by the sense of abandonment and fear when it is even for a short time separated from the mother. However, just as in reality, the mother, under normal circumstances, has not in any way truly abandoned the child, neither has God. His love continues to nurture the spirit by enkindling within the soul that deep longing for Himself that gradually grows in intensity.

The Response of Love in the Soul – Surrender to the Beloved

John employs a vivid image of the soul at this juncture: ‘The wounded soul rises up at night, in the purgative darkness, according to the affections of the will; as the lioness or she-bear that goes in search of her cubs when they are taken away and cannot be found, it anxiously and forcibly goes out in search of its God.’¹⁶⁶ His explanation for this drive that surges through the soul is rooted in the very nature of love itself. Love ‘imparts a force’ to a person since, as John puts it, ‘it is the nature of love to seek to be united, joined, equaled, and assimilated to the loved object in order to be perfected in the good of love.’¹⁶⁷ The freedom that comes from the purgative night that ‘puts the sensory and spiritual appetites to sleep, deadens them and deprives them of the ability to find pleasure in anything,’¹⁶⁸ enables this empowering love to carry a person into a whole new place of being where he is ‘led into a remarkably deep and vast wilderness, unattainable by any human creature, into an immense, unbounded desert, the more delightful, savorous, and loving, the deeper, vaster’ and more solitary it is.’¹⁶⁹ This empowering love is none other than the ‘secret wisdom’¹⁷⁰ by which the

¹⁶⁶ “Porque de noche se levanta (esto es , en estas tinieblas purgativas) según las afecciones de la voluntad, y con las ansias y fuerzas que la leona u osa va a buscar sus cachorros cuando se los han quitado y no los halla anda esta herida alama a buscar a su Dios.” 2N 13.8 (359/554)

¹⁶⁷ “Y la propiedad del amor sea quererse unir y juntar y igualar y asimilar a la cosa amada para perfeccionarse en el bien de amor.” 2N 13. 9 (350/554)

¹⁶⁸ “Porque los apetitos sensitivos y espituales están dormidos y amortiguados, sin poder gustar de cosa ni divina ni humana” 2N 16.1 (363/558)

¹⁶⁹ “Que le parece que la colocan en una profundísima y anchísima soledad donde no puede llegar alguna humana criatura, como un inmenso desierto que por ninguna parte tiene fin, tanto más deleitoso, sabroso y amoroso, cuanto más profundo, ancho y solo.” 2N 18.2 (370/565)

¹⁷⁰ “Sabiduría *secreta*” 2N 17. 8 (371/566)

person can discover ‘the perfections of union with God, toward which one must advance humanly by not knowing and divinely by ignorance, since they are not humanly knowable.’¹⁷¹ It is through this participation in the gift of divine contemplation that the person is then able to withstand its profound denudation of spirit, the effects of sensory and spiritual annihilation in the faculties, while at the same time enabling this overwhelming desire to search for the fullness of love. It signals a qualitative change in the very existence of the person as the whole search for human fulfillment is transported into the world of the spirit.

Towards the end of Book Two of *The Dark Night*, John describes the experience of ‘dark’ or ‘secret’ contemplation as a ladder, a symbol that he understands as capturing the twofold movement of ‘ascent’ and ‘descent’ in respect of communication between God and the soul, which ‘simultaneously exalt and humble the soul.’¹⁷² He sees the ten steps of the ladder representing ten consecutive stages of the ascent to God representing the journey of faith, whereby, as Cummins puts it, ‘the steps of love here are not a list of the degrees of charity, but a description of the more elevated regions which the soul climbs in order to embrace God.’¹⁷³ It is on the fourth step that he sees a significant change taking place in the soul’s experience of love. Having reflected in the first three stages, on the different effects of purification in the soul, giving them a strong penitential flavour, it is in the fourth step that a significant new movement takes place. In the drive to be totally identified with the love of God that is enkindling the soul, the person reaches the stage where the primary desire is no longer to seek consolation for oneself, as John puts it, ‘either in God or in anything else; neither does it desire or ask favours of God...All its care is directed toward how it might give some pleasure to God and render Him some service.’¹⁷⁴ In other words, there is the appearance of a new movement of love in return for love, the reciprocal exchange where the

¹⁷¹ “Las perfecciones de la unión de Dios, las cuales como son cosas no sabidas humanamente, hase de caminar a ellas humanamente no sabiendo y divinamente ignorando.” 2N 17. 7 (370/566)

¹⁷² “Que de una vez levantan y humillan al alma” 2N 18.2 (371/567)

¹⁷³. Cummins, *Freedom to Rejoice, Understanding St. John of the Cross*. p.155.

¹⁷⁴ “En ninguna manera aquí el alma busca su consuelo ni gusto ni en Dios...y queda todo su cuidado en cómo podrá dar algún gusto a Dios y servirle “ 2N 19. 4 (375/571)

pleasure and the needs of the beloved become the paramount concern. It is the birth of a move ‘that pursues God in the spirit of suffering for His sake,’¹⁷⁵ and, as John points out, elicits a swift loving gesture that gives spiritual delight, from Christ the Word, Who John begins to clearly designate as the soul’s Beloved.¹⁷⁶

The following three steps outline the increase of desire that takes hold of the person as the soul is ‘almost completely purified,’¹⁷⁷ and results in what John describes as ‘an ardent boldness’¹⁷⁸ that is a direct result of the love that God now imparts to the soul. He states that it ‘impels the soul to lay hold of the Beloved without letting Him go,’¹⁷⁹ and finally enables the soul to burn gently in the life of God, enwrapped by the ‘gentle and delightful ardor by reason of the perfect soul’s union with God produced by the Holy Spirit.’¹⁸⁰ This union with the Beloved, therefore, enables the movement of total self-surrender to find its completion. The experience of its own poverty and nakedness of spirit is no longer the cause for deep suffering, but of joyful communion. John has made it clear, right from the start that, ‘The sensory and spiritual parts of the soul, in order to go out to the divine union of love, must first be reformed, put in order, and pacified.’¹⁸¹ This purifying and re-integrating process does indeed initially plunge the soul into a state of powerlessness which confronts it with the anguish of the abyss, but this is only a preparation. This poverty is the means by which the soul is able to ‘receive permanently the divine union, which is the divine espousal between the soul and the Son of God.’¹⁸² Furthermore, this poverty and darkness is God’s opportunity to empower the soul to love and discover that its total fulfillment is found in being loved in return.

¹⁷⁵ “Como aquí el alma con tan verdadero amor se anda siempre tras Dios con espíritu de padecer por El.” *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ “Porque el inmenso amor del Verbo Cristo no puede sufrir penas de su amante sin acudirle.” *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ “Por estar aquí el alma poco menos que puificada del todo.” 2N 20 1 (376/572)

¹⁷⁸ “*Atrever al[alma] con vehemencia.*” 2N 20 2 (376/572)

¹⁷⁹ “*Asir y apretar sin soltar.*” 2N 20 3 (377/573)

¹⁸⁰ “Ardor suave y deleitoso les causa el Espíritu Santo por razon de la unión que tienen con Dios.” 2N 20. 4 (377/573)

¹⁸¹ “Para poder ella salir a la divina unión de amor, conviene que estén primero reformadas, y ordenadas y quietas acerca de lo sensitivo y espiritual.” 2N 24. 2 (387/583)

¹⁸² “Recibir la dicha unión, que es el divino desposorio entre el alma y el Hijo de Dios.” 2N 24. 3 (387/584)

Self Knowledge Through Loving Union in the Trinity

This is the only basis for John for real self-knowledge, when a person, totally transformed by grace, is able to experience their genuine identity. In the words of E.W. Trueman Dicken: ‘It is therefore only by sanctifying grace that the human spirit, when detached from all it can regard as specific knowledge, can truly ‘possess itself’ and have direct experiential knowledge of itself. Such knowledge must be wholly supernatural, and of the same order as that direct experiential knowledge of God of which St. John of the Cross speaks as a ‘ray of darkness’.’¹⁸³ This is echoed by John in *The Living Flame* when he says, ‘the intellect of this soul is God’s intellect; its will is God’s will; its memory is the memory of God; and its delight is God’s delight.’¹⁸⁴ Awareness of selfhood has, therefore, finally been transposed out of the natural psychological context, which operates solely through the senses and the rational faculties, and placed in the realm of the spirit. The soul then, being ‘somehow God through participation,’¹⁸⁵ enjoys the knowledge of itself which God has, and this is the result of the mutual indwelling that characterises perfect union.

As we have seen, in *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night*, John outlines the purification of sense and spirit, which opens up an infinite capacity for loving union with God in the substance of the soul, in a clear and systematic manner. The denudation of sense and spirit and the opening up of the abyss of desire, where ‘deep calls upon deep’, facilitates the birth of a new mode of existence whereby the individual shares, in a unitive way, the very life of the Creator. If we once more observe how John places this purificatory process within the context of the growth in a spousal relationship of love, as described in *The Spiritual Canticle*, it will be possible to specify even more clearly the awareness of self-identity that flows from divine union. The

¹⁸³ Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love, A Study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross*. p.367.

¹⁸⁴ “El entendimiento de esta alma es entendimiento de Dios, y voluntad suya es voluntad de Dios, y su memoria eterna de Dios, y su deleite deleite de Dios.” L 2.34. (608/966)

¹⁸⁵ “En cierta manera es ella Dios por participación” L 3.78. (641/1023)

mutuality of love and desire between the soul and God, the bride and the Bridegroom, that becomes possible when sense and spirit are purified through God's initiative of love, is beautifully described through the imagery of the wounded stag that John employs from the Song of Songs, The bridegroom, having compared Himself to a stag,¹⁸⁶ says to His beloved, 'Return to me, My bride, because if you go about like the stag wounded with love for Me, I too, like the stag, will come to you wounded by your wound.'¹⁸⁷ Thus, having established that crucial level of mutual identity, John tells us that when the wounded stag appears he brings with him 'the breeze, that spirit of love...flight of contemplation,'¹⁸⁸ which the soul recognises to be the very spiration of the Holy Spirit. This, therefore, means that the soul, through its intimate links with Jesus Christ, the wounded stag, and breathing in the breath of the Holy Spirit, is now drawn into the intimate exchange of love that exists in the life of the Trinity. As has already been noted, the facilitating role of the Holy Spirit enables the Bridegroom (Jesus Christ) to 'perfect the three faculties (memory, intellect, and will) in regard to their objects,'¹⁸⁹ and this reinforces the desire in the soul 'to be dissolved and to be with Christ [Phil. 1:23],' in order, as John puts it, 'to see Him face to face and thoroughly understand the profound and eternal mysteries of His Incarnation'¹⁹⁰

Regarding the former, the objects of the three faculties, 'The deep caverns of feeling,'¹⁹¹ are, of course, the Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, 'Who will come and dwell within anyone who loves Him [Jn. 14:23].'¹⁹² John specifically relates the three spiritual faculties to a particular Person, the 'intellect with the wisdom of the Son...will in the Holy Spirit' and the

¹⁸⁶ "Compárase el Esposo al ciervo," C. 13. 9 (460/788)

¹⁸⁷ "Vuelvete, esposa mía, a mí, que, si llagada vas de amor de mí... que soy como el ciervo" *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ "El *aire*...espíritu de amor...vuelo de contemplación." C 13.11 (461/788)

¹⁸⁹ "Y pone en perfección de sus objetos a las tres potencias de el alma, memoria, entendimiento y voluntad." C 20/21 4 (489/819)

¹⁹⁰ "Ser *destada y verse con Cristo* (Phil 1, 23) es por verle allá cara a cara y entender allí de raíz las profundas vías y misterios eternos de su Encarnación." C 37. 1 (549/883)

¹⁹¹ "Las profundas cavernas del sentido" L 3. 18. (617/982)

¹⁹² "Vendría la Santísima Trinidad en él, y moraría de asiento en él (Io 14,23)" L 1 15 (585/925)

memory ‘powerfully and mightily in the delightful embrace of the Father’s sweetness.’¹⁹³ It is the inception of the spiritual marriage in which a more lasting experience of union ushers in what Howells describes as ‘The most significant change, which brings a new clarity to the trinitarian image in the spiritual faculties.’¹⁹⁴ It is an intellectual vision which John presents as an unexpected light in the soul like a new dawn following the former darkness: ‘She [the soul] very appropriately calls this divine light “the rising dawn,” which means the morning. Just as the rise of morning dispels the darkness of night and unveils the light of day, so this spirit, quieted and put to rest in God, is elevated from the natural knowledge to the morning light of the supernatural knowledge of God.’¹⁹⁵ This ‘morning light’ activates a new ability in the soul, which John refers to as ‘the feeling of the soul’¹⁹⁶, whereby ‘a person tastes the wisdom and love and communication of God.’¹⁹⁷ In other words, quoting Howells once more, ‘When the soul enters into knowledge within the Trinity, therefore, it gains this relational sharing of knowledge with the Trinity.’¹⁹⁸ In the light of our main theme, which centres on the development of self identity, we must now ask, what is the significance of this new trinitarian development and all the new levels of the person that are subsequently opened up?

The knowledge within the Trinity, that John is talking about, is, as we have already noted, of a totally different order from the knowledge that is acquired through the normal channels of the senses. It is not ‘object’ knowing in the conventional sense, but rather a dynamic experience of heightened awareness that comes alive through relational interaction between the Persons of the Trinity.¹⁹⁹ It is an infused knowledge that comes to birth through the soul’s union with the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of *The Spiritual*

¹⁹³ “Es ilustrándole el entendimiento divinamente en la sabiduría de el Hijo, y deleitándole la voluntad en el Espíritu Santo, y absorbiéndola el Padre poderosa y fuertemente en al abrazo abisal de su dulzura.” L 1 15 (585/925)

¹⁹⁴ . Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Mystical Knowing and Selfhood*. p.52.

¹⁹⁵ “Y llama bien propriamente aquí a esta luz divina *levantes de la aurora*, que quiere decir la mañana, porque , así como los levantes de la mañana despiden la oscuridad de la noche y descubren la luz del día, así este espíritu sosegado y quieto en Dios es levantado de las tinieblas del conocimiento natural a la *luz matutinal* del concimiento sobrenatural de Dios.” C 14/15 23 (471/799)

¹⁹⁶ “*El sentido de al alma*” L 3. 69 (637/1016)

¹⁹⁷ “Gusta la sabiduría y amor y comunicación de Dios.” *Ibid*.

¹⁹⁸ Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila , Mystical Knowing and Selfhood* p.54.

¹⁹⁹ Frost, *St. John of the Cross* p. 384.

Canticle, the wounded stag, and it is here, deep within this spousal intimacy, that John leads us to the most illuminating dimension of self-knowledge and a true awareness of identity within the person. In *The Living Flame*, the soul exclaims, ‘How gentle and loving...is Your awakening, O Word, Spouse, in the center and depth of my soul, which is its pure and intimate substance, in which secretly and silently, as its only lord, You dwell alone, not only as in Your house, nor only as in Your bed, but also as in my own heart, intimately and closely united to it.’²⁰⁰ John then goes on to make it clear that this awakening is ‘one of the most elevated and most beneficial.’²⁰¹ Why is this?

Howells in his study points out that the centre and depth of the soul ‘is another word for the single supposit’²⁰² (solo suppositum) that we referred to at the beginning of the chapter. We saw how the individual, although a sensory and spiritual unit, nonetheless experienced internal conflict and real disharmony between body and spirit. John, in *The Living Flame*, makes it clear that once the Bridegroom has entered the very deepest centre of the soul a new relationship between sense and spirit comes to birth, in which ‘the soul knows creatures through God and not God through creatures.’²⁰³ This signals a reversal of the unredeemed form of knowing where sensual knowledge was in continual conflict with the spiritual life of the person, and the subsequent integration of the sensory and spiritual dynamics of knowing whereby ‘these habits [sensory means of knowing] are perfected by the more perfect habit of supernatural knowledge infused in her.’²⁰⁴ In other words, the sensory and spiritual forms of knowing remain separate but enjoy a harmony in their operation, since the spiritual enjoyment will, in no way, destroy the life of the senses but integrate and perfect them. Correspondence,

²⁰⁰ “ Oh Verbo Esposo! En el centro y fondo de mi alma, que es la pura e íntima sustancia de ella, en que secreta y calladamente solo, como solo Señor de ella, moras, no sólo en tu casa, ni sólo como en tu mismo lecho, sino también como en mi propio seno, íntima y estrechamente unido” L 4. 3. (643/1028)

²⁰¹ “De los más levantados y que mayor bien hace al alma.” L 4. 4 (644/1029)

²⁰² Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Mystical Knowing and Selfhood*, p.55.

²⁰³ “Conocer por Dios las criaturas, y no por las criaturas a Dios.” L 4.5 (645/1030)

²⁰⁴ “Se le perfeccionan con el más perfecto hábito, que es le de la ciencia sobrenatural que se le ha infundido.” C 26.16 (515/846)

mutuality, and cooperation become the underlying characteristics of the soul's interaction with God that now informs the lived experience of the person as the 'solo suppositum.'

The Birth of Authentic Self Identity

This clarification of the effects of the Bridegroom's presence, deep within the soul, enables John to make probably the most important connection regarding the person's full realisation of their identity. Referring, in *The Spiritual Canticle*, to Christ as the rock, John explains, 'The high caverns of this rock are the sublime, exalted, and deep mysteries of God's wisdom in Christ, in the hypostatic union of the human nature with the divine Word, and in the corresponding union of man with God.'²⁰⁵ The hypostatic union embodies, physically and spiritually, 'the knowledge of the mysteries of the Incarnation, in which is contained the highest and most savory wisdom of all His works.'²⁰⁶ This wisdom is infinite since, referring to Christ Himself, 'He is like an abundant mine with many recesses of treasure, so that however deep men go they never reach the end or bottom, but rather in every recess find new veins with new riches everywhere.'²⁰⁷

The soul's true identity, therefore, finds its energy and rhythm in the hypostatic union of the Son's dynamic intimacy with the Father, which is eternally generated through the loving activity of the Holy Spirit, 'the breeze,'²⁰⁸ that envelops the individual in contemplation. Self-identity cannot, therefore, be confined to what is rationally identifiable within the person.

²⁰⁵ "Las *subidas cavernas* de esta *piedra* son los subidos y altos y profundos misterios de sabiduría de Dios que hay en Cristo sobre la unión hipostática de la naturaleza humana con el Verbo divino, y en la correspondencia que hay a ésta de la unión de los hombres en Dios." C. 37.3 (550/884)

²⁰⁶ "Según la noticia de los misterios de la Encarnación, como más alta sabrosa sabiduría de todas sus obras." C. 37.2 (550/883)

²⁰⁷ "Porque es como una abundante mina con muchos senos de tesoros, que, por más que ahonden, nunca les hallan fin ni término, antes van en cada seno hallando nuevas venas de nuevas riquezas acá y allá." C 37. 4 (551/884)

²⁰⁸ "Porque el Espíritu Santo, que es amor, también se compara en la divina Escritura al *aire*, porque es aspirado de el Padre y del Hijo." C 13. 11 (461/788)

It is a knowledge that resonates in the will, intellect and memory, but is rooted in the inter-trinitarian experience of mutual surrender. It constitutes an understanding of self that embraces a dynamic concept of self-awareness generated through the experience of spousal love in the spiritual marriage. Its dynamism and energy flow from the limitless and eternal nature of the spousal union, which gives a freedom to the evolution of self-knowledge, within the person, that is not hampered by a fear of physical death.

Now although the awareness of self-identity does not flow from the knowledge of the senses, they are not redundant and completely left out of the picture. Through the hypostatic union with the Second Person of the Trinity the soul participates in the mystery of the Incarnation,²⁰⁹ where ‘the power to do the works in the grace of God,’²¹⁰ in union with Jesus Christ, bring to fruition the exhortation of John found in the first book of *The Ascent*: ‘First have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with His.’²¹¹ The quality of love that Jesus demonstrated in His relationships with others and the final act of self-surrender on the Cross, were integral to the revelation of His self identity, bringing together the human and divine, His life of sense and spirit.

For the individual, who responds to the wound of love and the touch of God in the substance of the soul, the fullest realisation of self identity will likewise be achieved through the act of self-surrender that embraces both the human and divine components of the soul, expressed in relationships with others and the Trinity. In the end self identity is inseparable from the experience of loving union where ‘A reciprocal love is thus actually formed between God and the soul...in which the goods of both (the divine essence which each possesses freely by

²⁰⁹ “Comunicála principalmente dulces misterios de su Encarnación.” C 23 1 (499/829)

²¹⁰ “Es hacer obras en gracia de Dios.” C 32. 8 (536/869)

²¹¹ “Lo primero, traiga un ordinario apetito de imitar a Cristo en todas sus cosas, conformándose con su vida.” 1S 13.3 (102/289)

reason of the voluntary surrender between them) are possessed by both together.²¹² It is this that enables the soul to recognise the supernatural dimension of self-knowledge as she proclaims the truth in the memorable words of *The Spiritual Canticle*: that ‘we may attain to the vision of ourselves in Your Beauty in eternal life.’²¹³ It is in this vision that bride and Bridegroom, sense and spirit, what is temporal and what is spiritual, reveal the dynamism and meaning of the ‘solo suppositum’ and in the process highlight its true identity.

²¹² “Y así entre Dios y el alma está actualmente formado un amor recíproco...en que los bienes de entrambos, que son la divina esencia, poseyéndolos cada uno libremente por razón de la entrega voluntaria del uno al otro, los poseen entrambos juntos.” L 3.79 (641/1024)

²¹³ “Lleguemos hasta vernos en *tu hermosura* en la vida eterna.” C 36. 5 (547/880)

Chapter Three

The Thematic Development in Winnicott that Relates to Authentic Growth in Self Identity

Part One – The Preliminary Growth process

The Environment-Individual Set-Up

We will now turn our attention to Winnicott and examine the theme of self identity contained within his developmental theories relating to the whole maturational process of personal growth. As we saw in John, the actual concept of self identity does not receive a specific definition in Winnicott's writings. However, as we now come to examine how an operational sense of self develops within the person, as self-knowledge and a capacity for relationship with others is acquired through the individual's personal experience of love and the commitment of others, my intention is to demonstrate how Winnicott's concept of a True authentic Self, as a living and continually evolving reality, can provide us with a unique model which can then be brought into dialogue with John's understanding of the self. As a clear understanding of this concept in Winnicott's thinking can only be reached through an exploration of a developmental network of interrelated themes, this chapter will focus exclusively on his theories without specific references to John's thinking.¹ This will form the

¹ In this chapter I have chosen to highlight in an uncritical manner what I consider to be the important aspects of Winnicott's theories concerning the development of self identity that can provide an opening for dialogue with John's understanding of spiritual growth. In this regard I have followed the positive application of Winnicott's ideas to understanding religion that can be found in: Pruyser Paul, *Between Belief and Unbelief*, New York, Harper & Row, 1974, Meissner William, *Life and Faith, Psychological Perspectives on Religious Experience*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1987, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, 'The Psychology of Religious Experience', in *Communio*, 1977, pp.36-59, Rizzuto Anna Maria, *The Birth of the Living God*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1979, Callaghan Brendan, 'Do Teddy Bears Make Good Spiritual Directors? Ignatius Loyola meets Donald Winnicott', in *The Way*, 42/3, 2003, pp.19-32, Hood Ralph, "Mysticism, Reality, Illusion and the Freudian Critique of Religion", in *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Vol. 2 no. 3, 1992, pp.141-159. More critical objective accounts of Winnicott's theories, that examine his ideas within the wider psychological perspective can be found in Greenberg Jay and Mitchell Stephen, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1983, Flax Jane, *Disputed Subjects: Essays on*

essential content of the two succeeding chapters where an analogous dialogue will be initiated.

Winnicott's psychoanalytic position, rooted initially in Freud, and, subsequently, influenced, as we have seen, by Klein and Object Relations Theory, was also powerfully influenced by his work as a paediatrician and his considerable clinical experience of the mother/child relationship, which brought a unique element to his psychotherapeutic approach. This is reflected in his paper, 'Anxiety Associated with Insecurity', in which Winnicott refers to a meeting he attended of the British Psycho-Analytical Society ten years previously at which he made his famous remark 'There is no such thing as a baby.' He then goes on to explain: 'I was alarmed to hear myself utter these words and tried to justify myself by pointing out that if you show me a baby you certainly show me also someone caring for the baby or at least a pram with someone's eyes and ears glued to it. One sees a nursing couple.'² In other words, what precedes a clearly defined relationship between two separate individuals, that Winnicott describes as an object relationship, is the living context where the mother and infant comprise what Winnicott refers to as an 'environment-individual set up'³. He understands this not in any static sense but as potentially dynamic, a living context in which exists a sense of being whose centre of gravity resides, as Winnicott puts it, 'in the total set-up' of the mother/child union. With what he describes as good-enough childcare techniques, holding and

Psychoanalysis, Politics and Philosophy, New York, Routledge, 1993, Buswell Jill, 'A Bear in the Attic', in *Journal of Psycho-Social Studies*, Vol.5, Issue 2, 2011, Jacobs Michael, *Winnicott*, London, Sage Publications, 1995, Summers Frank, *Object Relations Theories and Psychopathology*, Hillsdale N.J., Analytic Press, 1994. Reflecting on Winnicott's theoretical vision in relation to religion through a more critical lens, of particular importance are: Beit-Hallahmi Benjamin, *Prolegomena to the Psychological Study of Religion*, Lewisburg PA, Bucknell University Press, 1978, 'Between Religious Psychology and the Psychology of Religion', in, *Object Relations Theory and Religion*, edited Finn Mark and Gartner John Westport CT, Praeger, 1992, Jones James W., *Toward a Relational Psychoanalysis of Religion*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Religion: Transference and Transcendence*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991, and 'Playing and Believing, The Uses of D.W. Winnicott in the Psychology of Religion', in *Religion, Society, and Psychoanalysis – Readings in Contemporary Theory*, eds. Jacobs Janet and Capps Donald, Boulder CO, Westview Press, 1997. Finally, in Rodman Robert F., *Winnicott: Life and Work*, Cambridge, Da Capo Press Ltd, 2003, Winnicott's theories are examined creatively within the context his biographical history and particular personality traits, offering us a compelling portrait of both the man and the psychological practitioner, working together.

² Winnicott, Donald W. *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, London Karnac Books, 1992.p.99

³ *Ibid.*, p.99.

management,⁴ the centre of gravity gradually moves into the developing infant, in its experience of holding sensations and growing awareness of the external world.

It is thus with these practical expressions of maternal care and the impact of the localisation of the centre of gravity within the body of the child, that the infant 'is able to have a personal existence and so begins to build up what might be called a *'continuity of being'*. On the basis of this *continuity of being* the inherited potential gradually develops into an individual infant.'⁵ For Winnicott the centrality of the place of the mother and her maternal care, expressed in her 'holding' function and the psychologically facilitating effect of her personal commitment that the child experiences, cannot be overemphasised. Her holding creates an environment-individual set-up that enables the central or True Self of the personality, 'the inherited potential', that contains the capacity for growth and development, to experience the opportunities it needs for this to take place and so enable the uniqueness of the person to emerge. Hence in Winnicott's words, 'The central self could be said to be the inherited potential which is experiencing a *continuity of being* and acquiring in its own way and at its own speed a personal psychic reality and a personal body scheme.'⁶

State of Unintegration

We will now examine in closer detail all the different aspects of this growth process as it unfolds, not only in relation to the dynamics of the maternal relationship, but also the physical, psychological and emotional evolution of the developing infant. Our starting point will be to highlight a particular state of quiescence that the infant is able to experience, facilitated by the physical and emotional holding of the mother, that we will see has foundational effects for future growth. Winnicott uses the term 'unintegration' to describe a

⁴ Winnicott, Donald W. *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, London, Karnac Books, 1990, pp. 43-45.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

particular state in which the infant feels no pressure coming from the mother's holding to form any active response to her care. It precedes the very earliest attempt of the infant to organise experience that initiates the first movements of the ego. It is the place of ultimate security, of peace, and of total relaxation, which, as Winnicott says, 'for an infant means not feeling a need to integrate, the mother's ego-supportive function being taken for granted.'⁷ The ability to relax in this way enables the infant to surrender to the holding environment with absolute trust. In a memorable passage, Winnicott gives us this fascinating description that clarifies for us, in a very simple and immediate way, what 'unintegration' means for him: 'In the quiet moments there is no line between inner or outer but just lots of things separated out, sky, seen through trees, something to do with the mother's eyes all going in and out, wandering around. There is a lack of need for integration...It is something to do with being restful, relaxed, and feeling one with people and things when no excitement is around.'⁸

It is this that he implements the real process of personal development as it allows the *continuity of being* to be strengthened, and the infant to be prepared to enter the next phase of growth. It also facilitates another very important aspect of the infant's overall primary experience, that of being able to experience solitude and total inner stillness, which we will return to later when we examine more closely the way the intricate dynamics of the mother/infant relationship evolve through instinctive interaction. This, as we will now see, can only be able to take place through what Winnicott defines as 'primary maternal pre-occupation,'⁹ one of his key concepts that demonstrates most clearly his originality and his insight into childcare. It is important for the sake of understanding the growth process to take a more detailed look at this concept.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁸ Winnicott, Donald W., 'Primary Introduction to External Reality', in Ray Shepherd, Jennifer Johns, & Helen Taylor Robinson (eds), *Thinking About Children*, London, Karnac, 1966. p. 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

The Mother – Living Context for the Growth of the Infant

As we have so far observed the environment-individual set-up creates the living context where the baby's sense of being is first activated as the centre of gravity locates itself in the body of the child. This allows for the uniqueness of the person, contained in what Winnicott describes as 'the inherited potential', to begin its life-long process of growth. It is essential that this living context is capable of providing a secret protected space where the baby can hide in total confidence. It must also be a place where the baby can experience its utter dependence in a state of unintegration, a kind of ongoing condition of trustful surrender. Now according to Winnicott, all this is only made possible through a process of psychological transformation in the mother that gathers momentum throughout the nine-month pregnancy, reaching a crescendo in the final weeks after the baby's birth. In his paper, 'The Ordinary Devoted Mother', Winnicott says this: 'I suggest ...that ordinarily the woman enters into a phase, a phase from which she ordinarily recovers in the weeks and months after the baby's birth, in which to a large extent she is the baby and the baby is her. There is nothing mystical about this. After all she was a baby once, and she has in her memories of being a baby; she also has memories of being cared for.'¹⁰

There is, therefore, a merger of mother and baby based on identification that has its roots in the unconscious life of the mother. As Winnicott points out, 'We notice in the expectant mother an increasing identification with the infant. The infant links up with the idea of an "internal object" in the mother...The baby has other meanings for the mother in the unconscious fantasy, but the predominant feature may be a willingness as well as an ability to drain interest from her own self on to the baby.'¹¹ There is, therefore, a two-way contradictory movement that takes place. On the one hand the mother and baby separate physically, but at

¹⁰ Winnicott, Donald. W. 'The Babies and Their Mothers', in *Winnicott on the Child*, Cambridge MA, Perseus Publishing, 2002. p.13

¹¹ Winnicott, Donald. W., 'The Relationship of a Mother to her Baby at the Beginning', in *The Family and Individual Development*, London, Karnac Books, 1996. p. 15.

the same time a totally new unification takes place on the psychological level through the creation of the environment-individual set-up.¹² This new merger literally comes to birth through the birth trauma itself. The mother and baby have to surrender to the process, of giving birth. There is a mutual, enormously significant, experience of powerlessness: 'Among features typical of true birth is the feeling of being in the grip of something external, so that one is helpless. There is a very clear relation here between what the baby experiences and what the mother experiences in being confined, as it is called.'¹³ The mother, in other words, has to be able to resign herself to a process almost exactly comparable to the infant's experience at the same time.

This resignation to what Jung would refer to as an archetypal process results in a very special interior state in the mother. It is a state of heightened sensitivity that Winnicott unexpectedly compares with an illness: 'This organised state (that would be an illness were it not for the fact of the pregnancy) could be compared with a withdrawn state, or a disassociated state, or a fugue, or even a disturbance at a deeper level such as a schizoid episode in which some aspect of the personality takes over.'¹⁴ This condition of unconscious availability that places the mother emotionally within the world of the infant provides the setting, as Winnicott puts it, 'for the infant's constitution to begin to make itself evident, for the developmental tendencies to start to unfold, and for the infant to experience spontaneous movement and become the owner of the sensations that are appropriate to this early phase of life.'¹⁵ It allows for the stage of absolute dependence to be the foundation for future stability and gives impetus to 'the inherited potential' as it develops from the ongoing sense of being that enables the infant 'to build a personal ego, to ride instincts, and to meet with all the inherent difficulties in life. All

¹² Abram, Jan., *The Language of Winnicott*, London, Karnac Books, 2007. p. 230.

¹³ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 184.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 303

this feels real to the infant who becomes able to have a self that can eventually even afford to sacrifice spontaneity, even to die.’¹⁶

The primary maternal pre-occupation of the mother is, therefore, a vital component in the formation of a true sense of identity. Unlike Freud, who understood the ego as emerging from the id, Winnicott believed, like Melanie Klein, that the ego, which is responsible for gathering information (both external and internal) and organising it, is present right from the beginning of life: ‘In the very early stages of the development of a human child ego functioning needs to be taken as a concept that is inseparable from that of the existence of the infant as a person.’¹⁷ During the infant’s phase of absolute dependence it is the mother’s state of primary maternal pre-occupation, therefore, that enables her to be the necessary ego-support for her infant, through her adaptation to its needs. It is her ego that enfolds the infant’s ego as it slowly comes alive and is energised through its own sense of being. This, as we will now see, takes place when a fundamental internal relationship is formed within the infant that becomes the personal vehicle for negotiating the demands of inner and outer reality, which is at the heart of mature psychological growth.

The Formation of Psycho-Somatic Unity

Winnicott was never in doubt about the importance of a psycho-somatic unity forming the basis of healthy ego development. As he says, ‘gradually the psyche and the soma aspects of the growing person become involved in a process of mutual interrelation. The interrelating of the psyche with the soma constitutes an early phase of individual development.’¹⁸ The transition from absolute to relative dependence initiates the process and this, as we will see in more detail later, is triggered through an experience of disillusionment by the mother, within the infant, as a de-intensification of her maternal care takes place through the natural process

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 304

¹⁷ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p.56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.244.

of relational re-definition. It is through the intellectual stimulus, that comes from the disillusionment with the maternal environment, that a very primitive psychological awareness of its body and physical movements is activated in the infant. Winnicott describes this awareness as ‘an imaginative elaboration of somatic parts, feelings and functions’¹⁹, on the part of the psyche. This then begins the process of cohesion between the psyche and the soma, which allows the *continuity of being* the opportunity to develop in a way that energises the ego. This body-mind collaborative relationship is vital if the ego is to begin its task of collating experiences and information, strengthening its growing identity and preparing for the advent of object relationship. The importance of the physical dimension of the ego is brought out clearly by Winnicott: ‘The ego is based on a body ego, but it is only when all goes well that the person of the baby starts to be linked with the body and the body-functions, with the skin as the limiting membrane. I have used the term personalisation to describe the process.’²⁰ A growing psychosomatic unity will then generate a raw energy or primitive aggression that must underpin the growing sense of the personal self. It is an energy that will have to be shaped and moulded first through interaction with the mother and then with objects that form the infant’s basic environment, so that authentic relatedness and self-realisation can begin to come together in a creative way.

The Place of Aggression in the Development of Relationship

In his paper, ‘Primitive Emotional Development’, Winnicott has this to say, ‘There are three processes which seem to me to start very early: (1) integration (2) personalisation (3) following these, the appreciation of time and space and other properties of reality – in short, realisation.’²¹ Integration, in this context, he regards as taking place from the very earliest moments of extra-uterine life: ‘The tendency to integrate is helped by two sets of experience : the technique of infant care whereby an infant is kept warm, handled and bathed, rocked and

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁰ Winnicott *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 59.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

named, and also the acute instinctual experiences which tend to gather the personality together from within. Many infants are well on the way toward integration during certain periods of the first twenty-four hours of life.’²² In other words, integration defines the movement of life that comes alive with the immediacy of maternal care. This provides the basis for *continuity of being*, the living context for ‘the inherited potential’ that, as we have seen, contains the tendency for growth and development. This can only be realised as the next phase, that of personalisation, is activated and the capacity for objective relationships with others begins to grow in the individual. However, this cannot begin to take place, according to Winnicott, unless a sense of ‘concern’ for the object or the ‘other’ has somehow been acquired, and it is this that brings us to one of Winnicott’s pivotal theories, what he describes as the existence of a primitive ruthless aggression which is present in the baby long before it is able to feel concern. However, the latter is only possible if the baby is allowed to feel and express this ruthlessness. As Winnicott states, ‘We have to postulate an early ruthless object relationship, mostly showing in play, and he (the baby) needs his mother because only she can be expected to tolerate his ruthless relation to her even in play...without this play with her he can only hide a ruthless self.’²³

This is necessary since, according to Winnicott, the infant has a root capacity for destruction, ‘And the important thing to note about this instinctual aggressiveness is that although it soon becomes something that can be mobilised in the service of hate, it is originally a part of appetitive or some other form of instinctual love. It is something that increases during excitement and the exercise of it is highly pleasurable.’²⁴ This is a most important passage since, in his treatment of primary aggression, Winnicott uses different terms, such as instinctual aggressiveness, primary appetitive love, theoretical greed and mouth-love. He understands that all these aspects of aggression in the new-born baby can be seen by an observer (or felt by the mother) as cruel, hurting and dangerous. However, for the infant ‘they

²² *Ibid.*, p. 150

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²⁴ Winnicott Donald. W. *Deprivation and Delinquency*, Hove, Brunner-Routledge, 2000. pp.87-88.

are so by chance. The infant's aim is gratification, peace of mind and body.²⁵ In other words, they are not intended to be destructive. Indeed earliest aggression is part of the appetitive drive that focuses on oral satisfaction and well-being that comes through the mother. It relates to the instinct for survival and the need to connect with the primary maternal environment, and particularly, the source of physical nourishment, the breast. This is why the state of merger at the time of absolute dependence is crucial. It is vital for the baby to experience, at an unconscious level, the sense that the mother accepts and receives the appetitive aggression, as one who, herself, was a baby. It is the birth of an experience of mutuality 'which is the beginning of communication between two people; this (in the baby) is a developmental achievement, one that is dependent on the baby's inherited processes leading towards emotional growth, and likewise is dependent on the mother and her attitude and her capacity to make real what the baby is ready to reach out for, to discover, to create.'²⁶

This allows for several vital developmental processes to take place within the baby. The biologically driven instinct, which causes the baby to be ruthless, without intention, creates intense anxiety. Winnicott understands this anxiety in two ways. The first relates to the baby's perception that the mother is not the same after the baby is fed at her breast as she was before 'the cannibalistic attack', 'If we like we can use words to describe what the infant feels and say: there is a hole where previously there was a full body of richness.'²⁷ The second is related to the infant's growing awareness of what is taking place within himself. The very act of feeding and the experience of appetitive aggression confront the infant, for the first time, with the subjective and objective aspects of relationship. The mother is both the context of total dependency and at the same time the object of instinctual (biologically driven) love. It is the experiential beginning of what Winnicott refers to as the Me and Not-Me dimensions of relationship, and engenders a new level of awareness: 'this infant, after the feed, besides

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²⁶ Winnicott D. W. 'Mother-Infant Experience of Mutuality', in C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd & M. Davis (eds), *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, London Karnac Books, 1989, p.255.

²⁷ Winnicott *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 268.

being apprehensive about the imagined hole in the body of the mother is also very much caught up in the struggle within the self, a struggle between what is felt to be good, that is to say self-supportive, and what is felt to be bad, that is to say persecutory to the self..²⁸

Guilt That Leads to Concern

The infant who experiences the mother's survival from its appetitive onslaughts, at the same time responding to gestures of love and reverie, can slowly begin to feel guilt and from its centre a new desire for reparation and restitution can grow. As Winnicott says, 'Guilt starts through the bringing together of the two mothers, and of quiet and excited love, and of love and hate, and this feeling gradually grows to be a healthy and normal source of activity in relationships.'²⁹ In his article, 'the Development of the Capacity for Concern'³⁰, Winnicott brings together many of these important themes. He recognises that the word 'concern' is used to cover in a positive way a phenomenon that is covered in a negative way by the word 'guilt'. He points out that a sense of guilt is a form of anxiety that is linked with the concept of ambivalence. This, for Winnicott implies a degree of integration in the individual ego that allows for the retention of the good-object image in the psyche with the simultaneous presence of angry destructive feelings towards it. The advent of concern implies 'further integration and further growth and relates in a positive way to the individual's sense of responsibility.'³¹ This is clear since concern refers to a positive attitude in the individual who has learnt to process the experience of ambivalence in a way that enables him to care for an 'other', thereby accepting responsibility for the relationship that comes to birth. It is a fundamental aspect of this integrative process that enables real progress to take place. As Winnicott says, 'Integration is a word that comes in here because if one can conceive of a fully integrated person then that person takes full responsibility for all feelings and ideas that

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.269.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.270.

³⁰ Winnicott, 'The Development of the Capacity for Concern', in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, pp.73-82.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.75.

belong to being alive.’³² Developing a capacity for concern maintains the sense of *continuity of being* in the face of potentially destructive forces.

Fusion – Eros and Aggression

Reference has already been made to Winnicott’s concept of the two mothers, the environment mother and the object mother³³, and their coming together in the infant’s mind as the capacity for concern grows out of the sense of guilt. A further developmental implication needs to be highlighted before examining more closely the dynamism of object relationships and the consequence that this has for defining the sense of self. Winnicott, in the same article that deals with the capacity for concern, refers to the stage of ‘fusion’ that is directly related to the integration of the inner maternal responses. Fusion he describes as ‘the achievement of emotional development in which the baby experiences erotic and aggressive drives towards the same object at the same time.’³⁴ Concerning the erotic impulses, there is both, as he puts it, ‘satisfaction-seeking and object-making’, and on the aggressive side ‘there is a complex of anger employing muscle erotism, and of hate, which invokes the retention of a good-object-*imago* for comparison.’³⁵

Clearly, Winnicott sees these instincts rooted, on the one hand, in the sensuous co-existence of the baby in the unintegrated state with the mother in her primary maternal pre-occupation, and on the other, in the ruthless primary aggression that is so clearly manifest in the drive for appetitive satisfaction. This fusion, for Winnicott, not only facilitates concern arising out of guilt, but also signals the beginning of a new capacity to relate to objects, as he puts it, ‘that are less and less subjective phenomena and more and more perceived as ‘not-me elements. He (the baby) has begun to establish a self, a unit that is both physically contained in the baby’s

³² Winnicott *Deprivation and Delinquency*, p. 137.

³³ Winnicott . *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 76

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p 74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.74.

skin and that is psychologically integrated.’³⁶ Through this coming together of internal psychological processes and physical experience, Winnicott sees a psychosomatic unity forming and it is this that enables the baby to experience the ‘personal richness that resides in the self.’³⁷

Through the repeated experience of the mother surviving the effects of the baby’s primary aggression, the baby gradually establishes, within its psyche, the sequential response of guilt that leads to concern, that in turn seeks reparation. This will come in the form of a smile or a response to the mother that re-establishes the sense of the holding environment. The mother’s task, therefore, is not only to survive the attack that expresses the infant’s ‘ruthless’ need of her, but she must also be there to receive the ‘spontaneous gesture,’³⁸ – the reconciliatory gift gesture. Survival of the mother is of vital significance for the whole developmental process as the infant begins to engage with objects outside the immediate subjective world of the maternal environment. She prepares her baby for the arduous task of meeting the external world, establishing a relationship with it and arriving at the point where the baby can actually use it in a constructive way. It is here that the notion of healthy impingement finally comes into its own.

Now, in this fusion of the erotic and aggressive impulses taking place within the context of the maternal relationship, Winnicott understands that the aggression that is fused under these circumstances relates specifically to instinctual gratification, the primary or ruthless instinct for immediate gratification. There is, however, a form of aggression ‘that is left out of the pattern of fusion, and available for pure motility use’³⁹, and this motility potential ‘needs to find opposition.’⁴⁰ It is this motility potential that is the source of aggressive impulses that, in a sense, need engagement, hence Winnicott’s statement: ‘the aggressive impulses do not give

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.75

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.75

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.145.

³⁹ Winnicott *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, Karnac Books, p.212.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.212.

any satisfactory experience unless there is opposition. The opposition must come from the environment, from the Not-Me which gradually comes to be distinguished from the Me...in normal development opposition from outside brings along the development of the aggressive impulse.’⁴¹ Opposition that comes from external objects is crucial if this surplus aggression is to be harnessed in a way that opens a creative response in the infant to the real world and its unexpected demands.

As we have seen, the fusion of the erotic with the aggressive instincts is vital, even when it is partial, as it allows for the experience of guilt which, in turn, stimulates the need to find a new form of response which is creative, and in his paper, ‘Aggression Guilt and Reparation’ Winnicott makes this very clear. With the toleration of destructive impulses, Winnicott, in the same paper, goes on to point out that there is a further development within the psyche that has particular relevance to external object relating. The constructive aim that he has referred to is an aspect of the guilt which comes from a toleration of one’s destructive impulses in primitive loving. He then introduces this other aspect: ‘Toleration of one’s destructive impulses results in a new thing, the capacity to enjoy ideas, even with destruction in them, and the bodily excitements that belong to them, or that they belong to. This development gives elbow room for the experience of concern which is the basis for everything constructive.’⁴² It is clear that when Winnicott refers to the value of the destructive instincts he is referring specifically to the destruction that goes on in unconscious fantasy, as opposed to destruction that is actually carried out. Why is this so important?

The Transformation of the Destructive Instinct

The great challenge for every person is to develop a capacity for relationships with external objects (this includes both individuals and concrete inanimate objects). As we have seen, so

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.212.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.142.

far, a person's relational capacity is based on the template of mother/infant interaction and the drama of developing communication between the two throughout the period of primary maternal pre-occupation and the developmental processes relating to all the instinctual, physical, and emotional aspects of growing autonomy within the infant. This is concretely facilitated when primary ruthless aggression finds integration and begins to assist the development of relationship, as it is transformed through guilt into concern, expressed through the spontaneous gesture, the gift gesture of love. As this is repeated and develops the physical context for communication, this reinforces, in the infant's mind, the differentiation between the Me and the Not-Me within the experience of relationship, which then facilitates the emergence of a true sense of individual identity. The primary ruthless aggression, when it is actually expressed in a concrete way, as in the case of the mother as object, can be absorbed and sustained through her maternal care, and her survival then initiates the experience of guilt.

With an external object the process is somewhat different. When the infant experiences the destructive drive in relation to an external object, Winnicott observes: 'The drive is potentially 'destructive' but whether it is destructive or not depends on what the object is like, does the object survive, that is, does it retain its character, or does it react? If the former.....the baby can become and does gradually become aware of a cathected object plus the fantasy of having destroyed, hurt, damaged or provoked the object.'⁴³ In other words, the destructive instincts are taken up into the mental processes where the destruction can be re-enacted, perhaps even with the inclusion of the fantasy of complete destruction, and as Winnicott puts it, 'in a pattern of developing personal aggressiveness that provides the backcloth of continuous (unconscious) fantasy of destruction.'⁴⁴ This experience of unconscious power, that is central in these destructive fantasies, then becomes the basis for perceiving the object in terms of utility. In a strange kind of way the object, through the

⁴³ Winnicott, 'The Use of an Object in Moses and Monotheism', in C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd & M. Davis (eds), *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, p.245.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.245.

unconscious process, gains its own autonomy (through its survival). 'It is important to note that it is not only that the subject destroys the object because the object is placed outside the area of omnipotent control. It is equally significant to state...that it is the destruction of the object that places the object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control. In these ways, the object develops its own autonomy and life...'⁴⁵ With usage, natural aggressive energy is then integrated into a person's developing relationship with the external world. The growing sense of autonomy is, therefore, reinforced and object relating increases in clarity.

The re-enactment of destructive impulses within the imagination of an infant indicates in an infant that it has been able to experience and integrate the capacity for illusion and employ this facility in a creative way. Winnicott places great emphasis on the inception of this capacity and situates it right at the beginning of the infant's life and its need to survive. The infant is hungry and so is ready to conceive of what it might need to assuage this feeling. Since it has no conception of what hunger is, and has had no previous experience that can inform its craving, the infant is in distress. It is at this moment that the mother intervenes and begins a process of internal and external response that then activates the fundamental capacity for illusion. As Winnicott states, 'If at the moment the mother places her breast where the baby is ready to expect something, and if plenty of time is allowed for the infant to feel around with mouth and hands...the baby eventually gets the illusion that this real breast is exactly the thing that was created out of the need, greed, and the first impulse of primitive loving.'⁴⁶ With repeated response to the cry of hunger and the offering of the breast, this practical adaptation to the infant's needs enables the infant to feel that it has created something and in this act of creation a feeling of omnipotence is born.

This Winnicott understands in terms of a kind of confidence that enables the infant to trust in the real world outside its own instinctual drives. 'The mother's adaptation to the infant's

⁴⁵ Winnicott Donald.W, *Playing and Reality*, London, Routledge, 1999, p.90.

⁴⁶ Winnicott Donald.W, 'Further Thoughts on Babies as Persons', in *The Child the Family and the Outside World*, London, Penguin Books, 1994, p. 90.

needs, when good enough, gives the infant the illusion that this is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create.⁴⁷ This sense of omnipotence, as we have seen, underpins the ability, in fantasy, to act out the destructive impulses and so come to perceive objects as existing separately in their own right. However, it also prepares the infant for a stage of growth that will set up a pattern of internal responses that will enable the True authentic Self to emerge, even where there have been difficulties. This will be achieved as the sense of omnipotence, the sense of being God, undergoes a disillusioning process, where the use of an object takes on a developmental significance and facilitates a whole new experience of transition. However, before examining all the different aspects of the transitional experience, so essential to Winnicott's understanding of the threshold of mature object relating, we need to pause here and turn our attention to what is also a particularly vital area of consideration regarding the development of an active and autonomous self, namely, the effects of the mother's failure to create a 'good enough' environment-individual set-up that can provide the holding experience upon which the whole movement of personal growth depends.

The Failure of Maternal Care – Its Consequences

The state of absolute dependence that enables the baby to value the security of unintegration, and so naturally develop the capacity of surrender, is facilitated by the primary maternal pre-occupation. It is the physical holding of the child that communicates the intensity of the mother's involvement. As Winnicott says: 'the infant is held by the mother, and only understands love that is expressed in physical terms, that is to say, by live human holding. Here is absolute dependence.'⁴⁸ If this environment-individual set-up fails, owing to the mother's inability to manage the infant, and she is unable to hold the infant, not just in a physical but also a psychological sense, the developmental process will be severely frustrated

⁴⁷ Winnicott *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 239.

⁴⁸ Winnicott D. W., *The Family and Individual Development*, Hove, Brunner-Routledge, 1999, p. 147.

and reactions within the child will be set in motion that will have serious lasting effects.⁴⁹ Mention has already been made of the importance of the protected space which is necessary for the embryonic ego, that contains the sense of self, to feel real and begin to experience its 'inherited potential'. This, in turn, allows for a *continuity of being* and the healthy emergence of a primitive but, nonetheless, authentic sense of self. When the holding environment is either absent or seriously defective the infant's *continuity of being* is constantly under threat from disruption through what Winnicott terms 'impingement,'⁵⁰ and it is within the intensity of the infant's reaction that Winnicott then locates the pain of fragmentation in its different forms.

If the infant has good-enough ego support at the beginning, within the confines of a well-protected space, then it will result in a strengthening of self-awareness, as Winnicott states clearly, 'Under favourable conditions the infant establishes a *continuity of being* and then begins to develop the sophistications which make it possible for impingements to be gathered into the area of omnipotence.'⁵¹ If the impingement, however, is too intense the infant's state of powerlessness, that under normal circumstances facilitates surrender, produces the opposite, a defensive reaction that sets up a whole new pattern of existence. Winnicott highlights the earliest form of destructive impingement in terms of 'unthinkable' anxieties: 'Unthinkable anxiety has only a few varieties, each being the clue to one aspect of normal growth,

- (1) Going to pieces.
- (2) Falling for ever.
- (3) Having no relationship to the body
- (4) Having no orientation.'⁵²

⁴⁹ Winnicott, *Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 59

⁵⁰ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, pp .183-184

⁵¹ Winnicott., *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p .47.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

These anxieties go straight to the very core sense of self and threaten to annihilate the sense of aliveness that maintains *the continuity of being*. As Winnicott puts it, ‘The alternative to being is reacting, and reacting interrupts being and annihilates. Being and annihilation are the two alternatives.’⁵³ This threat will produce a reaction that will result in an organisation of primitive defences that will immediately seek to protect the core self in its integrity. In one of his major papers that deals with issues relating to communication, Winnicott has this to say: ‘At the centre of each person is an incommunicado element, and this is sacred and most worthy of preservation...I would say that the traumatic experiences that lead to the organisation of primitive defences belong to the threat of the isolated core.’⁵⁴ And he states this threat in very clear terms: ‘the threat of its being found, altered, communicated with.’⁵⁵ Winnicott makes it very plain that if a violation of this core self takes place, especially from the unthinkable anxieties, the damage to the embryonic ego can be considerable. In the same paper he boldly states that even rape and being eaten by cannibals cannot compare to the damage and the consequent effects of this disruption.

Impingements that are traumatic not only arise from unthinkable anxieties that have their origin in the infant’s organism. They can also be external, events that impact on the infant, but in a way that cannot be adequately processed. Impingements, as has been stated already, are a normal part of the development of the ego’s functioning and confidence. When the infant is not ready to respond, however, it reacts in a way that rips open the fragile unity of the ego, and if this then mobilises and compounds the presence of unthinkable anxieties, the future results can be clinically extremely severe. Autism, latent schizophrenia, the development of a schizoid personality and a destructive False Self defence⁵⁶, become experiential testaments to the deficiency of ego-coverage and the absence of good primary maternal pre-occupation. Winnicott always understood these psychotic conditions as defences against the primitive

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁵⁴ Winnicott, ‘Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Certain Opposites,’ in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p.187.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p187.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.58-59

agony that resulted from the lack of care at this level and as he says, 'It is wrong to think of psychosis as a breakdown, it is a defence organisation relative to a primitive agony and it is usually successful.'⁵⁷ Likewise with patients who manifest overwhelming fears of breakdown in the future. This Winnicott traced back to the breakdown of the defences originally set up, obviously in the past, to ward off unthinkable anxieties. When, in his therapeutic practice, this fear broke out within the context of the therapeutic relationship, he regarded this as progress. It signified a good-enough therapeutic relationship that replicated the maternal environment but in a way that induced trust. The patient, open to his emotional and psychological sensibilities, felt safe enough to regress into that initial environmental failure where the unthinkable memories and their concomitant anxieties could be faced. These, according to Winnicott, are frozen and always kept carefully out of conscious experience, but ready to be re-experienced in an environment, as he puts it, 'that is making adequate adaptation.'⁵⁸

Serious failure, therefore, in the holding environment, leads to future disorder that results in recognised psychotic conditions. What can be said of partial failure where primary maternal pre-occupation has been weak or intermittent? This is where the core self has experienced destabilising impingements when the infant was 'held' by the maternal environment but in a way that failed to communicate the real security of accurate ego-coverage. This occurs when the physical (maternal) environment appears to be responsive to the child's needs but, in fact, is out of step with the infant's unconscious instincts and so the merger that Winnicott so accurately describes in his paper, 'Primary Maternal Pre-occupation',⁵⁹ has failed to take place. When the mother, under these circumstances, repeatedly fails to respond to the authentic rhythm of the infant's needs and the gestures that express the sense of being, she will be imposing her own inner world on her infant forcing it to adapt to her rhythm.⁶⁰ The infant then has no alternative but to comply with her more powerful reality and find a way of

⁵⁷ Winnicott . C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd, & M. Davis, (eds) *Psychoanalytic Explorations*. p. 90.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁵⁹ Winnicott, 'Primary Maternal Preoccupation', in *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, pp.300-305.

⁶⁰ Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 145.

protecting the existence of the core self that feels abandoned and at worst annihilated. Winnicott himself says: ‘When the mother’s adaptation is not good enough at the start the infant might be expected to die physically, because cathexis of external objects is not initiated. The infant remains isolated. But in practice the infant lives, but lives falsely.’⁶¹ The result is the mobilisation of what Winnicott describes as the False Self, ‘one of the most successful defence organisations designed for the protection of the True Self’s core, and its existence results in the sense of futility.’⁶² This defensive measure that can lead to a highly organised defence system and a way of life that reflects it, is one of Winnicott’s central concepts and is of great significance when dealing with the healthy development of a sense of self. It, therefore, requires close attention.

The Creation of the False Self

The False Self is brought to birth in the very act of compliance, and from the very first moments of its existence it has the task of protecting the inner core of the self. ‘Its defensive function is to hide and protect the True Self whatever that may be.’⁶³ Winnicott presents the False Self on a spectrum of intensity dividing it into five sequential sections.⁶⁴ In its most extreme form it has been contracted to hide the True Self, the inner core identity that needs to remain totally protected and incommunicado. As has already been stated, Winnicott posited the view ‘that healthy persons communicate and enjoy communicating, the other fact is equally true, that each individual is an isolate, non-communicating, permanently unknown, in fact unfound.’⁶⁵ When the core self has not only failed to receive the appropriate maternal response but also experienced an absence of a particular form of holding, that is the physical guarantor of the potential space, a False Self of particular intensity develops that observers

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁶² Winnicott *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 286.

⁶³ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 142

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

⁶⁵ Winnicott, *Ibid.*, p. 187..

tend to think of as the real person. It is a falsely constructed personality whose sole purpose is to maintain a defensive system that will hide the True Self.

For the vast majority of people environmental failure has been sporadic. The core self will have had intermittent experiences of primary maternal care in which the sense of continuity of being will have resulted in the experience of aliveness and 'the inherited potential' will therefore have been activated. As Winnicott says: 'Analysts have found it necessary to postulate that more normally there are good pregenital situations to which the individual can return when in difficulties at a later stage.'⁶⁶ The core or True Self, therefore, does contain life and the ability at some level to engage with the environment, but suffers in varying degrees from an imposed fragility. This accounts for the gradation that Winnicott postulates in the functioning of the False Self. It also accounts for a subtlety that exists in its very construct. On the one level it is organised to protect the True Self⁶⁷, a recognisable defensive function that is most clearly manifest in cases of severe environmental failure; what, in effect, is a protection from any impingements whatsoever. However, in its protective function it must also assume a more creative role of guardianship that acknowledges the necessity within the True Self to come alive and expand in its field of experience. Winnicott sees the first shift in the defensive function of the False Self in the presence of clinical illness as an organisation with a positive aim, which is 'the preservation of the individual in spite of abnormal environmental conditions,'⁶⁸ an attempt, however distorted, within the False Self to acknowledge the potential of the core self and its need for a secret life.

As Winnicott moves through the three remaining descriptions of the False Self identity he highlights what he calls the existence of the 'caretaker self.'⁶⁹ This is the False Self that recognises the needs of the True Self, and whose main concern is to search for conditions

⁶⁶ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 282

⁶⁷ Winnicott *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p148.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

which will 'make it possible for the True Self to come into its own.'⁷⁰ It is very often the caretaker self that brings a person to therapy and tests out the compatibility within the therapeutic relationship so that a regression can take place, safely, which will enable the person to enter into the state of former environmental failure. Winnicott makes it clear that under these circumstances, where the False Self is initially engaged, the therapist can only talk to 'the caretaker self' about the patient's True Self. As Winnicott puts it; 'It is as if a nurse brings a child, and at first the analyst discusses the child's problem, and the child is not directly contacted.'⁷¹ Continuing the analogy, it is not until the nurse has actually gone that the analyst can get down to work with the child, who is alone and free to play. It is when regression has allowed the patient to reach a condition of need dependency in the analytic relationship that the traumatic fears, that brought into the existence the False Self, can then be faced. Winnicott also ascribes a very different role to the Caretaker Self. In the event of a failure to discover favourable conditions for the True Self to come into its own, new defences have to be put in place as an ultimate defence of the True/core Self. If these fail and there is a threat to the integrity of the True Self then it is the task of the False to orchestrate suicide: 'This of course involves its own destruction, but at the same time eliminates the need for its continued existence, since its function is the protection of the True Self from insult.'⁷²

The Last two forms of the False Self defence system that Winnicott highlights assume a movement towards health that flows from a True Self identity that has discovered its freedom to exist and feel alive, but is still in need of some support. Creating its own identity through identifications with significant figures, the False Self allows the True Self of the person greater freedom to move around and engage, under a kind of camouflage. It does this through identifying with significant figures, a psychological device that enables the True Self a protective cover, at the same time allowing it sufficient opportunity for discrete interaction with the environment that responds to *the continuity of being*. Finally, Winnicott admits to the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

existence of a False Self that co-exists with a healthy and well defined True Self that is more a social construct, which, as he puts it, is ‘represented by the whole organisation of the polite and mannered social attitude.’⁷³ Although still based on a splitting mechanism that is mildly defensive, it is, as Winnicott states, ‘present in all children and is inherent in life itself.’⁷⁴ In a later paper given four years after his famous clarificatory article on the True and False Self, Winnicott was prepared to go so far as to say, ‘Each person has a polite or socialized self, and also a personal private self that is not available except in intimacy. That is what is commonly found, and we would call it normal.’⁷⁵

There is one final aspect of the False Self syndrome that needs to be raised before proceeding onto a closer examination of the development of the authentic self as the location of true identity. It concerns a particular form of adaptation to impaired maternal care which can have as far reaching effects, later on, as the impingements rooted in unthinkable anxieties that can arise during the period of transition from absolute to relative dependence. It concerns the compensatory activity of the intellect that is generated in response to the crucial stage of transition from the state of absolute to relative dependence. Even if the primary maternal care has been of a kind to allow the infant ego the opportunity for internal consolidation, a serious hiccup in the whole developmental process can occur as the next stage of mother/infant relationship is initiated. As a mother comes out of the state of primary maternal pre-occupation she begins to unsynchronise with the baby’s immediate needs, and to use Winnicott’s expression, she enters into a mode of ‘de-adaptation,’⁷⁶ and in essence starts to fail her infant in terms of immediate and accurate response. From a state of merger she has to regain, at a deep level in her psyche, her independence and start to respond once again to her own needs. This initiates for the infant the beginning of disillusionment and what Winnicott

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.143

⁷⁴ Winnicott . *Human Nature*, p. 108

⁷⁵ Winnicott Donald. W. *Home is Where We Start From*, London, Penguin Books, 1990 P. 66.

⁷⁶ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 87.

describes as the state of relative dependence.⁷⁷ It is at this point of emotional development, between absolute and relative dependence, between illusion and disillusion, that the infant's intellectual understanding develops, as Winnicott says, 'it is part of the equipment of the great majority of mothers to provide a graduated de-adaptation and this is nicely geared to the rapid developments that the infant displays. For instance, there is the beginning of intellectual understanding ...'⁷⁸ In other words, the infant's ability to use his intellectual apparatus to think and understand depends for its effective functioning on this transitional experience and the presence of illusion.

Since the mother fails, as every mother will fail in some way, the infant has to compensate for her failures and inconsistencies and does this by engaging its mental capacity and working through the disillusionment, which acts as a stimulant. In the event of this ordinarily taking place Winnicott says, '*The ordinary mother is good enough*. If she is *good enough* the infant becomes able to allow for her deficiencies by mental activity...The mental activity of the infant turns a *good enough* environment into a perfect environment, that is to say, turns relative failure of adaptation into adaptive success.'⁷⁹ Yet there are serious dangers that can arise at this crucial moment of growth, and a particularly complex and oppressive form of the false personality is conceived as 'Certain kinds of failure on the part of the mother, especially erratic behaviour, produce over-activity of the mental functioning.'⁸⁰ When this erratic unpredictable response of the mother becomes endemic, mental functioning then becomes, according to Winnicott, 'an end in itself, practically replacing the good mother and making her unnecessary.'⁸¹ This sets in motion a split between the body and the psyche. A False Self then emerges that draws its energy from increasingly intense effects of the mental apparatus to deal with 'unbearable' forms of disillusionment, which, in turn, 'develops a dissociation

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.87

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁷⁹ Winnicott *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 245.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

between intellectual activity and psychosomatic existence.’⁸² This Winnicott regards as clinically pathological and he says that ‘a person who is developing in this way displays a distorted pattern affecting all later stages of development.’⁸³ He cites the example of the extremely successful academic whose achievements are, in a sense, the very building blocks of a False Self. The tragedy then continually develops as with each success the inner emptiness intensifies and the lack of connectedness with the True authentic Self becomes more pronounced.

This description of the evolution of the False Self, experienced in different levels of intensity, is an important aspect of our survey of the developmental challenges that face the growing infant. It highlights the fundamental importance of a holding environment that is able to play an integral role in the birth of a True Self identity which, of its essence, needs to be developing a realistic capacity to engage with the external world, which can strengthen its authentic character. This will be clear as we now return to our consideration of all the different aspects of the transitional experience that are facilitated by the positive care offered by ‘the good-enough mother’⁸⁴ which enables *the continuity of being* to find new opportunities for development and expression.

Part Two - The Formation of Object Relationships

Experiencing Differentiation

One of the crucial tasks of the mother is to facilitate the movement within her child from absolute to relative dependence. After the birth of the child, during which a symbiotic identification, a mutual surrender to the birth trauma, will have taken place, the mother will have to undergo a de-adaptation process that will slowly terminate the state of merger, thus

⁸² Winnicott *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 144

⁸³ Winnicott *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 247.

⁸⁴ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and The Facilitating Environment*, p. 145.

dissolving the absolute dependence that the child has experienced. It is this fundamental transition within the maternal response, referred to earlier in the section relating to the formation of psycho-somatic unity, that will usher in the crucial experience of disillusionment for the infant, which then stimulates the earliest forms of intellectual activity. It is at this point that the sense of omnipotence, within the infant, gradually undergoes dissolution and an existence that can only be conceived of in terms of 'Me' begins to encounter the duality of human relationships that embraces the 'Me' and 'not-Me' elements of human interaction. Disillusionment, rather than being the result of calculated refusals by the mother to respond to her baby, arises through the natural process of failure that accompanies all human exchange. With the mother's de-adaptation the accuracy of her response to the baby's needs begin to fail. She naturally follows up these failures with mending gestures, and maternal care then takes on a normal pattern of intermittent success and failure, but is always underpinned by the continual mending gestures of reparation. Winnicott draws an important conclusion from this process: 'Human beings fail and fail; and in the course of ordinary care a mother is all the time mending her failures. These relative failures, with immediate remedy, undoubtedly add up eventually to a communication, so that the baby comes to know about success. Successful adaptation thus gives a sense of security, a feeling of having been loved.'⁸⁵

The disillusionment that is triggered off by the mother's failure and absence is, therefore, mitigated and held in check by the mending gesture. This allows the dissolution of the baby's sense of omnipotence to take place in a way that facilitates the process of self-definition and enables authentic growth to gather momentum. The experience of omnipotence naturally prevents the baby from experiencing 'coming to know' the mother as a person in her own right. It also renders it impossible for the baby to experience genuine love. Its dissolution marks a significant stage, therefore, in the way the baby begins to perceive 'the other' in the mother, and it also opens up the opportunity to discover a new subjective perception of itself

⁸⁵ Winnicott Donald. W., 'Communication Between Infant and Mother, and Mother and Infant, Compared and Contrasted', in Walter G. Joffe ed., *What is Psychoanalysis?* London, The Institute of Psychoanalysis/Balliere, Tindall & Caddell, 1968. pp. 97-98.

as an autonomous being with all the dynamic potential for growth that this implies. Furthermore, the gentle initiation of the baby into its first experience of genuine object relating, accompanied by the dawning awareness of being loved, robs the experience of 'being alone' of its traumatic associations that could become overwhelming. Growing with a sense of 'being alone in the presence of another'⁸⁶ is, for Winnicott, the third and vital stage of ego emergence that renders future relatedness possible. The first stage, the 'I' stage, represents the self-emergence from the environment-individual set-up, where the infant begins to be able to differentiate between Me and not-Me. The 'I am' stage occurs between the ages of 3 and 6 months and relates to the developmental achievement of a state of concern. The 'I am alone' stage, when accompanied by the reliable presence of the mother, offers the baby the basic paradigmatic experience of self in relationship with others that will eventually lead to the establishment of a lasting sense of meaning that will underpin any sense of fulfilment.

The Experience of Being Alone

'Being alone', in a context of care, enables the baby to experience its solitariness in a creative way. As Winnicott puts it, 'It is only when alone (that is to say, in the presence of someone) that the infant can discover his own personal life...When alone, in the sense that I am using the term, and only when alone, the infant is able to do the equivalent of what in an adult would be called relaxing. The infant is able to become unintegrated, to flounder, to be in a state in which there is no orientation, to be able to exist for a time without either a reaction to an external impingement or an active person with a direction of interest or movement. The stage is set for an id-experience. In the course of time there arrives a sensation or impulse...'⁸⁷ It is this sensation or impulse that can then strengthen the ego, enabling the baby to feel real as it occurs in a context of ego-relatedness.⁸⁸ Feeling real, feeling a sense of aliveness, as has already been stated, is only possible when the experience is based on the

⁸⁶ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 33.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.34.

psyche and soma coming together in a way that facilitates positive self-awareness. Being alone, therefore, in the presence of another, introduces the baby to this complementary interplay between the demands of the physical and psychological dimensions of reality. It is the living context in which ‘the inherited potential’, which is the core of the True Self and contains all the unique aspects of personal identity, comes alive as the psyche experiences *continuity of being*, and the gradual acquisition of ‘a personal psychic reality and a personal body scheme.’⁸⁹ This, as we have seen, is where Winnicott locates the very core of the personality which holds the essence of the True Self, the authentic identity of the person that needs to feel protected.

Reference has already been made to the incommunicado element of the True Self, which Winnicott describes as ‘sacred and most worthy of preservation.’⁹⁰ This can only be respected when it remains hidden and protected in a permanent state of isolation in which it has been established. As he says, ‘I am putting forward and stressing the importance of the permanent isolation of the individual and claiming that at the core of the individual there is no communication with the not-Me world either...’⁹¹ The importance of solitude for Winnicott cannot be overstated. The baby needs very early on to find a way of protecting this core of the True Self’s integrity, in its isolated and secret condition, but in such a way that it does not impede the ability to communicate with external objects and the outside world, As Winnicott puts it, ‘The preservation of personal isolation is part of the search for identification and for the establishment of a personal technique for communicating which does not lead to the violation of the self.’⁹² Health, for Winnicott, begins to exist when the communicating and non-communicating elements of the personality discover a symbiotic relationship that mirrors the interplay of silence and communication between the mother and baby, hence, ‘Although healthy persons communicate and enjoy communication the other fact is equally true, that

⁸⁹ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p.46.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.187.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.190.

*each individual is an isolate, permanently non-communicating, permanently unknown, in fact, unfound.*⁹³

Winnicott was very aware, however, that the maternal holding environment is a fragile construct that can easily be disturbed through external factors. The mother's failures can go unmended, or at least mended only intermittently. 'Being alone' is no longer always experienced in the 'presence of another' with all the containing and mitigating effects that good maternal care can provide: 'When failure is not mended within the requisite time, seconds, minutes, hours, then we use the term deprivation. A deprived child is one who, after knowing about failure mended, comes to experience failure unmended.'⁹⁴ The isolated space, so potentially fruitful, becomes the place of gross impingements from internal id impulses or the erratic intrusion of the mother or substitutes. False Self defences are then employed to seal off the sacred incommunicado self in a protective capacity that stifles growth. The reverie of the unintegrated state is then suppressed by the creation of a sophisticated inner defence that harnesses the omnipotence of the baby: 'The term disintegration is used to describe a sophisticated *defence*, a defence that is an active production of chaos in defence against unintegration in the absence of maternal ego-support, that is, against the unthinkable or archaic anxiety that results from failure of holding in the stage of absolute dependence.'⁹⁵

In its most serious manifestation the core of the True Self is, therefore, thrust into a state of solitary confinement. Whatever the degree of deprivation or strength of False Self defences, the baby, in order to grow, has to find ways of relating to objects that allow the communicating and non-communicating aspects of the personality opportunities to express themselves and to contribute to the strengthening of ego identity. It will be found in the use of the transitional object and the creation of the intermediate space in which external object

⁹³ *Ibid*, p.187.

⁹⁴ Winnicott *Winnicott on the Child*, p.76.

⁹⁵ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 61.

relating will find the opportunity for renegotiating the dynamic of relational growth, especially where there has been a breakdown. It is specifically in the experience of the transitional object that the emerging infant will find opportunities to break through any serious impasse to growth and so be able to establish a complementary relationship between inner and outer reality.

The Importance of the Transitional Space

The baby's transition from absolute to relative dependence on the mother cannot be achieved without the baby finding an object that in some way is both experienced as an object in its own right, external to the baby, but also an object that the baby itself has created. It thus represents all the components of mothering as an external object, while signifying the baby's ability to create what it needs. Why is this discovery of the transitional object of such significance? The answer lies primarily in the whole meaning of creativity, which is central to the experience of self identity and what Winnicott understands as *continuity of being*. While the baby exists in a relationship of absolute dependence, constantly nurtured by the mother's adaptation to the baby's needs, the baby's primary creativity is integral to the baby's illusion of omnipotence, the illusion of being God, that sustains the baby's response in the symbiotic relationship. As we have seen, this illusion of omnipotence has to be slowly modified by the disillusioning process in order for the baby to develop that ability to distinguish between Me and not-Me, and move from primary creativity to objective perception based on reality testing.

The creative drive, therefore, has to discover a new way of employing illusion which can contribute to symbol formation and the imaginative use of an object. The mother and baby relationship in its absolute dependency phase will, as we have seen, set in motion the *continuity of being* that finds its dynamism and creative potential in the awakening of those libidinal instincts that are based in the erotic and aggressive drives. The task of the fusion of

these components is vital for the formation of relationships with external objects. This incorporates the exercise of ruthless aggression which in turn leads to a sense of guilt, that is the opportunity for developing a sense of concern. It is important that these developmental experiences are transposed from the maternal relationship, in the strictest sense, and placed in a neutral environment that offers the opportunity for all these component experiences to be activated in a context that is essentially objective, but still has links with the world of primary creativity. Hence, its description as an intermediate zone, a transitional space. The developmental demands of this ongoing inner reality can then find a creative way of existing with the demands of external reality, and it is in the transitional space that constant renegotiation of internal needs can take place in a way that refines relationship with external objects. In Winnicott's words: 'It is an area which is not challenged because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet inter-related.'⁹⁶

The Transitional Object

It is in the creation of the transitional object, the first not-Me possession, that the baby begins to inhabit this transitional space. Winnicott located the inception of the process in the simple exercise of motility that surrounds the fingers and the mouth. Through thumb sucking and the caressing of the face and the lips by the fingers, oral engagement moves from the breast and starts to find its first non-maternal object. The auto-erotic satisfaction of thumb sucking still, however, maintains the fundamentally subjective nature of the infant's search for the external object until, Winnicott observes, 'with the other hand the baby takes an external object, say a part of a sheet or blanket, into the mouth along with fingers...the objects used naturally include napkins and (later) handkerchiefs...or the baby starts from early months to pluck wool and to collect it and to use it for the caressing part of the activity.'⁹⁷ Gradually, a

⁹⁶ Winnicott W.D. *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 230.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 231-232.

movement begins to take place that attempts to form a connection between inner and outer reality. Soft compliant objects that easily connect with the comfort of auto-erotic forms of consolation make way for more clearly defined objects, that are rooted in the affect of the infant, but have a distinct ‘otherness’ of their own: ‘Gradually in the life of the infant teddies and dolls and hard toys are acquired. Boys to some extent tend to go over to use hard objects, whereas girls tend to proceed right ahead to the acquisition of a family.’⁹⁸ It is not only the use of recognisable objects that fall into Winnicott’s understanding of transitional phenomena, he points out, ‘a word or two or a mannerism which becomes initially important to the infant for use at the time of going to sleep and is defence against anxiety, especially anxiety of the depressive type,’⁹⁹ also enables the infant to begin inhabiting the transitional space. It enables the infant to enter an objective experience which has its own rhythm (in the case of sleep, for instance), its own existence, in a way that carries the infant’s subjective involvement. It is, above all, a place of connection and overlap.

The existence of the transitional object is rooted in the baby’s experience of two mothers. ‘The mother of the dependent relationship (anaclitic) is also the object of instinctual (biologically driven) love.’¹⁰⁰ Hence, the transitional object can be seen as being used by the infant, through enactment, to relate to these two mothers and bring the two together. It must, therefore, offer opportunities to the infant of working through these instinctual responses to create a new synthesis of relational capacity. As such, Winnicott points out, it must not be changed in any way except by the infant himself: ‘the parents get to know its value and carry it around when travelling. The mother lets it get dirty even smelly knowing that by washing it she introduces a break in continuity in the infant’s experience, a break that may destroy the meaning of the object to the infant.’¹⁰¹ In other words, through the residual presence of the infant’s omnipotence, the creative capacity for illusion and ownership remain present.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 232

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 232

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.267-268

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.232.

However, there has to be some capacity within the object itself of proffering warmth, creative movement and having a texture that indicates that it has a 'vitality and reality of its own.'¹⁰²

What is of crucial importance is the object's capacity to survive instinctual loving and vigorous demonstrations of affection on the one hand, and the onslaught of hate and ruthless aggression that looks back to the presence of primary destructiveness on the other. It, therefore, is an object that relates to both the inner and outer world of the infant, and in Winnicott's words: 'It comes from without from our point of view but not so from the point of view of the baby. Neither does it come from within; it is not an hallucination.'¹⁰³ The transitional object is a catalyst for various emotional and psychological processes to begin to take place outside of the primary maternal environment, hence, it is transitional in nature and an object, by its very essence, that is going to lead to further object attachments. It must therefore be an object that can be superseded, can be put aside as a part of a developing process: 'Its fate is to be gradually allowed to be deattached, so that in the course of years it becomes not so forgotten as relegated to limbo. By this I mean that in health the transitional object does not 'go inside' nor does the feeling necessarily undergo repression. It is not forgotten and it is not mourned. It loses its meaning, and this is because transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between inner psychic reality and the external world.'¹⁰⁴

The Intermediate Space of Creativity

It achieves this by leading the growing infant into the space where the beginnings of symbol formation, and the creative use of illusion within the imagination, opens up the world of play. As Winnicott says, 'I have claimed that where we witness an infant's employment of a transitional object, the first not-Me possession, we are witnessing both the child's first use of

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.232.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.233.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,p. 233.

a symbol and the experience of play.’¹⁰⁵ This recreative intermediate space, then, naturally becomes the opportunity for further experiences of transitional phenomena, as well as a resting place ‘from the strain of relating inner and outer reality...the intermediate area of experience which is not challenged.’¹⁰⁶ Neutral territory is the place where *continuity of being* can draw on its sources of nourishment: the stimulus of id impulses that can strengthen ego identity, the continual working through of aggression which can lead to greater clarity in object perception (Me, not-Me), and finally, further refinement in the infant’s use of an object which will enhance the sense of autonomy. This, for Winnicott, lays the foundation for future involvement in ‘cultural experience’: ‘I have used the term cultural experience as an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and of play without being certain that I can define the word ‘culture’. The accent is on experience. In using the word culture I am thinking of the inherited tradition. I am thinking of something that is in the common pool of humanity.’¹⁰⁷ It is within a cultural context, and here Winnicott would include religious experience, that a person’s *continuity of being* can naturally find fresh impetus as ‘the inherited potential’ of the individual discovers a mirror through the inherited tradition, a collective context that enables the uniqueness of the self to find a strengthening of identity in relation to others.

When the transitional space becomes the place of play it has the potential to recreate that state of unintegration that originally existed within the mother/infant relationship. Reference has already been made, at the very beginning of this chapter, to an environment-individual set-up where the baby’s sense of being is first activated as the centre of gravity locates itself in the body of the child. Organised play, like the holding mother, can then become the opportunity for an essential connection to take place. Self-realisation that comes from a sense of being, an aliveness, evoked by the memory of unintegration and symbiotic union with the mother, becomes linked with the presence of others who are also experiencing the same feelings of

¹⁰⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p.96.

¹⁰⁶ Winnicott *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena*, p. 241.

¹⁰⁷ Winnicott, *Playing & Reality*, p.99.

aliveness. Team spirit and bonds of friendship become in a literal sense life-enhancing experiences which can celebrate the ongoing need for bonding and feeling alive, as 'play provides an organisation for the initiation of emotional relationships and so enables social contacts to develop.'¹⁰⁸ If an individual, however, is to develop 'the inherited potential', that is at the heart of personal identity, the communal play aspect of the transitional space needs to be complemented by experiences that relate to the core identity of self, which must remain solitary and incommunicado. It is in the struggle to bring together inner and outer reality, in the sometimes complex forms that they take, that meaning is going to be found. It is, therefore, important that the transitional space offers an individual a place where the sense of being alone is able to reinforce the strength of the incommunicado self's identity, in a way that does not interfere with the enlivening experiences with external reality.

True Self Identity

Winnicott, a year before his death, attempted to sum up his ideas concerning the definition of self: 'For me, the self, which is not the ego, is the person who is me, who is only me, who has a totality based on the operation of the maturational process.'¹⁰⁹ The self is rooted, therefore, in a living context whereby the essential identity of the person is in a continual process of becoming authentic and real. It embraces a dynamic understanding not only of the mother/baby relationship, but all relationships that subsequently open up the mysteries of both the inner and outer range of experience. For as Winnicott says, 'it is the self and the life of the self that alone makes sense of action or of living from the point of view of the individual who has grown so far and who is continuing to grow towards independence, and the capacity to identify with mature love objects without loss of individual identity.'¹¹⁰ Entering the transitional space repeatedly through the agency of the transitional object, and experiencing

¹⁰⁸ Winnicott *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World*, p.145.

¹⁰⁹ Winnicott . 'On the Basis of Self in Body', in C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd, & M Davis (eds) *Psychoanalytic Investigations*, p.271.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.271.

the recreative power of play and cultural engagement, not only offers the identity of the self opportunities for greater clarification within the context of mature object love, but also enables a process of reparation to take place which is vital for its continual growth.

In the earliest phase of the mother/baby relationship the authentic self of the infant will begin to experience its *continuity of being* and this will manifest itself in the spontaneous gesture. When the mother responds in a relatively successful way the infant can 'begin to enjoy the illusion of omnipotent creating and controlling and can thus gradually come to recognise the illusory element, the fact of playing and imagining. Here is the basis for the symbol which at first is both the infant's spontaneity or hallucination, and also the external object created and ultimately cathected'¹¹¹ However, when the mother is unable to respond and adaptation is constantly inaccurate, then vital processes cannot get started under these circumstances, for according to Winnicott, 'the infant might be expected to die physically, because cathexis of external objects is not initiated. The infant remains isolated. But in practice the infant lives, but lives falsely.'¹¹² It does so through developing a capacity for compliance for 'the mother who is not good enough is not able to implement the infant's omnipotence and so repeatedly fails to meet the infant gesture; instead she substitutes her own gesture which is to be given sense by the compliance of the infant.'¹¹³

Thus, as we have seen, a False Self identity is then constructed that gradually develops even more sophisticated methods of dealing with environmental demands and new relationships that appear to be genuine, but, in truth, are a shield for the True Self that has to remain hidden.¹¹⁴ It is here, in this falsely constructed inner world, that the transitional experience in all its diverse forms can offer its most salutary gift. The False Self is constructed not to destroy the authentic True Self, but to hide and protect it. The dismantling of the False Self

¹¹¹ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p.146.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p 146.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.145

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.143.

can only occur from within as the True self identity is strengthened and grows in confidence. Any direct assault on False Self identity will elicit its reinforcement, since its very nature is to increase its defensive capacity. Hence, it is through play and cultural engagement that *the continuity of being* can be strengthened and find ways of expression. Through the presence of the transitional object a relationship, that enables a new interaction between inner and outer reality to evolve, can exist without fear of challenge or impingement from outside. This gives the True Self the opportunities it needs to connect with its feeling of aliveness and acquire its dynamic sense of identity. The transitional space can then become the locus of transformation and the holding environment where birth and rebirth of the self can take place without fresh impingement.

In conclusion, the authentic growth process for self identity will always fundamentally depend on the two central needs that co-exist within a person, being able to find a mode of adequate expression and a healthy working alliance. The first is the freedom to experience the life of the solitary incommunicado self, the aspect of the person that contains those elements of uniqueness and the presence of mystery that pertain to individual identity. The second is the drive to form relationships and communicate with others and the outside world, in a way that can foster ‘the inherited potential’ rooted in the *continuity of being* and the sense of aliveness. This, as we saw, can only be achieved as primary aggression is harnessed and able to discover the requisite fusion with eros as differentiation between the Me and not-Me clarifies the nature of object relationships and the growing sense of self identity. It is in the activation of ‘the inherited potential’, the personal giftedness, that finds its identity in play and all forms of recreative activity, from cultural initiatives to religious worship, that then provides the bridge between these two central foci of the personality. It enables them to remain in a complementary relationship that can keep the True Self identity alive and healthy, and empower it to celebrate its existence through love and friendship.

Chapter Four

St. John of the Cross and Winnicott – Related Themes

Introduction

It is clear from the foregoing examination of John's and Winnicott's respective treatments of the evolution of self identity that both authors operate out of completely separate categories and personal experiences, separated by time, geographical distance and spiritual outlook. However, what emerges through a close examination of their thought, is the fundamental appreciation in both authors of a dynamic source of energy, that exists at the very heart of the human person, and yearns to be activated. Moreover, it is when this movement of life is in full flow that personal identity can then be realised. In this section I will now attempt to examine certain key features of John's and Winnicott's thought in order to initiate a thematic dialogue in which genuine links can be formed, which will neither distort or misinterpret their respective thinking. This will then, hopefully, provide a basis for a deeper form of reflective encounter where a genuine complementarity can be discerned, thereby providing greater precision in the way the interface between psychological and spiritual care is interpreted.

To initiate this thematic exploration I wish to quote one of Winnicott's training patients who was also his amanuensis, Masud Khan, who makes this statement in his summary of the essential and indefinable sense of self: 'Clinically the self-experience of the patient is characterised by a very archaic and simple state of excitement expressed often by motility. What it demands is mutuality – that is, shared trust. Its typical anxiety affect is threat of annihilation and its pervasive defence mechanism is staying dissociated and hidden, not repressed. Its domain is privacy.'¹ In this very brief description Khan highlights the importance and necessity of some form of stimulus that excites the presence of the self that thus leads to

¹ Khan, Masud, *Hidden Selves: Between Theory and Psychoanalysis*, New York, International Press, 1983, p. 188.

movement and the experience of relationship, as an encounter with ‘the other’. His reference to the core self’s fear of annihilation, and the necessity of maintaining a dissociated and hidden dimension of existence for the self, balances the inner and outer experience of reality, always finding its centre, however, in solitude. Furthermore, it is this quotation of Khan that can provide a highly appropriate departure point for our initial comparative survey.

Sources of Energy

We have seen that it is the element of desire that animates the life of the soul for John² and that real creative movement that facilitates growth is ‘excited’ by God’s loving initiative. This, according to John, takes place in an imperfect soul that ‘is ordinarily inclined towards evil, at least in the first movements of its will, intellect, memory, and appetites,’³ which is expressed in a pattern of attachments that prevent real growth within the soul. However, in the same stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle* John also points out that there is a concomitant inclination towards God in the same faculties and appetites⁴ that enables God’s approach to be received in the first place. In other words, John’s reflection begins with the life of the soul that has already experienced the movement of desire, which holds the soul’s search for identity, and has begun to experience this in both negative and positive ways. Secondly, it is important to constantly bear in mind that John is working out of an established Catholic spiritual landscape where certain truths are taken for granted and therefore do not need extensive explanation.⁵ This not only applies to the unquestioned belief in the loving commitment of God towards the soul and His desire for loving union, but also to John’s acceptance of the malfunction of the soul and its experience of inclination towards self-

² “Con ansias, en amores inflamada” 1S 1:1 (73/258)

³ “Porque así como una alma imperfecta muy ordinariamente a los menos primeros movimientos inclinados a mal según el entendimiento y según la voluntad y memoria y apetitos e imperfecciones” C 27: 7 (519/850)

⁴ “También así el alma de este estado según el entendimiento y voluntad y apetitos en los primeros movimientos de ordinario se mueve e incline a Dios por la grande ayuda y firmeza que tiene ya en Dios y perfecta conversión al bien” *Ibid.*

⁵ “ Y si yo en algo errare por no entender bien así lo que en ella como en lo que sin ella dijere, no es mi intención apartarme del santo sentido y doctrina de la Santa Madre Iglesia Católica, porque en tal caso totalmente me sujeto y resigno no sólo a su mandado, sino a cualquiera que en mejor razón de ello juzgare.” S. Prólogo 2 (70/255)

contradiction. The world of spiritual evil, the agency of the Devil, and the physical inheritance of a deeply flawed humanity, in the form of Original Sin, were truths that needed no extensive explanation to his readers. This also applied to the belief in the efficacy of grace and the very existence of God, Who was already present to the soul, prior to the specific intervention that John cites at the beginning of *The Ascent*,⁶ since he was addressing listeners who took the basic tenets of Christian conversion for granted.⁷ The background, therefore, of dysfunctional, obsessive desire could be presented without an in-depth analysis which would reveal both the physical and psychological dimensions of human disorder, and this we will return to later on in the chapter.

At this point, however, we will now turn to Winnicott in order to find initial resonances in his developmental thinking that can initiate a creative dialogue with John. We will first of all examine an analogous concept to John's movement of desire that is central to Winnicott's whole understanding of the personal search for fulfilment, the presence of *continuity of being* that is at the heart of the emergence of True Self identity and the fullness of its expression. Having done this, we will then move on to consider the negative aspects of personal experience that hinder its development and which correspond to John's understanding of the deformation of desire and its creative development. Winnicott's theory relating to the growth of self identity is contained in his scheme of growth that moves through three strata of relational maturity: absolute dependence through relative dependence to independence.⁸ As we have seen, it is Winnicott's understanding of *continuity of being* that carries the infant through these successive stages of growth towards maturity, a movement that reaches right back to the moment of conception. It is the life force nurtured and contained within the mother, and extending beyond birth into the mother/ baby dyad, that comprises the environment-individual set-up. *Continuity of being* enables 'the inherited

⁶ "Y esto fue *dichosa ventura*, meterla Dios en esta noche... En la cual ella no atinara a entrar, porque no atina bien uno por sí solo a vaciarse de todos los apetitos para venir a Dios." 1S 1:5 (74/259)

⁷ "Ni aun mi principal intento es hablar con todos, sino con algunas personas de nuestra sagrada Religión de los primitivos del Monte Carmelo..." S Prólogo 9. (72/257).

⁸ Winnicott, Donald W., *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, London Karnac Books 1990, pp. 84-92.

potential' of the person to come alive, and it is this that holds the core of True Self identity.⁹ It is here, in Winnicott's concept of *continuity of being*, that we can discern a very powerful analogy to the concept of desire, which is central to John's understanding of movement and growth in the soul. As we shall see, just as the world of desire in the soul, when challenged and activated by the touch of God's love¹⁰ becomes the vehicle for transformation and growth, so too with *continuity of being*. It is when the True Self is engaged with external relationships, that it is able to find its real identity. In the light of our central theme, we will now examine more closely these complementary positions.

The Movement of Desire in John

In *The Spiritual Canticle* John presents us with the ultimate destiny of the soul, that of total union with God, whereby 'souls possess the same goods in participation that the Son possesses by nature. As a result they are truly gods by participation, equals and companions of God.'¹¹ This is a unity of being which has been achieved through the empowering love of God for the soul Who 'makes her love Him with the very strength with which He loves her.'¹² This empowerment is only, of course, made possible once the receptive desire for love has been totally opened up in the soul and engaged in the mutual search for fulfilment. In *The Spiritual Canticle*, desire, at the deepest level, for John, is, in a very dynamic sense, the means by which true identity and the personal search for fulfilment is achieved, as union is discovered in 'the other'. In *The Living Flame* John describes this union in slightly different language: 'When it (the soul) has reached God with all the capacity of its being and the strength of its operation and inclinations, it will have attained to its final and deepest centre in God, it will know, love and enjoy God with all its

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.46.

¹⁰ See here 2S 24.4.(190377) and 2S 32.2.(210/400)

¹¹ "De donde las almas esos mismos bienes poseen por participación que El por naturaleza; por cual verdaderamente son dioses por participación, iguales y compañeros suyos de Dios." C. 39.6. (559/893)

¹² "La hace amar con la fuerza que El la ama, transformándola en su amor." C. 38. 4. (554/888)

might.¹³ This John understands as taking place after the soul has made a journey, and he uses the analogy of the rock in the earth that is driven to find its resting place at the deepest centre, which is the middle of the earth. He tells us that ‘when once it arrives and has no longer any power or inclination toward further movement, we declare that it is in its deepest centre.’¹⁴ This union, therefore, has a dynamic aspect of mutual empowerment of love, the movement of total self-gift ‘in the other’. It also has the other dimension whereby the soul finally discovers its resting place, its centredness in God, a total experience of union that requires no more journeying or searching.

This subtle dual nature of desire that is activated in the union of the soul in God is expressed with clarity in *The Living Flame* where John describes the awakening of new life in the soul in Stanza 4 whereby ‘The soul knows creatures through God, and not God through creatures.’¹⁵ God, on the other hand, is immovable in Himself, yet He is always ‘moving, governing, bestowing being, power, graces, and gifts upon all creatures, bearing them all in Himself by His power, presence and substance.’¹⁶ Desire, therefore in John, experiences these dual modes of expression working always in tandem: the continual expectation of energising encounter and the yearning for the place of silent rest and inner peace. Furthermore, it is held and contained by the all-embracing loving desire that God has for the soul and so exists in a holding and energising context.

Continuity of Being in Winnicott

Continuity of being comes alive in the experience of absolute trust between mother and baby, which at different times enables the child to remain in that state of total quiescence, unintegration, when the baby

¹³ “Al cual cuando habiendo ella hubiere llegado según toda la capacidad de su ser y según la fuerza de su operación e inclinación habrá llegado al último y más profundo centro suyo en Dios, que será cuando con todas sus fuerzas entienda, ame y goce de Dios.” L. 1. 12 (583/923)

¹⁴ “Y cuando llegare y no tuviere de suyo más virtud e inclinación para mas movimiento, diremos que está en el más profundo centro suyo.” L. 1.11. (583/922)

¹⁵ “Conocer por Dios las criaturas, y no por las criaturas a Dios.” L 4.5. (645/1030)

¹⁶ “Pero Dios siempre se está así....moviendo, rigiendo y dando ser y virtud y gracias y dones a todas las criaturas, teniéndolas en sí virtud y presencial y sustancialmente.” L.4.7. (645/1031).

actually experiences a need not to respond but to remain within the totally supportive environment without external pressure.¹⁷ It is the forerunner experience of the incommunicado self that will hold, in a special way, the experience of uniqueness, which is at the core of the True Self, and as Winnicott says, it is a vital experience for the self, 'acquiring its own way and at its own speed a personal reality and a personal body scheme.'¹⁸ What is important for our consideration here is that the maternal holding environment, which facilitates the state of unintegration in the first place, enables a two dimensional aspect of *continuity of being* to begin the process of development that is essential for future growth. On the one hand it will have created the context in which a relationship can be experienced and celebrated as a reality in itself, as a given, and not as the result of effort or determination. On the other, it will have provided the holding experience in which the active expression of *continuity of being* will have found its creative outlet and energy in the omnipotent creation and recreation of the external object (ie. the breast, nipple etc.)¹⁹.

This clearly echoes the dual dimension in John of the essential nature of desire that has both active and passive modes of expression. However, the actual process of development for Winnicott can only take place when the holding relationship itself undergoes a physical and emotional transformation and this, as we have seen, only happens when the primary cohesive world of the mother/baby dyad gradually disintegrates through the natural process of the mother's need to de-adapt to the exigencies of her own personal reality. It is this failure to continually respond accurately to the baby's needs that then produces disillusionment in the child,²⁰ and with its containing world shattered, the baby, in Winnicott's words, must then sustain 'the immense shock of loss of omnipotence.'²¹ As we have seen, the immediate organic response of the child is to begin developing the intellectual apparatus,²² and, as has been stated in the

¹⁷ Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 61

¹⁸ *Ibid* ,p. 46.

¹⁹ Winnicott, Donald W., *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, London, Karnac Books, 1992, pp. 238/239.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88

²¹ Winnicott, Donald W., *Playing and Reality*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.71

²² Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 87

previous chapter, it is the stimulus that proceeds from this experience that activates the primitive psychological awareness of the body and physical movements, essential for the development of future objective relationships. However, this will not be enough to maintain development unless there is another continuing holding context which can both support the passive aspect of the experience of *continuity of being*, which will have been responsible in the first place for the coming to birth of the deepest aspect of the True Self, while at the same time, offering, like the mother, the possibility of experiencing movement in the search for relational engagement.

The Transitional Object's Presence

The transitional object's presence, which carries true symbolic meaning relating to the maternal holding experience, enables *continuity of being*, that has already been activated in the maternal relationship, to discover a continuing relational process that can facilitate its search to engage with external relationships. Thus, the *continuity of being* is at the point where, in order to survive and grow, needs to be liberated from the closed all-encompassing relationship between mother and baby. Unless its creative drive, locked in the illusory process of omnipotent creation and re-creation, can be transformed so that it engages with exterior reality and separate external objects, it will ossify and die.²³ The transitional object, therefore, provides the developmental context for *continuity of being* to begin to find its active and passive modes of regenerative experience outside the maternal setting and within the transitional space and the different forms of transitional experience. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the consolidation of authentic identity can only become possible when an individual experiences certain interior movements of growth taking place deep within: the ability to distinguish between the Me and not-Me in relational perception, the capacity to move from primary creativity to objective perception based on reality testing, the employment of illusion that leads to symbol formation and the imaginative use of an object, and finally, the reorganisation of the instinctual erotic and aggressive drives in the task of fusion, facilitating

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

relationships with external objects. What is important to note here, is that, just as the love of God, intervening in the life of the soul, opens up the essence of desire, engaging it, carrying it through processes of differentiation and growth, and leading the soul into total fulfilment in the discovery of loving union in which the person's True identity comes to birth, so too, the transitional object, presented to the infant at a crucial moment in its personal development, likewise facilitates the growth of *continuity of being*, that has its origin in the maternal holding environment, and carries the whole search for personal fulfilment in a truly dynamic psychological sense. This interesting and important thematic connection will be developed further in the next chapter.

It is in the adoption of a transitional object that the infant is able to experience the flow of *continuity of being* in a way that facilitates its ability to start embracing exterior reality and the existence of external objects. We have seen in the previous chapter how, by its very nature, the transitional object has a certain fluidity of function and character whereby, having been embraced and cherished as a love object, it is never consciously rejected but allowed to be gently relegated to limbo, available always for further recognition. Now Winnicott places the emergence of the pattern of transitional phenomena between the ages of four and twelve months.²⁴ However, he immediately makes it clear that the pattern of acquisition of all kinds of transitional objects can persist into childhood, preparing the way for what he describes as transitional phenomena, experiences that 'have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner reality and the external world as perceived by two persons in common, that is to say, over the whole cultural field.'²⁵ The transitional experience, therefore, although rooted chronologically in the primary phase of development, is not limited to the crucial transition from absolute to relative dependence in the mother /baby relationship but extends into all areas of creativity where renegotiation of self identity takes place. Winnicott himself clarifies this point in a key passage: 'At this point my subject widens out into that of play, and of artistic creativity and appreciation, and of religious feeling and of dreaming, and

²⁴ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, 1992, p. 232

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233

also of fetishism, lying and stealing, the origin and loss of affectionate feeling, drug addiction, the talisman of obsessional rituals etc.²⁶ *Continuity of being*, therefore, is presented in the transitional space within a context that extends way beyond childhood into adult maturity, that facilitates its continued movement and maintains its creativity and aliveness, enabling ‘the inherited potential’ to flourish.

It is, therefore, in Winnicott’s concept of *continuity of being* discovering its creative context, initially, in the maternal holding environment and then in the relationship with the transitional object, and in John’s understanding of the place of desire and its activation through the love of God, and His continued holding response, that we can find that initial starting point for serious analogous reflection. At this point, we will now look in more detail first of all at the deformation of desire in John which can prevent creative spiritual movement in the soul. This will then be followed by a consideration of those negative aspects of human experience that Winnicott understands as deeply destructive to the whole development of *continuity of being* that likewise can frustrate and, indeed, prevent the emergence of True Self identity.

Deformation of Desire in John

When John, describing the visits of God to the soul, refers to ‘the secret touches of love, which like fiery arrows pierce and wound it,’²⁷ he understands the initiative of God as having two aspects. The first contains the dynamic call to deepening union which ultimately facilitates the discovery of the true identity of the soul in the life of the Trinity.²⁸ The second is a challenging visitation of the light of truth which uncovers a state of disorder that stands in the way of this future union, in other words, complete fulfilment of desire in the soul. John portrays this disordered state as one that is rooted in the body’s obsessional attachment to its appetites that cling on to myriad forms of possessions and force the individual to remain

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

²⁷ “Suele hacer unos encendidos toques de amor que, a manera de saeta de fuego, hieren y traspasan el alma y dejan toda cauterizada con fuego de amor.” C 1. 17. (422/748)

²⁸ “Porque esto es estar transformada en las tres Personas en potencia y sabiduría y amor, y en esto es semejante el alma a Dios, y para que pudiese venir a esto la crió a su imagen y semejanza.” C. 39.4. (588/892)

underdeveloped and totally split off from the other aspect of the soul's existence, the life of the Spirit.²⁹ The force and power of desire is, therefore, imprisoned in a static world of transitory gratification that cannot lead into any sense of fulfilment and as John states: 'A man who lets his desires capture him suffers torture and affliction like an enemy held prisoner.'³⁰ John's vision of the disordered soul, expressed in the disunity of sense and spirit, is the result of the Fall at the beginning of Creation when the intimate union between Adam and Eve and God was shattered through the intervention of Satan.³¹ One of the clearest manifestations of this fallen condition, this shattered intimacy, has been understood in terms of fear and insecurity that is rooted in the human heart. In the Book of Genesis, as Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden and became subject to the exigencies of the physical world with all its uncertainties, this fear eventually erupted into violence and death.

In the Catholic Faith Tradition this inheritance of fear and the potential for annihilation has always been part of the understanding of the experience of Original Sin³² which has been handed on through the ages. The search for physical security through power and possessions and the gratification of bodily desires have often been seen as a direct consequence of the Fall and as an effective way of dissipating fear, particularly of death. Furthermore, the union of Adam and Eve with God was based on a constitutional likeness, as we read in the Book of Genesis, 'God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him.'³³ And in the second account of Creation: 'Yahweh God shaped man from the soil of the ground and blew the breath of life into his nostrils and man became a living being.'³⁴ It was, therefore, a likeness accompanied by a shared existence initiated by God. The rupture that was effected has never been understood in the Christian tradition as a destruction of the basic essence of the human soul, the

²⁹ "De manera que todas las criaturas en esta manera nada son, y las aficiones de ellas menos que nada podemos decir que son, pues son impedimento y privación de la transformación en Dios." 1S 4.3. (78/264)

³⁰ "Y de la manera que es atormentado y afligido el que cae en manos de sus enemigos, así es atormentada y afligida el alma que se deja llevar de sus apetitos." 1S 7.2. (88/274)

³¹ The Book of Genesis, *New Jerusalem Bible*, New York, Doubleday & Company, 1985, 3 vv. 1-7. p.20.

³² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, 339-401, p. 90.

³³ The Book of Genesis, 1. 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.7.

'solo suppositum' where the body and spirit still have a potential for union in themselves and with the Creator, but rather as fragmented elements that need to be brought into harmony. Hence, when John talks about 'a certain touch of divinity in the soul'³⁵ it is precisely this spiritually disordered condition that God is entering, and He does this by slowly connecting with the inner spiritual reality of the soul. Man's condition before the Fall was one of communion and identification in which he lived his true identity of desire. These characteristic elements are still present, but in severely mutilated forms. The world of obsessional attachments has now become a forum for an experience of identification with other creatures that effectively destroys the possibility of spiritual communion with God.³⁶

The experience of total loving union, towards which all human desire is ultimately oriented, contains, as we have seen, the movement of dynamic mutual self-gift as well as the joy of consummation that comes from total identification with the beloved, a unique blend of the active and passive dimensions of love.³⁷ In the state of sensual addiction where the appetites of the body both possess and are possessed by creatures, the soul, therefore, as the 'solo suppositum' of the body-spirit, lives a caricature, a truncated and distorted imitation of union. The experience of identification does exist but obviously cannot offer the full interaction of mutual self-gift for which the soul craves. The emptiness that naturally follows the lack of fulfilment does initiate new movement but this, of its very nature, is governed by the need to search for more addictive attachments of new unfulfilling objects.³⁸ Desire in the soul is, therefore, trapped in a sterile and enclosed world and is forced to live in a false reality. Moreover, for John, the real evil of the tyranny of sense lies in the effect it has on the rational faculties. Until the loving initiative of God has broken into the closed addictive world, dominated by the senses, the rational faculties have no means of acquiring their transcendent identity as containers for the theological virtues. It is, after all, only through

³⁵ "En tenerlas en cierto toque que se hace del alma en la Divinidad," 2S 26.5. (195/382)

³⁶ "Es porque todas las afecciones que tiene en las criaturas son a delante de Dios puras tinieblas." 1S 4. 1 (77/263)

³⁷ "Esta *pretensión* del alma es la igualdad de amor con Dios que siempre ella natural y sobrenaturalmente apetece, porque el amante no puede estar satisfecho si no siente que ama cuanto es amado." C 38. 3 (553/887)

³⁸ "Porque ésta es la propiedad del que tiene apetitos, que siempre está descontento y desabrido, come el que tiene hambre." 1S 6.3 (85/272)

the transformation of the intellect, memory and will into faith, hope and love that the life of desire within the ‘solo suppositum’ of the soul is able to embrace the mystery of God’s reciprocal loving desire.³⁹ It is this, as we have seen, that enables the soul to experience its true identity in mutual self-gift. John outlines very forcefully that state of the soul that is dominated by the appetites of sense. Movement and change only become possible where the innate desire for creatures, and the appetitive search for gratification, loses its power and rediscovers its creative dynamism in the search for a new mode of being. It is important to note that John, throughout his writings, is referring to the soul who, though living under the dominance of sense, nonetheless still retains a capacity for conversion, and is receptive to the touches of love that initiate new movement and the experience of the soul’s inner world of desire.

Having now pinpointed the deformation of desire and the Christian understanding of its origins, that is exposed, according to John, when the intervention of God’s love sheds light on the obsessive world of desire which prevents movement in the soul, we must now turn our attention to the crucial area of pathology that Winnicott highlights in relation to the maintenance of *continuity of being*. This will assist us in clarifying, in greater detail, the facilitating presence of the transitional object in the process of growth, and will also provide a further parallel between John and Winnicott’s understanding of the development of the authentic self. However, before examining the construction of the False Self more closely, and the damage that is inflicted on the developmental process, one important observation needs to be highlighted.

The False Self in Winnicott

John and Winnicott, as we have seen, operate out of different perspectives. John, when dealing with the soul’s need to be liberated from all obsessional attachments, both of sense and spirit, assumes a universal involvement, in some degree, in the world of moral disorder. From John’s Catholic spiritual perspective

³⁹ “ Porque, como habemos dicho, el alma no se une con Dios en esta vida por el entender, ni por el gozar, ni por el imaginar, ni por otro cualquier sentido, sino sólo por la fe según el entendimiento, y por esperanza según la memoria y por amor según la voluntad.” 2S 6.1. (119/305)

no one is exempt from the effects of original sin and will manifest, in some way, the inheritance of spiritual disorder. With Winnicott, his treatment of the evolution of the False Self and its defences does not have the same unquestioned universal character, and the deformation of *continuity of being*, that results from it, is rooted in a dysfunctional environment that has an interpersonal origin rather than a spiritually universal cause. However, in dealing with the degrees of the False Self, and in his description of the social manifestations of the False Self syndrome, both in the form of intellectual defences and the socially adapted self, there are indications that Winnicott would recognise some form of False Self construct in every individual's experience. Within his own theoretical framework, failure, breakdown of response and disillusionment indicate his willingness to accede to an imperfect reality that does have, in a very specific sense, universal application. However, throughout his treatment of the False Self there is, nonetheless, the implication that its construct is still the exception rather than the rule, and his focus is very much on 'the good-enough environment' and the centrality of the True Self. Bearing this in mind, it is now vital to look more closely at this pathological aspect of human development that can so clearly correspond to John's understanding of the soul in need of redemption.

The False Self construct, which of its very nature, is defensive, comes into existence when the primary maternal environment is 'not good-enough'. This will have resulted in the activation of the anxiety affect induced by the threat of annihilation and referred to in Khan's description of the self, quoted earlier. In Winnicott's words, it is 'a defence, a defence against that which is unthinkable, the exploitation of the True Self, which would result in annihilation.'⁴⁰ This threat of annihilation and the resulting anxiety will have been produced by destructive impingements, that is, disruptive experiences that have impacted on the core self of the baby. Where the ego support system of the mother creates a holding environment that keeps these impingements to a minimum then the infant is slowly able to respond in a way that does not disrupt the *continuity of being*. However, when the maternal support is deficient or even non-existent the baby, as Winnicott says, 'does not really come into existence, since there is no continuity: instead the

⁴⁰ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p.145.

personality becomes built on the basis of reaction to environmental impingement'.⁴¹

In its most extreme form the fragmentation that results leads to serious mental ill-health, such as latent schizophrenia. Where it is less serious, 'impingements' may be met and dealt with by the ego organisation, which gathers them into the infant's omnipotence where they are sensed as projections.⁴² What then results is a 'new degree and quality in the hiding of the central self. In this respect, the last defence is the organisation of the False Self,'⁴³ which comes into existence through fear since it is 'a defence against that which is unthinkable, the exploitation of the True Self, which would result in its annihilation.'⁴⁴ The False Self also comes into existence through necessity since a person has to live with environmental and relational demands which will initiate personal development. Survival is the key concept which governs these two aspects of the False Self, and survival finds its natural expression in compliance, and as Winnicott says: 'compliance is then the main feature, with imitation a speciality. When the degree of the split in the infant's person is not too great there may be some almost personal living through imitation.'⁴⁵

The need for survival and a compliant existence does not, however, totally destroy the potential of the True Self from rediscovering its potential for growth. Winnicott, as we have seen, classifies the False Self organisation into five categories. In all of them, even the first and most extreme where 'the True Self is hidden',⁴⁶ change and the implicit deconstruction of the False Self is possible, since in all of them the True Self is allowed its existence. In the second category Winnicott states, 'the True Self is, however, acknowledged as a potential and is allowed a secret life.'⁴⁷ In the third 'the False Self has as its main

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 46

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.47

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*.

concern a search for the True Self to come into its own.⁴⁸ The True or central Self, therefore, which has been unable to thrive, initially, through the mother's inability to respond to the baby's spontaneous impulses and, subsequently, through the construction of the False Self, nevertheless remains alive with a potential for growth, however muted and undernourished. This is of vital importance where the possibility of movement and transformation are considered which can only be realised when the False Self defences are in no way threatened, but, rather are allowed the opportunity for gradual transformation into containing structures that have acquired a new relationship with the True Self. The False Self is, after all, a substitute, a false personality whose existence can only be dissolved by the growing presence of the True Self, through the release of *continuity of being* that activates 'the inherited potential'. It cannot be removed from without but only from the new sense of identity that is developing from within the person, and it is precisely here that the transitional object plays a key role.

John's and Winnicott's Treatment of Disorder

Both John and Winnicott are dealing with the human condition where a split has established itself at the centre of the personal experience of self and relationships with others. For John, attachment to creatures deprives the person of access to union with God that can only be achieved once they are connected with the spiritual self. Desire can then truly experience its energy and dynamism through the power of transformation, most specifically in the rational faculties. John's description of a life dominated by the appetites 'wearisome and tiring to a man, because they agitate and disturb him just as wind does with water,'⁴⁹ creates a picture of existence that does genuinely coincide with that of the False Self of Winnicott who sees it accompanied by 'a sense of futility in regard to false living, and a constant search for the life that feels real, even if it leads to death, as by starvation.'⁵⁰ When the life of the False Self is

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁴⁹ "Cánsase y fatígase el alma con sus apetitos, porque es herida y movida y turbada de ellos como el agua de los vientos." 1S 6.6 (86/272)

⁵⁰ Winnicott, Donald W., *Human Nature*, London. Free Association Books , 1988. p. 108.

split off from the experience of everyday reality, and the *continuity of being* is deprived of the opportunities it needs to be engaged with the healthy development of authentic personal identity, an individual is condemned to live a false reality existence where honesty and truth must be subordinated to the need for compliant security. Likewise for John, when a person is blinded by his appetites, ‘when he is in the midst of the truth and of what is suitable for him, he no more sees it than if he were in the dark.’⁵¹

The Emergence of the True Self

As we now return to Winnicott the task that now confronts us is to examine more closely all the different strands of experience that enable the transitional object the opportunities that it needs to begin initiating growth where the False Self is protecting the existence of the True Self, the bearer of *continuity of being*. In his work, *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott makes this important observation, ‘one has to allow for the possibility that there cannot be a complete destruction of a human individual’s capacity for creative living and that even in the most extreme case of compliance and the establishment of the false personality, hidden away somewhere there exists a secret life that is satisfactory, because of its being creative or original to that human being.’⁵² In this statement Winnicott refers to a secret hidden life, creative and original, that continues to exist even in the face of False Self defences. This is possible since according to Winnicott, ‘this hidden life, which is the presence of the True Self, has its origins in what he describes as the ‘Primary Process’, the aliveness of the body tissues and the working of the body-functions, including the heart’s action and breathing.’⁵³ He designates it ‘Primary’ because it is the state of existing which is prior to the state of being that is reactive to external stimuli. In other words, it is the most basic form of existence that is synonymous with life itself within the individual.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “Puesto en medio de la verdad y de lo que le conviene, no lo echa más de ver si estuviera en tinieblas.” IS 8.7. (91/278)

⁵² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 68.

⁵³ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 148.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44

The True Self begins to develop when two concurrent experiences are present. The first is when the infant begins to relate to external reality on the most primitive level in a way that is integrated with the natural bodily processes. The second is when the infant begins to react to external stimuli without experiencing a trauma because the stimuli have a counterpart in the inner psychic reality.⁵⁵ Good-enough mothering is precisely the responsive kind of maternal care that fits in with these two fundamental conditions and enables the True Self to respond by enjoying the capacity for omnipotence.⁵⁶ It is this that then sets off a developmental process that enables the True Self to have life. When it is absent and there is a non-correspondence with the psychic reality, particularly in its earliest and most fragile stage of development, the False Self is constructed. However, Winnicott is clear that in spite of the trauma the True Self does, in fact, exist but waits for the opportunity to grow.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the False Self, even in its most extreme form, always retains its potential for disintegration. As Winnicott says, ‘in living relationships, work relationships, and friendships the False Self begins to fail.’⁵⁸

Since the True Self is established in the ‘Primary Process’ and will have some kind of inner experience, however primitive or fleeting, of a containing environment – here it might even be necessary to direct this sensation to the foetal experience in the womb – there is always the potential for feeling real, and as a consequence, creative. Winnicott refers to the case of one of his patients, who through the analytic process was able to begin her life, and he says, ‘My patient...came near to the end of a long analysis, to the beginning of her life.’⁵⁹ She was able to feel real for the first time and found herself wanting to live. Winnicott had been able to offer a relationship in which his responses to his patient had corresponded in some way to her inner psychic reality and thus had enabled her to connect with her desire to be creative. Now what is interesting is that he did this by first striking up a relationship with the False Self, what his

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

patient called the 'Caretaker Self'⁶⁰, who gradually handed over to him the needs of the patient and, in so doing, allowed him to connect with the True Self. Thus, for significant change to take place, where there is present a False Self preventing the True Self from discovering its creativity, a relationship that begins to provide some elements of what we see in the 'good-enough' mother must be present. Defining it more specifically, there must be a relationship that somehow provides some accuracy in the form of stimuli that relate to the inner psychic reality. However, this will only be effective when the False Self is not threatened but is acknowledged in a way that can begin to depotentiate its rigor. It has come into existence as a response to the threat of annihilation and drawn its strength from the continual presence of existential anxiety. Where relationships, in their sustained response, begin to dissolve this state of fear the False Self can begin to allow the True Self greater freedom and this will mean a release of its creative drive.⁶¹ It is at this point that the transitional object can play its significant role.

Under normal circumstances, where the 'good-enough' mothering has not resulted in the formation of the False Self, the transitional experience with the acquisition of a loved object and the initiation into the 'intermediate space' will be a relatively straightforward affair.⁶² The disillusionment and reintegration of the illusory omnipotent drive to create and re-create will find its focus in the transitional object that offers the context for creative development. This will take place within the continuing framework of the original relationship that is undergoing continuing modification. When a False Self construct is present, the contours of the growth process, although similar, obviously must take into account the absence of the dependable maternal environment and the necessity of finding appropriate substitutes. Winnicott makes this clear when describing the treatment of maladjusted children, where he states, 'There must be someone for the object (transitional) to stand for, which means that the condition of these children cannot be cured simply by giving them a new object. A child may, however, grow to such confidence in the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁶² Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, pp. 231-232.

person who is caring for him or her that objects that are deeply symbolical of the person will appear.’⁶³

This relational process can, however, only play this antecedent note to the transitional object if it has been able to connect in some way with the child’s inner psychic reality and release the *continuity of being* which is always experienced through a sense of aliveness and desire to be creative.⁶⁴ It is when this takes place and the True Self is activated, in such a way that fear of annihilation is diminished, the power of the False Self defence is then greatly reduced. This frees the omnipotence of the True Self to experience its illusory sense of continuity, which can then undergo the process of modification that leads to object relationship.⁶⁵ On a final note, it is important to remember that the False Self protects the True Self through relational techniques that are based on compliance and imitation. As Winnicott says, ‘the infant builds up a false set of relationships, and by means of introjections even attains a show of being real, so that the child may grow to be just like the mother, nurse, aunt, brother or whoever at the time dominates the scene.’⁶⁶ We can, therefore, well understand that within the context of one of these imitative relationships the False Self is then caught off its guard, and the desire within the True Self to feel real exerts itself and finds genuine connection that precipitates growth.

Liberation of Desire in the Life of the Soul

The question that must now be asked, at this stage, is this: Is it possible to locate any parallel process within the life of the soul that is either related to John’s thinking, or forms part of it, thus mirroring, in some degree, the existence of a potential maternal substitute who is able to connect with the infant’s inner psychic reality and so activate the *continuity of being*, enabling the transitional object to exercise its meaningful function? As we have just seen, in his description of the ‘Primary Process’, Winnicott

⁶³ Winnicott, Donald W., *Deprivation and Delinquency*, Hove, Brunner-Routledge, , 2000, p. 187

⁶⁴ Winnicott, Donald W., *Home is Where We Start From*, London, Penguin Books, 1990, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. p. 149

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

highlights the fundamental state of the human organism that is poised to receive external stimuli that initiate the experiential state of being. It is when these stimuli are received, both physically and psychologically, that growth is initiated and the infant truly comes alive, and this is particularly related to the infant's engagement with its inner psychic reality that is fundamental to the development of True Self identity. If we look for some kind of equivalent to Winnicott's understanding of the infant in the 'Primary Process', in the teaching of John, we will find it in the very essence of the soul that, through its very creation, as we have seen referred to in the Book of Genesis, is inclined to seek for identification and communion with 'the other', in God. John, as we know, recognises that when desire in the person, generated by these existential needs, is either ignored, misappropriated or misdirected, it cannot grow in its authentic identity and is then suffocated by a false reality.

Now movement, in the soul for John, is always initiated by the experience of desire in God penetrating and challenging the world of desire in the soul. The stimulus for change in the direction of this desire is first and foremost an internal experience of the touch of God's love.⁶⁷ What is needed is a responsive context, physically and personally, that can prepare the soul for the process of movement towards true authentic fulfilment, enabling it to respond to God's loving initiative which alone can redirect deformed desire and enable it to undergo life-giving transformation. This, like the 'good-enough' maternal holding environment, will normally be found in the nurturing faith environment of immediate family relationships, namely, parents, siblings and close relatives, who all make up the domestic faith community that holds the child in its primary spiritual encounter with God's loving desire for union. When this fails, the substitutional framework will then be found in the necessary ecclesial and communal contexts that will be comprised of teachers, spiritual directors and appropriate role models who can bring alive the essence of the Sacred Scripture and religious writings that will be a source of nourishment and

⁶⁷ "Y así estos actos de amor del alma son preciosísimos, y merece más en uno y vale más que cuanto había hecho en toda su vida sin esta transformación, por más que ello fuese." L. 1.3. (580/917)

support.⁶⁸ As John makes clear, interior illumination must always be reflected in some degree through external verification that is consonant with the life of the Church, a truth that has always been recognised by the ecclesial community.⁶⁹ It is the combination of the interior and exterior sources of illumination that can stimulate the fundamental desire for fulfilment while at the same time clarifying the means to be taken to achieve it. Furthermore, it is the wider faith community that presents the living figure of Christ as the one Who alone has the power to facilitate the flow of desire, through all the stages of transformation, that lead to the true meaning of self identity. This is powerfully illustrated where John exhorts his readers, ‘First have a 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.’⁷⁰

This figure of Christ, for John, is the central role model that links the internal and external world of the soul as He rises directly out of the Sacred Scriptures that have a personal, as well as a communal, significance. It is this combination of stimuli that impels the fundamental desire in the soul to seek fulfilment and surrender to the process that will bring it to fruition.⁷¹ It is also here, furthermore, that we see a definite analogy between the mother substitute preparing the way for the transitional object, through which *continuity of being* finds its momentum, and the nurturing faith context that introduces the figure of Christ Who likewise becomes the means of focusing the flow of desire within the soul, enabling it, like the transitional object in Winnicott, to find true fulfilment. On a final note, we must always remember that the movement of desire within the soul, for John, is never in question, however distorted it might become, just as the potential for True Self identity, rooted in *continuity of being*, in Winnicott, is never denied its

⁶⁸ John’s general references to the Church, Sacred Scriptures, spiritual directors and confessors in the Prologue, Ascent to Mount Carmel (70-71/256-257)

⁶⁹ “Para dar a entender que no quiere Dios que ninguno a solas se crea para sí las cosas que tiene por de Dios, ni se conforme ni afirme en ellas sin la Iglesia o sus ministros.” 2S 22. 11 (183/370)

⁷⁰ “Lo primero, traiga un ordinario apetito de imitar a Cristo en todas sus cosas, conformándose con su vida, la cual debe considerar para saberla imitar y haberse en todas las cosas como se hubiera él.” (Io 13,15) 1S 13.3. (102/289)

⁷¹ “El que no busca la cruz de Cristo no busca la Gloria de Cristo. (cf. Phil. 3, 18-19)” Dichos de luz y amor. (675. 23/ 101. 166)

existence. As we will later see in more detail, the momentum of desire intensifies as it undergoes purification and finds in its transformation the authentic source of its meaning.

Reflections

It will be helpful, at this stage, to pause briefly, to clarify what we have been able to establish so far in this comparative reflection relating to John's understanding of the presence of desire in the soul, and Winnicott's concept of *continuity of being* that holds 'the inherited potential' of the individual. Both desire and *continuity of being* contain at their centres a movement towards a specific form of fulfilment. Desire in John centres on loving union and identification, which is rooted in the very essence of the soul that is destined to find total fulfilment in the exchange of love in the Trinity. *Continuity of being*, that holds 'the inherited potential' of the individual, is a movement that ultimately finds its fulfilment in a sense of aliveness and being creative that unfolds in the creation of relationships with others. We have examined the presence of deformation in desire and the experience of *continuity of being*, respectively, with regard to the existence of the world of inherited Evil and Original Sin and its effects on the soul, and the experience of failure in the maternal environment-individual set-up that has resulted in exposure to the destabilisation of gross impingements in the life of the infant. These, as we have seen, thus become, on the one hand, the origins of a life of sensual addictive attractions for the soul, that according to John, renders true spiritual growth impossible, and on the other, the formation of the False Self defence that Winnicott sees as the major source of prevention for the flourishing of True Self identity in freedom and growth.

It is here that it has been possible to identify a certain congruence of themes in both writers, in substitutional figures and supportive settings, that provide restitutive experiences both for the soul, immersed in false and destructive attachments, and the individual trapped in the defensive structure of the False Self identity. In John, we have seen this manifested in the supportive ecclesial community in its

teachings and nurturing relationships which have prepared the soul for its transformatory encounter with the loving desire in God, reaching into the very depths of its inner identity. In Winnicott, it is through the presence of the maternal substitutes, who have been able to touch the inner psychic reality of the individual, free up the flow of *continuity of being*, and thus facilitate the continued emergence of True Self identity. Finally, it is within these experiences of regeneration that two creative contexts are then offered that can shape the momentum of growth facilitating the respective searches for fulfilment and the holding together of the demands of inner and outer reality; the first is the figure of Christ for the soul and the second is the transitional object for the infant/individual. We will now explore how these contexts enable growth to take place and, specifically, how the energy, that kindles movement and development, is generated.

The Process of Purification in John

It is the task of the active power of God's love to free the soul from attachments, both physical and spiritual, in order to release the flow of its desire, enabling it to carry the soul into the heart of the Trinity. Just as the de-adaptation of the mother's response to the child initiates the process of disillusionment and the abrogation of omnipotence, so too the touch of God's love sets in motion the challenge of renunciation in a conscious physical sense. This elicits explicit rejection of all that John considers harmful to the soul's capacity to receive the gift of love, and as he says, 'the preparation for this union, as we said, is not an understanding by the soul, nor the taste, feeling or imagining of God, or any other object, but purity and love, which is the stripping off and perfect renunciation of all these experiences for God alone.⁷² It is, hence, appropriate to cite the maxims for mortifying and pacifying the passions which begin with the instruction:

'Endeavour to be inclined always:

⁷² " De aquí queda ahora más claro que la disposición para esta unión.....no es el entender del alma, ni gustar, ni sentir, ni imaginar de Dios ni de otra cualquiera cosa, sino la pureza y amor, que es desnudez y resignación perfecta de lo uno y de lo otro sólo por Dios." 2S 5.8. (118/304).

not to the easiest, but to the most difficult;

not to the most delightful, but to the harshest...'⁷³

It is these maxims that support John's clear distinctions to all beginners of the spiritual journey: 'First try to act with contempt for yourself and desire that all others do likewise. Second, endeavour to speak in contempt of yourself and desire all others to do so. Third, try to think lowly and contemptuously of yourself and desire that all others do the same.'⁷⁴ John's vision of the authentic emergence of the full identity of the self in Christ is that of a complete metamorphosis of the soul that begins to occur when the soul is 'placed by God in this night.'⁷⁵ by God Himself. From the very start the soul contains, to use a Winnicottian phrase, a de-adaptation component, expressed through renunciation, in relation to its initial concrete relationship to the world of sense and feeling. This drive to renounce obsessive involvement with the world of sense is understood, right from the start, as having both active and passive dimensions initiated and supported by the loving presence of God.⁷⁶ These processes of growth, which already hold the seeds of the fullness of communion, will eventually come to completion in the total identification of love between the soul and God. For John, this 'sheer grace', which elicits the co-operation of the person through active involvement, already bears within it the power to transform the drive to renounce destructive attachments into an attitude of surrender, which is achieved through the gift of faith.⁷⁷

John refers to a willingness in the soul to do all it can to allow God's grace to work in it, which is then complemented by the action of God Himself: 'the soul must empty itself perfectly and voluntarily – I mean in its affect and will – of all the earthly and heavenly things it can grasp. It must through its own

⁷³ "Procure siempre inclinarse:

No a lo más fácil, sino a los más dificultoso;

No a lo más sabroso, sino a lo más desabrido." 1S 13.6. (102/289).

⁷⁴ "Lo primero, procurare obrar en su desprecio y desear que todos lo hagan ... Lo Segundo, procurar hablar en su desprecio y desear que todos lo hagan...Lo tercero, procurare pensar bajamente de sí en su desprecio y desear que todos lo hagan..." 1S 13. 9. (103/290).

⁷⁵ "Y esto fue *dichosa ventura*, meterla Dios en esta noche." 1S 1.5. (74/259)

⁷⁶ "De donde se le siguió tanto bien, en la cual ella no atinara a entrar, porque no atina bien uno por sí solo a vaciarse de todos los apetitos para venir a Dios." 1S 1. 5. (74/259)

⁷⁷ "Lo cual nunca el alma por sí misma pudiera conseguir...haciéndola Dios desfallecer [y desnudar} en esta manera a todo lo que no es Dios naturalmente...va Dios hacienda y obrando en ella por medio de esta noche, ilustrándola e inflamándola divinamente con ansias de sólo Dios." 2S 13.11. (361/555)

efforts empty itself in so far as it can. As for God, who will stop Him from accomplishing His desires in the soul that is resigned, annihilated, and despoiled?’⁷⁸ Spiritual growth involves this complementary movement of purification that begins to become more and more the work of God within the soul. What is crucial for this process of transition is the advent of contemplation in the individual’s life of prayer. By gradually disengaging a person from meditation, where active involvement of the imagination and the senses contributes to an activity based on a response to God’s loving initiative, the soul is drawn into a place of passive receptivity. It is then, as John tells us that, ‘the work is done in the soul and the knowledge and delight is already produced, than that the soul does anything, besides attentively loving God and refraining from the desire to feel or see anything.’⁷⁹

Initially this call ‘to remain in God’s presence with a loving attention and a tranquil intellect’⁸⁰ is presented by John as a gentle introduction to a new state of being with God. His description of the ‘divine calm and peace with a wondrous sublime knowledge of God, enveloped in divine love,’⁸¹ infusing the soul, seen in isolation, can appear to be a very beguiling description of what in fact is a momentous development in the life of the soul. This state of contemplation is the forum in which the most radical engagement of the soul with the essential nature of its own being, and that of God Himself, experiences a relationship where communion and identification discover the dynamic harmony for which the soul craves. Contemplation is in a real sense that intermediate space where the depth of this yearning is existentially revealed to the soul as it discovers its own place in the heart of the Triune God.

⁷⁸ “Ha de vaciarse de todo lo que puede caer en ella perfectamente y voluntariamente, ahora sea de arriba, ahora de abajo, según el afecto, digo y voluntad, en cuanto es de su parte; porque a Dios, quien le quitará que El no haga lo que quisiere en el alma resignada, anihilada y desnuda?” 2S 4.2 (112/298)

⁷⁹ “que entonces antes es verdad decir que se obra en ella y que está obrada la inteligencia y sabor, que no que obre ella alguna cosa, sino solamente tener advertencia el alma con amar a Dios sin querer sentir ni ver nada.” 2S 15.2. (148/335)

⁸⁰ “Aprenda el espiritual a estarse con advertencia amorosa en Dios con sosiego de entendimiento.” 2S 15. 5. (149/336)

⁸¹ “Se infundirá en su alma el divino sosiego y paz con admirables y subidas noticias de Dios, envueltas en divino amor;” *Ibid.*

Renunciation and Contemplative Prayer

Renunciation of sense experiences, therefore, prepares the soul for its entry into the contemplative state, and this works in tandem with the instruction of the person by God ‘through discursive meditation and through forms, images and sensible means, according to the individual’s own manner of acquiring knowledge.’⁸² The contemplative ‘transitional space’ of prayer carries this dialectic of renunciation and instruction into the very heart of the soul’s existence. Contemplative prayer is the context where the rational faculties are transformed in a way that enables God to reveal His presence within the very centre of human desire, and this means that the rational faculties, intellect, memory and will, must, in their natural functioning, have to undergo an annihilation.⁸³ In one of his most famous descriptions of this process John states, ‘one has to follow the method of disencumbering, emptying and depriving the faculties of their natural rights and operations to make room for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural.’⁸⁴ John is aware that this language could imply that the process of growth is purely negative, ‘it will perhaps seem that we are tearing down rather than building up the way of spiritual exercise.’⁸⁵ However, this rigorous disciplinary approach must be seen within its spiritually enhancing context if it is to be understood as John intended.

Purgation (in its initial stages) contains within it a violence, a destructiveness, that is not openly stated but is, nonetheless, present. As we have seen, John instructs his readers to ‘make progress only through the imitation of Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.’⁸⁶ The figure of Christ is one who brought about ‘the reconciliation and union of the human race with God through grace...at the moment in which

⁸² “ La lleva primero instruyéndo [la] por formas y imágenes y vías sensibles a su modo de entender .” 2S 17. 3. (156/342)

⁸³ “ Porque, viendo cómo anhilamos,” 3S 2.1 (214/403)

⁸⁴ “ Conviene ir por este estilo desembarazando y vaciando y haciendo negar a las potencias su jurisdicción natural y operaciones, para que se dé lugar a que sean infundidas e ilustradas de lo sobrenatural.” 3S 2.2. (215/403).

⁸⁵ “ quizá le parecerá que antes destruimos el camino del ejercicio espiritual que le edificamos,” 3S 2.1. (214/403).

⁸⁶ “Porque el aprovechar no se halla sino imitando a Cristo, que es *el camino y la verdad y la vida.*” 2S 7. 8. (124/310).

He was most annihilated in all things,⁸⁷ and as John then points out, ‘that the true spiritual person might understand...that his union with God and the greatness of the work he accomplishes will be measured by his annihilation for God in the sensory and spiritual parts of his soul.’⁸⁸ Understood within this Christological context, the forceful and violent element of purgation leads to ‘the most noble and sublime state attainable in this life’⁸⁹ since the interior death of the Cross leads supernaturally to the ecstasy of the Resurrection. Violence is placed at the service of growth in love where the narcissism of human desire is transformed into self-gift, and it is here that renunciation discovers its life-giving mode of expression in surrender. The renunciation of sensory gratification and the voiding of the faculties, as they are transformed into the theological virtues, therefore, enable the soul to reach a new level of receptivity to the reciprocal desire in God Himself for communion and identification with the soul.

For John, it is this relational context that enables the True Self identity of the person to be discovered. It is the place where autonomy and freedom are clarified as the person experiences a sharper differentiation of self and ‘the other’ in mystical union. What is important to note here is that the objects of purification, the senses and the rational faculties, are purified in such a way that they are able to exist in a totally new form. The spiritual faculties, having been voided and purified of their contents, continue to ‘abide in the darkness of these three virtues, which are the means and the preparation for the soul’s union with God.’⁹⁰ The sensory and lower part of the soul is, ‘reformed, purified, and brought into conformity with the spiritual part...participates according to its capacity in the goods the soul now possesses.’⁹¹ The senses and faculties, that go to make up the ‘solo suppositum’, as they are integrated into the new configuration of desire and self identity, in Christ, can, therefore, be initiated into the service of the transformatory

⁸⁷ “Que fue reconciliar y unir al género humano por gracia con Dios....al tiempo y punto que este Señor estuvo más anihilado en todo.” 2S 7.11. (124/311).

⁸⁸ “Para que entienda el buen espiritual...que cuanto más se anihilarse por Dios según estas dos partes, sensitiva y espiritual, tanto más se une a Dios y tanto mayor obra hace.” *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ “El mayor y más alto estado a que en esta vida se puede llegar.” *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ “Y se queden puestas en la oscuridad destas tres virtudes, que son el medio, como habemos dicho, y disposición para la unión del alma con Dios.” 2S 6.6 (120/306-307).

⁹¹ “Que ya está la parte sensitiva e inferior reformada y purificada, y que está conformada con la parte espiritual...porque aun de los ahora tiene participa según su capacidad.” C 40.1. (563/897)

process in a way that no longer leads to fragmentation but union with God in love. We will now at this stage return to Winnicott who, as we will see, also deals with the theme of aggression within the context of his understanding of relational development. As with John, it will become apparent that aggression can truly discover a creative energising function when put at the service of the innate drive for authentic fulfilment in the human subject.

Aggression in the Developmental Process in Winnicott

True Self identity can only be fully realised where the reality of the Me and Not-Me polarity has been established. As we have seen, for Winnicott, healthy relationships must always manifest a certain degree of fusion between eros and aggression.⁹² Winnicott recognised that this primary aggression originally manifests itself in a ruthlessness in the infant towards the mother since ‘the normal child enjoys a ruthless relation to his mother, mostly showing in play.’⁹³ It is part of the experience of instinctive love, and as Winnicott states, ‘this love is originally a form of impulse, gesture, contact relationship, and it affords the infant the satisfaction of self-expression and release from instinct tension.’⁹⁴ The task, therefore, that faces every infant is the challenge of becoming aware of its aggression, the effects it has on the maternal relationship, and the necessity of finding a way of responding creatively to it. This can only happen when the infant has developed the capacity to relate to an external object that it not only recognises as being outside its omnipotent control but can also actually experience the state of separation as the true manifestation of reality.⁹⁵ This comes, according to Winnicott, only when a capacity to use objects has been developed, and object usage, which is instinctively involved in the whole experience of creativity, can only occur when the ‘vast capacity for destruction’⁹⁶ in the infant has undergone considerable transformation. In the initial stages of object relating there will always be projective mechanisms and

⁹² Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 217.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 154

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁹⁵ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. pp. 181-182.

⁹⁶ Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency*, pp. 87-88.

identifications that have been enhanced through ‘some degree of physical involvement (however slight) towards excitement.’⁹⁷ In order for an object to be used ‘it must necessarily be real in the sense of being part of a shared reality, not a bundle of projections.’⁹⁸ This can only be accomplished through a sequence of internal events that Winnicott says clearly ‘is the most difficult thing, perhaps, in human development; or the most irksome of all the early failures that come for mending.’⁹⁹ It is a change that enables the subject to perceive the object as an entity in its own right, and not as he puts it, ‘as a projective entity,’¹⁰⁰ and this involves the destruction of the object by the subject.

According to Winnicott, when he is dealing with the developmental importance of aggression within the infant, ‘it is the aggressive component that more surely drives the individual to a need for a Not-Me or an object that is felt to be external.’¹⁰¹ Furthermore the aggressive impulses do not give any satisfactory experience unless there is opposition. The opposition must come from the environment, from the Not-Me, which gradually comes to be distinguished from the Me.¹⁰² The satisfactory nature of the development of aggression is rooted, for Winnicott, in the primary maternal environment where it is the interaction with the breast that introduces the child to the whole challenge of externality. It initiates the infant into the oppositional encounter where ‘the destruction of the breast has become a fixture. I mean the actual impulse to destroy.’¹⁰³ However, it is the following statement that carries the most significant import: ‘It is an important part of what a mother does, to be the first person to take the baby through this first version of the many that will be encountered, of attack that is survived.’¹⁰⁴ This is made possible through her dual role as environmental mother and object mother. She it is, who provides the living context, as we have seen, for eros and aggression to begin the lifelong task of fusion and the opportunity

⁹⁷ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 88.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.89.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p.215.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p. 215

¹⁰³ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

for the child to experience the emotional evolution from guilt through reparation to concern. This can enable a toleration of destructive impulses to grow as they become part of a constructive process of growth. Now, as Winnicott clearly states, 'To be able to tolerate all that one may find in one's inner reality is one of the great human difficulties, and an important human aim is to bring into harmonious relationship one's personal inner and outer realities.'¹⁰⁵ This is where the necessity of clarifying the Me and Not-Me mode of being resides, and the acquisition of the ability to use objects consolidates this vital aspect of the maturational process.

Winnicott is quite clear that the capacity for destruction in the infant is vast but, as he puts it, 'it is also true that he has a vast capacity for protecting what he loves from his own destructiveness, and the main destruction must always exist in his fantasy.'¹⁰⁶ The experience of the mother's survival of the primitive onslaughts, stimulated by the appetitive drives and growing oppositional awareness in the infant, provides a symbolic paradigm for the imaginative representation of the surviving object.¹⁰⁷ She enables the extraordinary interaction to take place between aggression and love when she remains the same after sustaining the destructiveness of primary aggression, when she 'does not retaliate by rejection or punishment,'¹⁰⁸ but, rather, continues 'to be herself, to be empathetic towards the infant, to be there to receive the spontaneous gesture, and to be pleased.'¹⁰⁹ This concrete experience of survival of a cathected object sets in motion the particular formation of the object relationships where differentiation between the individual and the external object is achieved precisely through the destruction of the object in fantasy. Winnicott in a truly memorable passage states, 'A new feature thus arrives in the theory of object relating. The subject says to the object: 'I destroyed you', and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: 'Hullo object!' 'I destroyed you' 'I love you.' 'You have value for me

¹⁰⁵ Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁷ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁸ Abram., Jan, *The Language of Winnicott, A Dictionary of Winnicott's Use of Words* London, Karnac, 2007, p. 34.

¹⁰⁹ Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency*, p. 103.

because of your survival of my destruction of you.’ ‘While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy.’¹¹⁰ He then adds that, both in a subjective and objective way, omnipotent control no longer characterises the nature of the relationship since ‘the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives) contributes-in to the subject, according to its own properties.’¹¹¹ The use then of the object as an entity, totally distinct from the subject and its projected inner world, both reinforces its ‘otherness’, becoming a tangible expression of the Me and Not-Me experience, and at the same time, releases its capacity to bridge the inner and outer worlds of the individual, having undergone its metamorphosis in the inner world of psychic transformation.

The Intermediate Space

This recognition of the place and importance of primary aggression that constantly seeks to find expression, particularly in relation to external objects, expands and enriches our understanding of the intermediate space and the presence of the transitional object. The survival of the transitional object facilitates the process of self-differentiation where the Me and Not-Me experience can be clarified without external interference. The ‘intermediate area’, as Winnicott says, ‘is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is ‘lost’ in play,’¹¹² and playing, for Winnicott, ‘leads on naturally to cultural experience and indeed forms its foundation.’¹¹³ Aggression, for all human beings, is a constant factor that has to be negotiated because it brings together the reality of the external world and the interior reality of the instinctual experience.¹¹⁴ In one of his broadcast talks for the BBC Winnicott, when talking about the phenomenon of child play, referred to the place of aggression in the child’s experience of playing. Acknowledging the partial truth that children have to work off hate and aggression in play ‘as if

¹¹⁰ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 90.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 241.

¹¹³ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 106.

¹¹⁴ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis* p. 215.

aggression were some bad substance that could be got rid of,'¹¹⁵ he then points out the positive value that experience holds, when he says, 'But it is more important to state...that the child values finding that hate or aggressive urges can be expressed in a known environment without the return of hate and violence from the environment to the child.'¹¹⁶ It is this that can facilitate a gradual toleration of aggression and from this Winnicott cites the emergence of what he calls 'the alternative to destruction, and a very important one. This is construction.'¹¹⁷

We have already noted Winnicott's observance that, although the capacity for destruction in the child is vast, so is the capacity for protecting what he loves from destruction.¹¹⁸ Playing that can incorporate a growing awareness of the importance of symbols, through the experience of transitional objects and the early stages of a dynamic integration of inner psychic reality with the demands of the external world, facilitates 'the growing child's personal acceptance of responsibility for the destructive side of his or her nature... is something that cannot be implanted, anymore than trust can be implanted.'¹¹⁹ This will happen when playing can provide a continuation of the earliest experience of the transformation of the destructiveness that is powered by the instinctual drives, creating deep anxiety in the infant when directed towards the mother, the holding environment. As Winnicott points, out when this anxiety is 'allayed by the contribution to the environment mother...for giving and making reparation that the environment-mother offers by her reliable presence,'¹²⁰ the potential feelings of guilt are modified and are replaced by 'concern.' Playing is constructive, in a deeply personal sense, when it offers opportunities, not just for the child but for the adult, where 'contributing-in,'¹²¹ the chance to participate in the satisfaction of another person's needs, is incorporated into the play. This can provide an opportunity for the child, and later on the adult, to experience the fusion of the erotic and aggressive drives in a concrete situation related

¹¹⁵ Winnicott, Donald W. *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*, London Penguin Books, 1991, p. 143.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143

¹¹⁷ Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency*, p. 96.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

specifically to the nurturing of relationship.

When discussing the theory of play, Winnicott naturally understands its origin in ‘the hide and seek’ nature of the exchange between mother and baby, where ‘the mother (or part of mother) is in a ‘to and fro’ between being that which the baby has a capacity to find and (alternatively) being herself waiting to be found.’¹²² This, as Winnicott puts it, enables the baby ‘to enjoy the experiences based on a ‘marriage’ of the omnipotence of intra psychic processes with the baby’s control of the actual.’¹²³ These fundamental elements are always going to be present in future relationships, waiting to be modified. The transitional object, as we have seen, plays a pivotal role in the process of transition from absolute to relative dependence that strengthens self identity. Constructive playing expands the ‘interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects,’¹²⁴ and offers the opportunity of placing these important functional aspects of growth within a personal context that can lead to friendship. ‘Play’ as Winnicott says ‘provides an organisation for the initiation of emotional relationships, and so enables social contacts to develop.’¹²⁵ It can naturally bring together ‘bodily functioning and the aliveness of ideas,’ thereby facilitating the drive for psycho-somatic unity which forms, as we have seen, the basis of ‘creativity and feeling real.’¹²⁶ As relationships are formed in recreation that can allow for this interplay between the inner psychic reality and the external world, greater clarity in the perception of self in relation to others can be achieved, in a way that does not threaten or destroy intimacy, but enhances it. In Winnicott’s words, play that is creative can enable the individual to experience ‘separation without separation,’¹²⁷ a description that enables the reality of the incommunicado self, while remaining protected, to be acknowledged in a way that does not negate communication with external reality.

¹²² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 47.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Winnicott, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*, p. 145.

¹²⁶ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 244.

¹²⁷ Winnicott, *The Child the Family and the Outside World*, p. 146.

Emergence of Self Identity in John and Winnicott

What will have become clear by now is that for both Winnicott and John the emergence of self identity is, in both cases, a transformatory process that reaches into the very depths of the person and is an ongoing experience. Both authors carefully delineate an emergence of self-awareness that combines a growing freedom to relate to 'the other' with an internal reconfiguration of instincts and desires, and it is through this combination that a true sense of fulfilment is to be found. Both recognise the fundamental importance of a highly responsive containing environment which is able to facilitate the necessary growth process. In Winnicott, it is, initially, the presence of the mother and/or the mother substitute, who is then taken up into the transitional object, and subsequently creates for the child the opportunities for moving through the successive phases of transition.¹²⁸ For John, the eternal love that God has for the soul is always the ultimate context for movement and growth, however, it is always supported by and made tangible through the immediate family setting and the wider ecclesial environment, the living contexts in which conversion and the interior journey of faith can take place.¹²⁹

At a deeper level we have seen the presence of a motivating energy that both authors highlight in their own particular way and which underpins the emergence of an authentic self. In Winnicott it is *continuity of being* that enables the creative core of 'the inherited potential' to find expression in the growing ability to enjoy objective relationships.¹³⁰ This will involve the development, within the person, of the capacity to relate to external reality, a process that will result in a creative use of the aggressive instincts and the need to experience their integration in the growth process that we saw taking place in the partial fusion of eros and aggression.¹³¹ With John, it is the corresponding presence of desire which becomes the living

¹²⁸ Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 80, See also p. 85.

¹²⁹ "Que no quiere Dios que ninguno a solas se crea para sí las cosas que tiene por de Dios, ni se conforme ni afirme en ellas sin la Iglesia o sus ministros, porque con éste solo no estará El aclarándole y confirmándole la verdad en el corazón, y así quedará en ella flaco y frío." 2S 22. 11. (183/370)

¹³⁰ Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 46.

¹³¹ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 217.

affective context for the transformation of renunciation into surrender, where a certain violence towards instinctual drives for gratification has to be harnessed in order for the purification of sense and spirit to take place, thereby facilitating that movement towards divine union between the soul and God. These will be themes that we will return to in the next chapter. Finally, both John and Winnicott understand these respective energies as so deeply present in the constitutional make up of the individual that their very presence within the person expresses the principle of existence. When the flow of these energies has been blocked or distorted, in Winnicott through the failure of the maternal response, and in John through the presence of obsessional attachments, both authors do recognise the possibility of redemption in the developmental process where favourable circumstances are present. In both cases, however, this redemptive reconnection is made with the natural flow of these energies and the rediscovery of the way they can be creative vehicles for personal fulfilment.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted what I consider to be genuine correspondences in the ways that John and Winnicott develop their understanding of the journey the individual must make to reach a true sense of self. In the chapter that follows I will demonstrate how these thematic correspondences can be used as signposts to a deeper and more creative exchange between John and Winnicott. I hope to reveal how specific aspects of this correspondence, taken to a deeper level, can shed a new light on the way we understand the formation of the authentic Christian identity of the self, enabling the psychological and spiritual perspectives of growth to find a new relationship, centred in an intermediate space that is embodied in the person of Christ. Winnicott, in one of his famous talks, ‘The Place where we Live’, prefaces the section, where he talks about an intermediate zone, with some very interesting and significant observations. In the intermediate zone or transitional space he highlights two very distinct behavioural responses in a person to this creative space where he says, ‘I may talk of my behaviour in the world of external (or shared reality) or I may be having an inner or mystical experience, while squatting on the

ground contemplating my navel.’¹³² He later sharpens the distinction by referring to ‘those who like to think superficially in terms of behaviour, in terms of conditioned reflexes and conditioning...By contrast there are those who place emphasis on the inner life, who think that the effects of economics and even of starvation itself have but little importance as compared with mystical experience.’¹³³ If we were to identify John and Winnicott with either of these polarities, in broad terms, it is probably fair to say that John clearly inhabits the second while Winnicott would show more characteristics with the first. However, having said this, and in the light of our deeper examination of their respective thought, such crude methods of identification clearly do neither of them justice and ignore the way both authors grapple with the exigencies of relating to inner and outer reality. As Winnicott himself says regarding the approach which concentrates purely on external behavioural observation, ‘most of us get tired of restricting ourselves to behaviour or to the observable extrovert life of persons who, whether they like it or not, are motivated from the unconscious.’¹³⁴

What I intend to examine in the next chapter, therefore, is how the person of Christ can enable a genuinely creative interaction to take place between John’s and Winnicott’s vision of the authentic development of the individual, and to do this in such a way as to locate the appropriate intermediate zone in the person of Christ Himself. It is here that I hope to demonstrate how their respective concepts concerning authentic growth can come together, and, like two individuals caught up in play in the transitional space, will provide the opportunity for key aspects of their teaching to be illuminated and so shed light on the dynamic nature of the Christian vision of self identity. By analysing more deeply, therefore, this highly creative encounter, I hope to show how their unique contributions, come together in an extraordinarily dynamic way through person of Christ, Who in Himself, can bring together their respective understandings of self-transcendent growth, in the personal relationship that He offers to all who seek Him.

¹³² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 104.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

Chapter Five

St. John of the Cross and D.W. Winnicott – Related Themes Part Two

Part One

The Fundamental Objective

In the last chapter I showed how an essential parallel could be drawn between John's and Winnicott's understanding of the dynamics of growth within their respective contexts. In John, this centred on a person's entry into the state of contemplation where purification, both active and passive, leads to inner transformation as the soul, united to the person of Christ, becomes drawn totally into the life of the Trinity. This is powerfully expressed in *The Spiritual Canticle*¹ and *The Living Flame*,² where John sees the soul's total fulfilment of its created existence in the dynamic union of love in God. This involves the continual activation of desire, which is the generative force that facilitates the loving union of the soul with Christ, and is characterised by a reciprocal movement of desire between the lover and the beloved. In Winnicott, authentic development takes place where a person is able to acquire a capacity to enter into objective relationships in which *continuity of being*, that holds 'the inherited potential'³ is able to bring to birth True Self identity, a concept that is central to Winnicott's understanding of the essence of human fulfillment, that flourishes when an individual can experience their creativity and sense of aliveness.⁴ This can only take place where an infant can grow out of the state of Absolute Dependence, experienced within the maternal holding relationship, and begin to develop a relationship with the Not-Me external world. This, as we saw, is achieved through the crucial role of the transitional object which initiates the

¹ "Porque no sería verdadera y total transformación si no se transformase el alma en las tres Personas de la Santísima Trinidad en revelado y manifesto grado." C. 39.3. (558/891)

² "Totalmente es indecible lo que el alma conoce y siente en este recuerdo de la excelencia de Dios, porque siendo comunicación de la excelencia de Dios en la sustancia de el alma" L 4.10 (646/1033)

³ Winnicott, Donald W. *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, London, Karnac Books, 1990 p. 43.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 148.

individual into the forming of objective relationships and developing a capacity to experience creative opportunities for further growth in the intermediate space.

In this chapter my intention is to move to a deeper more creative interaction between John's and Winnicott's understanding of the spiritual and human development of the individual as he/she grows in a deeper awareness of their authentic identity. By bringing together the pivotal roles of the person of Christ, in John, and the transitional object in Winnicott, I hope to show how it is possible to formulate a psychologically dynamic understanding of Christian self identity that will not only reveal the essential unity of body and spirit, that comes together in Christ, but also enables us to build creative links between the development of personal relationships, the experience of growth through contemplative prayer, and the creative use of the intermediate space, where the many different aspects of human experience, both interior and exterior, can find new meaning.

Leaving Behind the World of Maternal Security

In the first chapter of the *The Dark Night* John has a very touching description of the early days of the spiritual life, when God 'like a loving mother who warms her child with the heat of her bosom, nurses it with good milk and tender food and carries it in her arms.'⁵ The maternal holding environment, mirroring the state of absolute dependence⁶ in Winnicott, is the spiritual context for consolation and reassurances, but not the place for spiritual growth through the practice of virtue. Indeed, John emphasises the need to grow beyond this euphoric state of dependence by pointing out that this static environment can also be the facilitating locus for serious imperfections that are rooted in the seven deadly sins.⁷ In order to move beyond this state of beginners into the state of proficients, those, according to John, who have

⁵ " Al modo que la amorosa madre hace al niño tierno, al cual al calor de sus pechos la calienta, y con leche sabrosa y manjar blando y dulce le cría, y en sus brazos le trae y le regala." 1N 1. 2. (298/487)

⁶ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 84.

⁷ " Irémoslo notando por os siete vicios capitales, diciendo algunas de las muchas imperfecciones que cada uno dellos tienen..." 1N 1.3 (299/488)

left behind the prayer of discursive meditation and entered the night of contemplation, must undergo a process of disillusionment where a fundamental redirection begins to take hold of the individual.

For John, the central feature of preparation for entry into the night of contemplation is the gradual acceptance in the individual that ‘among all creatures, both superior and inferior, none bears a likeness to God’s being or unites proximately with Him...’⁸ Hence, ‘nothing which could possibly be imagined or comprehended in this life can be a proximate means of union with God,’⁹ and indeed ‘no supernatural knowledge or apprehension can serve as a proximate means for the high union with God through love.’¹⁰ The soul to whom God ‘is handing the breast of His tender love,’¹¹ must, therefore, undergo the process of disillusionment where the mother ‘withholds her caresses and hides her tender love, she rubs bitter aloes on her sweet breast and sets the child down from her arms.’¹² In words and images that are powerfully reminiscent of Winnicott’s description of ‘the frustrations that gather together under the word weaning,’¹³ a transition needs to take place that can foster spiritual maturity. John’s description of the state of childlike dependence on God’s consolation, however, makes clear its connection with the state of spiritual imperfection that, nevertheless, co-exists with an experience of God’s tender love for the soul. This, as we will see, is of vital importance when the figure of Christ is put before the individual as the context in which growth will take place.

⁸ “Entre todas las criaturas superiores ni inferiores, ninguna hay que próximamente junte con Dios ni tenga semejanza con su ser.” 2S 8.3. (126/312).

⁹ “Ni más ni menos, todo lo que la imaginación puede imaginar y el entendimiento recibir y entender [en este vida] no es ni puede ser medio próximo para la unión de Dios.” 2S. 8.4. (127/313)

¹⁰ “Ninguna noticia ni aprehensión sobrenatural en este mortal estado le puede server de medio próximo para la alta unión de amor con Dios.” 2S 8.5. (126/314)

¹¹ “Porque le da Dios aquí su pecho de amor tierno.” 1N 1.2. (298/487)

¹² “Le va la madre quitando el regalo y, escondiendo el tierno amor, póne [le] el amargo acíbar en el dulce pecho y, abajándole de los brazos.” 1N 1,2, (298/ 487)

¹³ Winnicott, Donald W. *Playing and Reality*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 13.

The Transitional Object and the Figure of Christ

Just as the maternal holding environment, for Winnicott, must be the foundational context in which an authentic sense of *continuity of being* can be nurtured¹⁴, so too with the initial experience of God's unconditional love. For the transitional object to assume the pivotal role of development 'as one of the bridges that make contact possible between the individual psyche and the external world'¹⁵, it must recall and represent the subjective relationship with the maternal figure but in a way that offers this connection with the world of external objects. It is the primary maternal holding environment that provides the True Self with the opportunity it needs to establish its identity.¹⁶ The inner core of the True Self must be able to enjoy a certain isolation which will be permanent, enabling it to experience its *continuity of being* as a rejuvenating source of energy.¹⁷ It is an inextricable part of the experience of the love of the mother that is practically expressed by her creation of a facilitating environment.

The transitional object, as we have seen, must in some way represent this for the individual, enabling him to feel connected with the fundamental experience of the environment-individual set-up that is expressed through the mother's attentive love.¹⁸ However, the transitional object assumes its dynamic function as the shock of disillusionment gathers momentum in the wake of the mother's de-adaptative response to the child, and the challenge that this poses for the drive within the infant to experience its omnipotence.¹⁹ It is this development of the transitional object's role that, then, enables it to open up that intermediate space that facilitates the movement towards mature object relating upon which human maturity depends.

¹⁴ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 54.

¹⁵ Winnicott, Donald W., *The Family and Individual Development*, Hove, Brunner-Routledge, 1999, p. 149.

¹⁶ Winnicott, Donald W., *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, London, Karnac Books, 1992, p. 212.

¹⁷ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 46.

¹⁸ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239

At this point we will now bring the proposal of the figure of Christ as transitional object more clearly into the picture and use, as our creative starting point, John's injunction, 'You must then study His life in order to know how to imitate Him and behave in all events as He would.'²⁰ As we have seen in the previous chapter, meditation provides the basis for this acceptance of Christ as the means by which growth towards fullness of life, both psychologically and spiritually, takes place. The 'forms, figures, and images, imagined and fashioned,'²¹ by 'the imagination and the phantasy'²², the two interior bodily senses, galvanise the inner world of illusion, which engages the creative drive for omnipotence.²³ The latter, as we have seen, functions as an integral part of the mother/ baby dyad, and will have the power to evoke the unconditional maternal experience of God's love.

Now it is the figure of Christ, who 'during His life He died spiritually to the sensitive part and at His death He died naturally,'²⁴ is the one who likewise opens up to the individual, through His very being, that contemplative space which will carry him into a new mode of loving. This He achieves by combining, on the one hand, the unconditional love of the Father that John so beautifully expresses with maternal imagery, evoking the dependent 'anaclitic' relationship with the mother, and on the other, the call to conversion, the call to engage with the energies that are released when the world of instinctual love and attachment, recalling the biological mother, is touched. He is the man of suffering who is able to enter the spiritual struggle that confronts every human being when they are faced with the apparent contradictory nature of this reality of God's unconditional love, that can only be authentically experienced side by side with the need for interior conversion and purification.

²⁰ "La cual debe considerar para saberla imitar y haberse en todas las cosas como se hubiera 'el (Io 13,15)" 1S 13, 3. (102/289)

²¹ "Imágenes, formas y figuras, fabricadas e imaginadas," 2S 12.3. (137/324)

²² "Imaginativa y fantasía." 2S 12.3 (137/323).

²³ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 239.

²⁴ "Cierto está que él murió a lo sensitivo , espiritualmente en su vida y naturalmente en su muerte," 2S 7.10. (124/310)

The Transitional Role of Christ – Meditation Leading into Contemplation

Winnicott clearly expresses the way the infant engages with the transitional object, enabling it to become an integral part of its interior reality, while at the same time preserving its own identity or ‘otherness’ without clearly defining this reality: ‘it must never change, unless changed by the infant...yet it must seem to the infant to give warmth, or to move...to do something that seems to show it has vitality, or reality of its own.’²⁵ In other words, it must hold in itself the complex interchange between the Me and not-Me reality of the world of subject and object. Through the medium of meditation I wish to suggest that the person of Christ takes on precisely this function. Through engaging the imagination and the fantasy, and the subsequent stimulus given to the affect through exercising these faculties, the vital creative connection is made which allows for identification and a certain exercise of omnipotence to which we will return later. Through His own autonomous existence, however, the person of Christ can begin to reveal His not-Me status, as it were, through facilitating a disengagement from the exercise of these faculties, at the same time as maintaining a relationship with the person.

Now, when reflecting on ‘the signs for recognising in spiritual persons when they should discontinue meditation and pass on to the state of contemplation,’²⁶ John, having described the dryness accompanying meditation and ‘a disinclination to fix the imagination or sense faculties upon other particular objects, exterior or interior,’²⁷ finally gives, as the ‘surest sign’, a person’s desire ‘to remain alone in loving awareness of God, without particular considerations, in interior peace and quiet and repose, and without the acts and exercises...of

²⁵ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p.233.

²⁶ “Las señales que ha de haber en sí el espiritual por las cuales se conozca en qué tiempo le conviene dejar la meditación y discurso y pasar al estado de contemplación” 2S 13. (140/326)

²⁷ “Cuando ve no le da ninguna gana de poner la imaginación ni el sentido en otras particulares, exteriores ni interiores.” S 13. 3. (140/327)

the intellect, memory and will.’²⁸ Two chapters later he expresses these sentiments more strongly when describing how the soul, ‘enveloped in divine love...should not interfere with forms or discursive meditations and imaginings. Otherwise the soul will be disquieted and drawn out of its peaceful contentment to distaste and repugnance.’²⁹

The lack of tangible consolation and satisfaction in meditation, is, therefore, for John, one of the crucial signs of Christ’s growing presence within the soul. It signals the entry into the night of faith which is the pathway into deeper and deeper union with Him. The conscious status of His presence within the imagination and the intellect must be slowly abandoned to allow the new and authentic relationship to grow, according to the Spirit’s movement, as it slowly comes alive in the night of contemplation. It is at this point important to recall what Winnicott has to say in his description of the change of status that the transitional object undergoes. He states that ‘its fate is to be gradually allowed to be deattached, so that in the course of years it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo. By this I mean that in health the transitional object does ‘not go inside’ nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo repression. It is not forgotten and it is not mourned....the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between ‘inner psychic reality’ and ‘the external world as perceived by two persons in common’, that is to say, over the whole cultural field,’³⁰ the latter including, among other things, the world of religious feelings.

The essential task of the transitional object is to engage the whole inner world of attachment that initially has been totally associated with the mother and has limited the Me dimension of experience to the exercise of omnipotence and illusion with the mother baby/dyad. The

²⁸ “ De estarse a solas con atención amorosa a Dios sin particular consideración, en paz interior y quietud y descanso, y sin actos y ejercicios de las potencias, memoria, entendimiento y voluntad.” 2S 13.4. (141/327).

²⁹ “Envueltas en divino amor; y no se entremeta en formas, meditaciones y imaginaciones, o algún discurso, por que no desasosiegue el alma y la saque de su contento y paz, en lo cual ella recibe desabrimiento y repugnancia.” 2S 15.5. (149/ 336)

³⁰ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 233.

transitional object activates the different levels of instinctual attachment offering, above all, a defence against anxiety by its continued presence and the opportunity for further movement and development by its quality of otherness, which introduces the not-Me dimension of existence in a way that is totally unthreatening. Therefore, by its very nature it has to be superseded if it is to exercise its function successfully since authentic personal identity is only realised through continual differentiation between self and the other.³¹ This can only take place when a kind of dialectic is made possible through active engagement with the external world that can, in turn, co-exist with an inner withdrawal into the self. This then facilitates a deeper clarity between the Me and not-Me differentiation and thus prepares the way for further engagement. Now John recognises that discursive meditation carries with it a dependence on various forms of consolation that will gratify the interior sense and shield a person from the main task of spiritual growth, which itself consists of a total realignment of the person, ‘solo suppositum’ through the experience of loving union.³² As John says, ‘Many spiritual persons, after having exercised themselves in approaching God through images, forms, and meditations suitable for beginners, err greatly if they do not determine, dare, or know how to detach themselves from these palpable methods. For God then wishes to lead them to more spiritual, interior, and invisible graces by removing the gratification derived from discursive meditation.’³³

Now, as we have seen, entry into the intermediate space of contemplation is in no way a rejection of the Gospel message, least of all the person of Christ, but rather the place where a genuine relationship with God, in the person of Jesus Christ, can begin to grow. If we accept

³¹ Winnicott, Donald W. ‘Basis for Self in Body’, in, ed. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd & Madeleine Davis, *Psycho-Analytic Explorations*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 271.

³² “El sentido corporal interior, que es la imaginativa y fantasía, de la cual también habemos de vaciar todas las formas y aprehensiones imaginarias que naturalment en él pueden caer, y probar cómo es imposible que el alma llegue a la unión de Dios hasta que cese su operación en ellas.” 2S 12. 2. (137/323)

³³ “De donde yerran much muchos espirituales, los cuales, habiendo ellos ejercitándose en llegarse a Dios por imágenes y formas y meditaciones cual conviene a principiantes queriéndolos. Dios recoger [a bienes] más espirituales interiores y invisibles, quitándoles ya el gusto y jugo de la meditación discursiva.” 2S.12.6 (138/325)

that the practice of meditation, as it engages the affect and imagination, can, nonetheless, foster purely subjective images of God that are tailor-made to meet our own needs, and in the end become real barriers to a genuine authentic relationship, then it is necessary for a person to undergo a total transformation that will achieve three fundamental goals. The first is a capacity to acquire an objective God-image that nurtures a spiritual awareness of God as totally 'other, in Winnicottian language, a Not-Me image of God. This image, which is nurtured by the Traditions and the community of the Church, needs to be experienced in vital ways as external to a personal representation of God governed by emotional control and imagination. The second goal is to experience, or to put it more accurately, to receive the objective God as He 'comes toward me as the Subject who sees me as a subject, entering my life in every intimate way.'³⁴ This will then lead to the third goal which is the growing awareness of the True Self, the genuine Me, that can only come alive fully as it gradually responds to the initiative of God, as Subject, in a totally reciprocal way. It is only when the figure of Christ can operate as a transitional object that these three goals are realised.

The Uniqueness of Christ's Transitional Role

Winnicott locates the importance of the transitional object expressed in its power to open up the intermediate space where its meaning is 'diffused...spread out over the whole intermediate territory,'³⁵ which, according to Winnicott, belongs not only 'to the arts but religion'³⁶ too. Ana Maria Rizzuto in her psychoanalytic study, *The Birth of the Living God*, which focuses on the use of representations of God in the course of life, makes a very apposite observation when she says, 'God is a special transitional object because, unlike teddy bears, dolls, or blankets made out of plushy fabrics, he is created from representational

³⁴ Ulanov, Ann Belford, *Finding Space, Winnicott, God and Psychic Reality*. Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 36.

³⁵ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 233.

³⁶ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 14.

materials whose sources are the representations of primary objects.³⁷ When John, therefore, encourages his readers to take the person of Christ as a model and study His life, with the underlying intention that the reader personally identifies with Him, He is opening up an interplay between powerful subjective and objective experiences, that have a meaningful personal history, recalling fundamental life experiences. By immersing himself in the life of Christ, as an imitative and associative model, a person will be taken back into his own world of earliest emotional attachments to primary objects, as well as being presented with the concrete challenge of present and future realities. This finds an interesting clarification in the Second Book of *The Ascent* where John, referring to a person who is questioning God the Father, desiring some vision or revelation, says, ‘God could respond as follows: 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....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.’³⁸

It is clearly John’s intention to demonstrate in this way how the person of Christ is established in consciousness as the figure who links both the inner and outer world of experience. However, unlike the inanimate transitional objects that have acquired symbolic meaning but will, nonetheless, be ‘relegated to limbo...because the transitional phenomena have been diffused...’³⁹, the figure of Christ will increase in meaning as His transitional function undergoes transformation. This will take place once the dynamic personal

³⁷ Rizzuto, Ana-Maria, *The Birth of the Living God, A Psychoanalytic Study*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 178.

³⁸ “Diciendo: Si te tengo ya habladas todas las cosas en mi Palabra, que es mi Hijo, y no tengo otra, qué te puedo yo ahora responder o revelar que sea más que eso? Pon los ojos sólo en él....porque él es toda mi locución y respuesta, y es toda mi visión y toda mi revelación; lo cual os he ya hablado, respondido, manifestado y revelado, dándoosle por Hermano, Compañero y Maestro, Precio y Premio.” 2S 22.5 (180/367)

³⁹ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 233.

commitment of Christ, offered by God the Father ‘as the Way, the Truth and the Life.’⁴⁰ to the individual, is realised in the intermediate space of contemplation. For John, the image of Christ is not just a beautiful icon to be admired from afar but a living personal reality whose own life and experience is the lever for a very special kind of psychological engagement that links with the deepest level of a person’s capacity for growth. He does this by symbolising the connection between the intimate subjective experience of maternal love and acceptance, located by John in the heart of God the Father, which enhances all the associations of primary identification and the presence of a public historic figure that has its own objective existence. By examining now in closer detail the way Christ achieves this by constantly exercising His role that, on the one hand, draws on the nascent characteristics of the transitional object and, on the other, allows for a transformation of them through repeated initiatives, we can begin to construct a psychologically dynamic lens through which we can understand John’s notion of participant transformation.

The Integrative Presentation - Parallels in John and Winnicott

In a very important sense the creative power of the transitional object exists precisely in the very nature of its unthreatening presence in the infant’s experience. Winnicott points out that the effectiveness of the transitional object is linked to its mode of presentation by the parents particularly in its timing. In the early process of growth Winnicott points out that ‘sooner or later in an infant’s development there comes a tendency on the part of the infant to weave other-than-me objects into the personal pattern.’⁴¹ This obviously becomes the unique opportunity for introducing a transitional object, but it can only continue to be effective if it is accompanied by the parents’ continued awareness of its undefined status. The parental attitude, as Winnicott says, ‘is to get to know its value and carry it around when travelling.’⁴² The mother ‘who lets it get dirty and even smelly, knowing that by washing it she introduces

⁴⁰ “El camino y la verdad y la vida.” 2S 7. 8. (124/310)

⁴¹ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p.231.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p 232

a break in continuity in the infant's experience,⁴³ indicates an intuitive awareness of the infant's needs and capacity for response. The understanding that the parents show to their infant's need for a transitional object facilitates the use of the object by the infant. It gives the latter the psychic space to experience its presence as an integral aspect of its own personal rhythm. There is here a very strong analogy with God's sensitivity and awareness of a soul's rhythm of response, which has been outlined above. God wishes only to work at the pace of an individual's personal capacity to respond. The understanding that the parents show to their infant's need for a transitional object facilitates the use of the object by the infant. It gives the latter the psychic space to experience the inner and outer aspects of reality which the object symbolises. Likewise, God the Father knows that, regarding relationship with the world of the Spirit, 'a person only obtains this little by little, after his own manner and by means of the senses to which he has always been attached.'⁴⁴ Hence, we read in the Book Two of *The Ascent*, 'God, to achieve His work gently and to lift the soul to supreme knowledge, must begin by touching the low state and extreme of the senses...He brings a person to the supreme spirit of God by instructing him through discursive meditation and through forms, images and sensible means, according to the individual 's own manner of acquiring knowledge.'⁴⁵

In the Book Two of *The Night* John tells us that 'In the measure that the soul walks in darkness and emptiness in its natural operations, it walks securely.'⁴⁶ When a person is gradually drawn away from discursive meditation into the contemplative night of faith he is initially held in a state of tranquility and peaceful awareness of God's presence.⁴⁷ John, as we have seen, creates a picture of a state of gentle passivity in which God envelops the soul in

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.232.

⁴⁴ "Al cual, como habemos dicho, no puede llegar el alma sino muy poco a poco a su modo, por el sentido, a que siempre ha estado asida." 2S.17.5 (157/344)

⁴⁵ "Para levantar Dios al alma al sumo conocimiento, para hacerlo suavemente, ha de comenzar y tocar desde el bajo y fin extremo de los sentidos del alma....por lo cual, la lleva primero instruyéndola [la] por formas y imágenes y vías sensibles a su moda de entender (ahora naturales, ahora sobrenaturales) y por discursos a ese sumo espíritu de Dios." 2S 17.3.(156/342)

⁴⁶ "De aquí se segue que cuanto el alma va más a oscuras y vacía de sus operaciones naturales va más segura," 2N 16.3. (364/558-559)

⁴⁷ "De manera que muchas veces se hallará el alma en esta amorosa o pacífica asistencia sin obrar nada con las potencias, esto es , acerca de actos particulares no obrando activamente, sino sólo recibiendo." 2S 15.2. (148/335)

His divine love, and by this means lays the foundation for a perceptive response that will take a person way beyond the need to experience sensible consolation in all its forms. Moreover, as John says, ‘He begins by communicating spirituality, in accord with the person’s littleness and small capacity, through elements that are exterior, palpable and accommodated to sense.’⁴⁸ Personal desire, even in its most basic form, and the image of Christ, have to be brought together in what one might call a subjective encounter where initially, according to John, the beginners ‘measure God by themselves and not themselves by God’⁴⁹ This integrative approach, that we see working here in both John and Winnicott, plays an important facilitating role in the opening phase of psychological and spiritual development’ that we will now see emerging in our two authors. For just as the infant will find a way, through the mode of presentation of the transitional object by the understanding parents, of entering the process of Me not-Me differentiation, thereby, opening up the world of objective reality, the soul will likewise undergo its own process of interior transformation. This will begin to take place as the person of Christ is woven into the spiritual texture of the soul by symbolising the connection between the intimate maternal image of God, quoted earlier, with the presence of a public historic figure who continues to have His own objective existence. This will lead to an interior transformation that will reveal the true objective reality of God’s presence in Christ. We will now examine these processes more closely.

Part Two

Differentiation - The Reality of Me and not-Me – Abrogation of Omnipotence

One of the most important characteristics of the transitional object, for Winnicott, is the function that it plays in defining the reality of the Me and not-Me experience in its earliest

⁴⁸ “ Desta manera, pues, la va Dios [ordinariamente] instruyendo y haciéndola espiritual, comenzándole a comunicar lo espiritual desde las cosas exteriores, palpables y acomodadas al sentido, según la pequeñez y poca capacidad del alma, para que mediante la corteza de aquellas cosas sensibles.” 2S 17.5. (157/343)

⁴⁹ “ Midiendo a Dios consigo, y no sí mismos con Dios.” 1N 7.3. (310/500)

phase. It introduces the infant into a whole new relational dynamic with an object whereby the initial automatic response of omnipotent control has to undergo a gradual, but in the end, total transformation. As Winnicott states, in his *Summary of Special Qualities in the Relationship*, ‘the infant assumes rights over the object, and we agree with this assumption. Nevertheless some abrogation of omnipotence is a feature from the start.’⁵⁰ In order for *continuity of being*, in which the True Self finds its authentic identity, to be freed up for its continued development, the capacity for objective object relationships that stimulate differentiation can only develop once the experience of omnipotence is frustrated and in the end totally broken down. As Winnicott says, ‘From this initial experience of omnipotence the baby is able to begin to experience frustration and even to arrive one day at the other extreme from omnipotence, that is to say, having a sense of being a mere speck in the universe’⁵¹ A false and totally unrealistic sense of security has, therefore, not only to be modified but, in essence, removed entirely. Authentic security can only be found when the True Self can freely experience *continuity of being* that is stimulated by objective relationships that clarify the Me and not-Me status of subject in relation to object. This can only happen when a whole new way of experiencing creativity has been discovered. Now it is clear that the central importance of the transitional object, for Winnicott, resides in its pivotal function in the child’s historical process of growth. According to Winnicott ‘the object is a symbol of the union of the baby and the mother (or part of the mother). This symbol can be located. It is at the place in space and time where and when the mother is in transition from being (in the baby’s mind) merged in with the infant and alternatively being experienced as an object to be perceived rather than conceived of.’⁵² This passage is crucial for our discussion at this point.

The illusionary process of omnipotent creation and re-creation has to undergo dynamic modification in order for the Me and not-Me perceptive ability to start functioning.

⁵⁰ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 233.

⁵¹ Winnicott, Donald W., ‘Communication Between Infant and Mother, and Mother and Infant, Compared and Contrasted’, in *Winnicott on the Child*, Cambridge MA, Perseus Publishing, 2002. p.78.

⁵² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 96.

Expressing it slightly differently' the totally subjective mode of perceiving an object has to be modified in order for the new objective capacity for perception to develop. However, certain aspects of the subjective mother/baby merger must continue to be present during the period of transition and beyond, and these are related to the experience of creativity and unintegration through which *continuity of being* is maintained and developed. It is the transitional object and the integrative manner in which it has been presented that enables modification to take place in a way that safeguards these essential elements of growth where there is a 'continuity of the human environment, and likewise of the non human environment, which helps with the integration of the individual personality'⁵³ and makes 'provision for realising the child's creative impulses.'⁵⁴ The transitional object, therefore, must enable this abrogation of omnipotence to slowly take place in a way that facilitates the nurturing of the *continuity of being* by providing, in itself, a connection to both inner and outer reality and the opportunity to feel real and creative. These, as I have stated before, are the conditions in which True Self identity flourishes.

Purification of Sense and Spirit through Union with Christ

Reference has been made to the importance of the encounter between the figure of Christ and the world of subjective desires that takes place during the time of discursive meditation. It is the means of weaving the person of Christ, both subjectively and objectively, into spiritual consciousness that is reflected in Winnicott's timely description of the presentation of the transitional object when he says, 'Sooner or later in an infant's development there comes a tendency on the part of the infant to weave other-than-me objects into the personal pattern.'⁵⁵ It is the moment when the movement within the infant to abrogate the control of omnipotence is initiated that then allows *continuity of being* the freedom to find its enrichment in object relationships. Now the soul's totality of desire can only be realised when it is rooted not in the

⁵³ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵⁵ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p.231.

life of sense but that of spirit. Purification of the senses through what John describes as ‘dark contemplation’⁵⁶ has to be undergone if the radical re-orientation of the ‘solo suppositum’ is to take place. We will now begin to follow this process within a soul for whom the person of Christ takes on this transitional function and through His own being, present within the soul, enables it to experience this profound inner transformation.

In Book Two of *The Night*, John addresses the soul in these words, ‘Oh, then, spiritual soul, when you see your appetites darkened, your inclinations dry and constrained, your faculties incapacitated for any interior exercise, do not be afflicted; think of this as a grace, since God is freeing you from yourself and taking from you your own activity.’⁵⁷ Every possible natural ability that can be galvanised to enable the individual to exercise control over their own well-being has to be disarmed, so that God Himself can take control and lead the soul into a whole new reality. With two very concrete images John defines the experience in very practical terms: ‘To reach a new and unknown land and travel unknown roads, a man cannot be guided by his own knowledge, rather he has doubts about his own knowledge and seeks the guidance of others...Similarly when a person is learning new details about his art or trade, he must work in darkness and not with what he already knows.’⁵⁸

The unknowing aspect of the experience, for John, is absolutely central to progress. However, what gives it its transforming power is the purification that takes place through it, whereby the soul ‘is purified in this forge like gold in the crucible.’⁵⁹ In one of his most memorable

⁵⁶ “Oscura contemplación.” 2N 5.5. 339/531.

⁵⁷ “Oh, pues, alma espiritual! Cuando vieres oscurecido tu apetito [tus afecciones secas y apretadas, e inhabilitadas tus potencias para cualquier ejercicio interior] no te penes por eso, antes lo ten a buena dicha, pues que te va Dios librando de ti misma, quitándote de las manos las potencias.” 2N 16.7. (365/560)

⁵⁸ “Así como el caminante que, par ir a nuevas tierras no sabidas, va por nuevos caminos no sabidos ni experimentados, que [camina no] guiado por lo que sabía antes, sino en dudas y por el dicho de otros...Ni más ni menos el que va sabiendo más particularidades en un oficio o arte, siempre va a oscuras, no por su saber primero.” 2N 16. 8. 365/560-561.

⁵⁹ “En esta fragua se purifica el alma como el oro en el crisol ” 2N 6.6. (339/531-532)

images he describes the ‘terrible anguish (like hanging in midair, unable to breath)⁶⁰ which not only purifies the senses and faculties but ‘annihilates, empties, and consumes all the affections and imperfect habits the soul contracted throughout its life.’⁶¹ What is significant for our reflection here is that in the following chapter John refers first to the *Book of Job*, where Job describes his own suffering with graphic imagery, ‘He has broken me and set me up as His mark so as to wound me. He has surrounded me with His lances, He wounded all my loins...’⁶² John then follows this with an even longer quotation from the *Lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet*, in which ‘*He has turned and turned again His hand against me all the day. He has made my skin and my flesh old; He has broken my bones....I have become a derision to all the people, and laughter and scorn for them all the day*’⁶³

These images powerfully recall the figure of the Suffering Servant in the Prophet Isaiah which, of course, refers us immediately to the person of the suffering Christ Who ‘at the moment of His death He was certainly annihilated in His soul, without any consolation or relief, since the Father left Him that way in innermost aridity in the lower part.’⁶⁴ Carrying the analogous imagery further, which we quoted earlier, Christ is the one above all Who on the cross hung in midair, unable to breathe, the one Who ‘is our model and light.’⁶⁵ As we build up a picture of the places and experiences of encounter between the figure of Christ and the soul that undergoes purification, we can begin to understand how Christ, as the transitional object, is indeed slowly woven into the personal pattern. Just as the experience of the transitional object is integral to the abrogation of omnipotence in Winnicott’s understanding of the pattern of growth, so too is the figure of Christ for John. He slowly offers a highly

⁶⁰ “Que es unpadecer muy congojoso, de manera que si a uno suspendiesen o detuviesen el aire que no respiaese.” 2N 6.5 (339/531)

⁶¹ “Al alma aniquilando y vaciando o consumiendo [en ella]todas las afecciones y hábitos imperfectos que ha contraído toda la vida.” *Ibid.*

⁶² “Quebrantóme, písome como [señoelo suyo] para herir en mí; cercóme sus lanzas, llagó todos mis lomos...” 2N 7.1 (340/532)

⁶³ “ Tanto he vuelto y convertido su mano sobre mí todo el día! Hizo vieja mi piel y mi carne; desmenuzó mis huesos...Hecho soy para escarnio de todo el pueblo, y para risa y mofa de ellos todo el día.” 2N 7.2 (340-341/533)

⁶⁴ “ Al punto de la muerte quedó también anihilado en alma sin consuelo y alivio alguno, dejándole el Padre así en íntima sequedad según la parte inferior.” 2S 7.11.(124/310)

⁶⁵ “ Él es nuestro ejemplo y luz” 2S 7.9. (124/310)

personal encounter within the purificatory process that brings together the Me and not-Me experience of differentiation at the deepest level of a person's struggle for spiritual freedom. Now for John the latter has a two-fold aspect that needs to be brought into the picture. In his own words, John tells us, 'A man suffers all these afflictive purgations of spirit that he may be reborn in the life of the spirit.'⁶⁶ This rebirth, like all births, consists of pain, but also of joy, and John captures this dual aspect when he says, 'the soul in the midst of these dark conflicts feels vividly and keenly that it is being wounded by a strong divine love, and it has a certain feeling and foretaste of God.'⁶⁷ This exposure to the intensity of divine love that accompanies this night of purgation means that 'God gives from the outset an esteeming love of Himself so intense that, as we said, the soul's greatest suffering in the trials of this night is the anguish of thinking it has lost God and been abandoned by Him.'⁶⁸ Hence, suffering and longing come together, and just as we have seen that renunciation in John is transformed into surrender, so here we see the pain of purification bringing to birth the existence of a longing, an intensity of desire, that resides not in the senses but in the spirit.

Reflecting now on the significance of the integrative presentations of the transitional object to the infant and the figure of Christ to the soul, woven into the personal rhythm of the individual's relational and spiritual experience, we can see two fundamental processes at work that mirror each other. The first is the creative development of *continuity of being*, kept alive through the symbolic presence of the transitional object, even in the face of the abrogation of omnipotence and the repetitive need to re-create. This secures its ongoing presence as the differentiating process of the Me not-Me experience leads into mature object relating. Secondly, the presence of desire, drawn into the person of Christ, is transformed as its central identification is gradually withdrawn from the life of the senses and placed in the

⁶⁶ "Todas estas afflictivas purgaciones del espíritu, para re[e]n-gendrarlo en vida de espíritu por medio desta divina influencia." 2N 9.6. (348/541)

⁶⁷ "En que en medio de estos oscuros aprietos se siente estar herida el alma viva y agudamente en fuerte amor divino, en cierto sentimiento y barrunto de Dios." 2N 11.1. (353/546)

⁶⁸ "Dios al alma un amor estimativo tan grande de Dios, que, como habemos dicho, todo lo más que padece y siente en los trabajos de star noche es ansia de pensar si tiene perdido a Dios y pensar si está dejada de El." 2N 13.5. (358/552)

world of the Spirit, which then begins to reveal the true nature of God, in Himself, as distinct from human projections of His image rooted in the world of sensual addiction. In both cases, abrogation and purification, extremely painful in themselves, nevertheless enables movement and development to take place as these two fundamental transforming experiences are woven into the ongoing psychological and spiritual development of the individual.

Eros and Aggression - Fusion in Christ

We have now come to what is probably the most important aspect of this comparative reflection, which is that the transitional object 'must survive instinctual loving, and also hating and, if it be a feature, pure aggression'⁶⁹ This is the initiating process of differentiation between the Me and not-Me that culminates in the full recognition of the objective object's autonomous existence, which, according to Winnicott, enables mature love to exist. The transitional object's survival from instinctual onslaughts of a varied nature connect the infant with the object mother's survival of the infant's urgent instinctual needs, which is experienced in tandem with the survival of the environment mother who 'actively provides care in handling and in general management.'⁷⁰ The interaction between the object and environment mother within the experience of the infant enables the gradual fusion of eros and aggression to take place, that is necessary if external relationships are to develop.

This fusion is vital since the aggressive impulse will always be activated when confronted with the demands of the external world, as Winnicott says, 'The opportunities must come from the environment, from the not-Me which gradually comes to be distinguished from the Me...in normal development opposition from outside brings along the development of the aggressive impulse.'⁷¹ For relationships to flourish it is axiomatic that love must be present in its true essence, enabling the movement that has been stimulated to be creative. Aggression

⁶⁹ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 233.

⁷⁰ Winnicott, Donald W., *Deprivation and Delinquency*, Hove, Brunner-Routledge, 2000, p. 103.

⁷¹ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p.215.

and eros, therefore, have to find ways of experiencing fusion, and this can take place when the early experience of the object and environment mother is evoked within the transitional experience that is itself initiated by the transitional object. It is here that we witness the full flowering of the figure of Christ as the authentic means of transition for the soul in this spiritual journey.

For John, Christ not only offers a relationship that can initiate the fusion of eros and aggression, through evoking the early relational dynamic of the object and environment mother, but also provides its concomitant effect, namely, the gradual differentiation between the Me and not-Me, with the most tangible form of further expression. Christ is the Way to the Father; He is the path we must use in order to gain access to the Father's heart. We have reached that place of object usage that enables full objectivisation to take the place of the 'other' in its autonomous existence, where a new freedom has been received. The person of Christ, offered by the Father, is the one Who survived the destruction of the Cross and continues to live through the life that comes from His Resurrection.⁷² This is the figure of the objective historical Christ Who comes to the soul from the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church. The invitation that is given personally to the soul is to engage with Him within the developmental context where eros and aggression are present, and seeking an outlet that will be creative and will facilitate further relationship. Just as the transitional object of Winnicott offers the infant the opportunity of relating to an object that can survive the onslaught of personal aggression, so too, with the person of Christ.

Now the understanding that is assumed by John is that Christ was the victim Who suffered and died for the personal sins of all human beings. In other words, He has an intimate connection with the aggressive overflow of every person's instinctual violence and is not just a distant historical figure. Therefore, the monologue quoted in the last chapter has particular

⁷² “ Y así en este levantamiento de la encarnación de su Hijo y de la gloria de su resurrección según la carne, no solamente hermoseó el Padre las criaturas en parte mas podremos decir que del todo las dejó vestidas de hermosura y dignidad.” C. 6.4 (435/761)

relevance here as we listen to Winnicott's extraordinary words again, 'I destroyed you' and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says 'Hullo object! I destroyed you. I love you. You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you. While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy.''⁷³ In a true theological sense it is always understood that Christ is the one Who has absorbed the world's aggression, but then offers every individual a unique personal relationship through His resurrection. It is here that we have a distinct echo of Winnicott's words, 'the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives) contributes-in to the subject, according to its own properties.'⁷⁴ It is the person of Christ, therefore, above all, who, having survived destruction and death, can then offer the individual, who has undergone the whole process of inner transformation from guilt through reparation to concern, a relationship of true creative intimacy.

Winnicott, when reflecting on the experience of concern has this to say, 'The infant is now becoming able to be concerned, to take responsibility for his own instinctual impulses and the functions that belong to them. This provides one of the fundamental constructive elements of play and work.'⁷⁵ We see that Winnicott understands play, the intermediate space, that is rooted in the transitional experience, as that which provides the creative context where on-going differentiation of the Me and not-Me experience is made possible. He also points out that 'play provides an organisation for the initiation of emotional relationships,'⁷⁶ in other words, opportunities for intimacy and friendship. It is here, in this very creative context of emotional receptivity, that 'a highly satisfactory experience such as may be obtained at a concert or at the theatre or in a friendship deserve a term as ego orgasm, which draws attention

⁷³ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p.90.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁷⁵ Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 77.

⁷⁶ Winnicott Donald W., *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1964. pp. 144-145.

to the climax and the importance of the climax,⁷⁷ an experience that is synonymous, for Winnicott, with that of ecstasy. Concern, therefore, is understood as that condition of openness of mind and heart that can take not just an infant, but a mature adult, into the encounter with external reality and another person that has life-giving potential. This is a highly important insight as we now return to John's equivalent of Winnicott's intermediate state of play, the contemplative night of faith, where belief becomes the vehicle for ecstatic friendship with God Himself.

The Place of Aggression - Purification Related to Images of God

We have already made the crucial link between the experience of disillusionment in Winnicott, that enables the transitional object to find its creative function, and John's understanding of the transitional movement in prayer from meditation to contemplation. We can now pinpoint an even deeper connection between Winnicott's concept of the intermediate space and John's night of faith. In the former, through the gradual development, within the individual, of the capacity for object usage, surplus aggression finds its creative outlet in the imagination through the destruction of the object. This contributes to the growing perception, within the individual, of the objective nature of the object whose autonomy and total independence can be fully acknowledged. This is made possible through the repeated survival of the object in the face of the destructive fantasy. As we now turn to John's treatment of the entry into the night of faith a fundamental truth of John's teaching must be born in mind, 'It is noteworthy that among all creatures both superior and inferior none bears a likeness to God's being or unites proximately with Him....God has no relation or essential likeness to them...Consequently, intellectual comprehension of God through heavenly or earthly creatures is impossible, since there is no proportion of likeness.'⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Winnicott, 'The Capacity to be Alone', in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, p. 35.

⁷⁸ " En lo cual habemos de advertir que, entre todas las criaturas superiores ni inferiores, ninguna hay que próximamente junte con Dios.....de Dios ellas ningún repecto hay ni semjanza esencial,Y

For John, natural knowing, that comes from normal intellectual and emotional experience, cannot in any way enable us in the end to know and encounter the true God, since ‘the intellect cannot profit from its natural knowing.’⁷⁹ However, he does acknowledge that the senses and the involvement of subjective imagery and identification are a necessary prelude to the process of authentic spiritual growth. Hence, he can state very unambiguously when reflecting on the importance of meditation, ‘These considerations, forms, and methods of meditation are necessary to beginners that the soul may be enamoured and fed through the senses...They are suitable as the remote means to union with God, which beginners must ordinarily use for the attainment of their goal and the abode of the spiritual repose.’⁸⁰ However, their preparatory function finds authentic meaning when they are consciously voided and purified in order to allow God Himself to reveal His loving presence in the soul, for according to John, ‘If a person will eliminate these impediments and veils, and live in nakedness and poverty of spirit...his soul in its simplicity and purity will then be immediately transformed into simple and pure Wisdom, the Son of God.’⁸¹

The conscious annihilation, therefore, of all the natural forms and images which are rooted in an individual subjective experience opens up the transitional space of contemplation where the true presence of Christ can then begin to be revealed in the night of faith. Here we discover genuine echoes of Winnicott’s notion of the destruction of the object in the imagination in order for the object not only to be used but also to emerge in its autonomy and ‘otherness’. In her highly perceptive study, quoted earlier, *Finding Space Winnicott God and Psychic Reality*

por eso imposible que el entendimiento pueda dar en Dios por medio de las criaturas, hora sean celestiales, ahora terrenas, por cuanto no hay proporción de semejanza.” 2S 8.3. (126/312-313)

⁷⁹ “ El entendimiento ...no se puede aprovechar de la inteligencia natural.” 2S 8.4. (126/313)

⁸⁰ “Aunque a los principiantes son necesarias estas consideraciones y formas y modos de meditaciones para ir enamorando y cebando el alma por el sentido.....y así sirven de medios remotos para unirse con Dios – por los cuales ordinariamente han de pasar las almas para llegar al término y estancia del reposo espiritual...” 2S 12.5. (138/324)

⁸¹ “ Si quitase estos impedimentos y velos del todoquedándose en la pur desnudez y pobreza de espíritu, luego el alma, ya sencilla y pura, se transforma en sencill y pura sabiduría, que es el Hijo de Dios.” 2S 15.4. (149/335-336)

Ulanov has this to say of the necessity of destroying subjectively created God images: ‘Our images of God, both our own and those of tradition which have pointed the way, are destroyed, or we ourselves move to destroy them when we meet the living God. This plunges us into the bleakest blackest dark night of the soul. Stripped of all we know about God we fall into unknowing. We dwell in the gap between projection and reality, between images and living encounters.’⁸²

Part Three

Relationship with Christ in His Uniqueness

Destructiveness for John and Winnicott, when aligned with the developmental process of the individual, has a clearly observed creative function. The repeated aggressive demolition of the object in Winnicott’s theory of object usage makes way for the clear perception of the object in its own uniqueness, and in Belford’s words, ‘Our unconscious aggression shows a ruthlessness thereby that makes way for evermore imaginative seeing of the familiar.’⁸³ It is an observation that echoes Winnicott’s understanding that the individual, as he discovers a new relationship with the object, repeatedly destroyed in the imagination, becomes ‘equipped with some capacity to see everything in a fresh way, to be creative in every detail of living.’⁸⁴ This relationship with an object, that is more and more perceived in its authenticity, releases creative energies that have positive consequences in the whole engagement of the individual with external reality, and to quote Winnicott again, ‘here it is the destructive drive that creates the quality of externality’⁸⁵ and finds expression particularly in the use of the object.

Let us now, at this point, return to John and examine more closely the journey of the soul that has begun to enter the night of contemplation as the faculties and the senses are voided to make way for a genuine encounter with the person of God in Christ. One of the central themes

⁸² Ulanov, *Finding Space. Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality*, p. 115

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸⁴ Winnicott, Donald W. *Home is Where We Start From*, London, Penguin Books, 1986, p. 41.

⁸⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 93.

of John's works is the gradual awakening in the soul of its innate capacity to respond to the overwhelming desire in God for loving union, which will find its fulfilment in the life of the Trinity. In *The Spiritual Canticle*, John, in his commentary on Stanzas 31 and 32, presents us with a truly astonishing picture of God as He is in Himself. The soul, addressing God in these words:

‘You considered
That one hair fluttering at my neck;
You gazed at it upon my neck
And it captivated You;
And one of my eyes wounded You.’⁸⁶

is making three essential points. The ‘one hair’ is the strong and solitary love that binds the virtues together to preserve them. It represents the strong single-minded love that has finally been purified of all its false attachments and obsessions and, as such, has captivated the desire of love in God Himself. The eye that wounds refers to the soul's faith and fidelity towards God. It is a single eye that is not ‘mixed with some other human respect ... Thus it is only one eye that wounds Him, just as it is only one hair that captivates the Beloved.’⁸⁷ Wounded and captivated by love⁸⁸ John is presenting the figure of God, in the person of the Bridegroom, as one Whose love contains such an intensity of desire and vulnerability, that He is prepared to become a prisoner of His Beloved. The soul, then, ‘united with God in the intellect through faith, and in the will through love... glories here in this union and thanks her Spouse for this favour received from His hands... Consider the joy, happiness and delight the soul finds in such a prisoner, she who had been so long His prisoner.’⁸⁹ Expressed here, in this highly

⁸⁶ “En sólo aquel cabello/ que en mi cuello volar consideraste /mirástele en mi cuello/ y en él preso quedaste/ y en uno de mis ojos te llagaste.” C. 31.2. (532/864)

⁸⁷ “Mezclada con otro algún respeto o cumplimento...y así, sólo un ojo ha de ser en que se llaga como también un solo cabello en que se prenda el Amado.” C. 31.9. (534/866).

⁸⁸ See here C.31.10. 534/866

⁸⁹ “Se sujeta en el entendimiento por fe y en la voluntad por amor. De la cual unión se gloria aquí el alma y regradia esta merced a su Esposo como reciba de su mano, estimando en mucho haberse querido pagar y prenda de su amor. En lo cual se podría considerar el gozo , alegría y deleite que el alma

emotive imagery is the genuine and authentic person of God Who can offer a dynamic intimacy of total union in which His ‘otherness’ can find full expression.

In his Introduction to Stanza 32, John then amplifies this theme further when he says, ‘Happy is the loving soul, since she possesses God for her prisoner, and He is surrendered to all her desires. God is such that those who act with love and friendship towards Him will make Him do all they desire, but if they act otherwise there is no speaking to Him nor power with Him even though they go to extremes.’⁹⁰ God is, therefore, willing to be used by His Beloved as a total expression of His love since His one desire is to reveal Himself as the lover, Who expresses His true identity in total surrender. As we have seen in Winnicott’s careful analysis of the way an object’s authentic identity only emerges through survival, after destruction in the imagination, and its capacity for use by the subject, we can recognise here these dynamics at work as the soul advances in a genuine mutual relationship with Christ. We will now examine further, in greater detail, how the receptivity of the individual gradually opens up to the initiatives of love that come from Christ’s desire for union, which we have seen is the fullest expression of His identity.

The Empowering Nature of Christ’s Transitional Role

In the earlier part of this chapter I referred to Rizzuto’s Psychological Study, *The Birth of the Living God*, where she makes the observation, very pertinent to the study of Winnicott and John, that ‘God is a special transitional object because He is created not from teddy bears, dolls or blankets but from representational materials whose sources are the representations of primary objects.’⁹¹ Referring then to Winnicott’s statement that ‘the transitional object is

tendrá con este tal prisionero, pues tanto tiempo había que lo era ella de él, andando de él enamorado.” C 31.10. (534/866)

⁹⁰ “ Dichosa el alma que ama, pues tiene a Dios por prisionero rendido a toda lo que ella quisiere; porque tiene tal condición, que, si le llevan por amor y por bien, le harán hacer cuanto quisieren, y si de otra manera, no hay hablarle ni poder con El aunque hagan extremos.” C. 32.1. (534/866-867)

⁹¹ Rizzuto, *Birth of the Living God*, p. 178

gradually allowed to be decathected, so that in the course of years it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo,'⁹² she then makes this further point that God 'Nonetheless, as is true of all other objects...cannot be fully repressed. As a transitional representation he is always potentially available for further acceptance or further rejection.'⁹³ This has to be so since, in Winnicott's words, 'the task of reality acceptance is never completed.... No human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality.'⁹⁴ The figure of Christ, in John, reveals a unique specialness as a transitional object. He holds within His own person not only the capacity to carry a person into the intermediate space of contemplation in the night of faith, but also the capacity to present Himself as an external object who can continue the facilitation of the differentiation process of mutual identity between Me and not-Me. However, in the way this process of differentiation unfolds, referring to Rizzuto's insight concerning God as a transitional representation, God makes Himself available for further acceptance and rejection. In other words, He keeps alive, always, a transitional dimension in the relationship so that further differentiation can lead to His own deeper self-revelation of Himself as a separate object. This can only take place where this is facilitating, at the same time, a greater capacity in the person, the figure of the bride in John, to enter more deeply into the intermediate space, the night of contemplation, in such a way that the Bridegroom, Christ Himself, can reveal more of His objective presence. The question that must now be asked is: How is this transitional dimension expressed in John's representation of the Bridegroom and what does it ultimately consist of?

Returning to *The Spiritual Canticle*, we find in Stanza 28 this important statement, 'If any thing pleases Him, it is the exaltation of the soul. Since there is no way by which He can exalt her more than by making her equal to Himself. He is pleased only with her love.'⁹⁵ The

⁹² Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 233.

⁹³ Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God, A Psychoanalytic Study*, p. 179.

⁹⁴ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 13

⁹⁵ "Y así, si de algo se sirve es de que el alma se engrandezca, y como no hay otra cosa en que más la pueda engrandecer que igualándola consigo, por eso solamente se sirve de que le ame," C 28.1 (520/851)

communication of God's love has only one motive and that is the empowerment within the soul of the beloved to love Him in the way that He loves her. John presents the Bridegroom, the figure of Christ, repeatedly as the lover Who loves with a love that contains in its centre a desire for a reciprocal love in the bride. Furthermore, the soul, the bride, is likewise presented as one who experiences this love not as a gift that is to be passively enjoyed but as an overwhelming stimulus to participate in a burning desire for 'the other'. Through very potent images in Stanza 9 the bride is portrayed as the wounded stag, wounded by the poisoned arrows of love.⁹⁶ This wounding kindles in her a yearning for healing, expressed in the question:

'Why, since you wounded
This heart, don't you heal it?'⁹⁷

John explains this as follows: 'Her complaint is not that He wounded her - for the more a loving soul is wounded the more its love is repaid - but that in sorely wounding her heart, He did not heal her by slaying her completely.'⁹⁸ In other words, in this wounding she was drawn into a state of painful incompleteness yet, at the same time, one of burning anticipation that thrusts her into that liminal place of illusion where the subjective yearning for union with the loved object cries out for fulfilment. The latter, of course, can only come when the bride herself has become capable of totally engaging with the fullness of desire in the Bridegroom. In real terms, this will not take place until she is liberated from the interior obstacles that prevent her own desire for love matching the intensity of the Bridegroom's desire for her.

The Night of the Spirit

It is in Book Two of *The Night* that John presents us with a powerful description of the purification of the spirit which is at the same time integral to the growing ability in the soul to

⁹⁶ "Anda tocada de la yerba del amor," C. 9.1. (442/769)

⁹⁷ "Por qué, pues has llagado/ aqueste corazón, no le sanaste?" C 9.2. (443/770)

⁹⁸ "No se querella porque la haya llagado (porque el enamorado, cuanto más herido, está más pagado), sino que, habiendo llagado el corazón, no le sanó acabándole de matar." C.9.3. (443/770)

enter into the unity of desire in love: ‘God proceeds thus so that by withdrawing the appetites from other objects and recollecting them in Himself, He strengthens the soul and gives it the capacity for this strong union of love, which He begins to accord by means of this purgation.’⁹⁹ However, John makes it perfectly clear that initially ‘when the soul is wounded, touched and impassioned,’¹⁰⁰ which includes all its strengths and faculties both sensory and spiritual, it becomes ‘aware of the fire and wound of this forceful love and still neither possesses it nor gets satisfaction from it, but remains in darkness and doubt. Doubtless, suffering hunger like dogs, as David says, these souls wander about the city and howl and sigh because they are not filled with this love.[Ps. 58:7, 15-16]’¹⁰¹ It is thus in and through the touches of divine love, that the soul is plunged into an inner dialectic between a liberating, though immensely purifying, interior purgation on the one hand and a growing desire for union on the other, both being a manifestation of the liberating presence of God’s self-revelation.

It is at this point that we must recall the very earliest experience of the first transitional object. As we have seen, it finds its place and significance through the disillusionment that accompanies the child’s separation from the mother and all the associated experiences of attachment to her. It facilitates entry into the intermediate space where new encounters with external objects become possible, but, above all, it is pre-eminently the bridge that opens the child to engagement with reality while still maintaining a sense of personal continuity within. John, describing the experience of the soul undergoing this spiritual purgation, makes this crucial point, ‘Nonetheless, in the midst of these dark and loving afflictions, the soul feels the presence of someone and an interior strength which so fortifies and accompanies it that when

⁹⁹ “Todo lo cual hace Dios a fin de que, apartándolos y recogidos todos para sí, tenga el alma más fortaleza y habilidad para recibir esta fuerte unión de amor de Dios, que por este medio purgativo le comienza ya a dar.” 2N.11 .3. (353/547)

¹⁰⁰ “Ella herida y tocada según todos ellos y apasionada,” 2N. 11.5. (353/547)

¹⁰¹ “Viéndose inflamadas y heridas de fuerte amor y sin la posesión y satisfacción de él en la oscuridad y duda? Sin duda, padeciendo hambre, *como los canes* que dice David *rodearon la ciudad* (ps 58,7 y 15) y no se viendo hartos de este amor, quedan aullando y gimiendo.” 2N 11.5. (354/547).

the weight of anxious darkness passes, it often feels alone, empty and weak.¹⁰² In other words, the presence of the bridegroom, the person of Christ, is maintained within the spiritual consciousness of the person, however obliquely, even when ‘the soul’s greatest suffering in the trials of this night is the anguish of thinking it has lost God and been abandoned by Him.’¹⁰³ This totally subjective reaction, however, in no way corresponds to the actual objective reality of what is taking place. This ‘cleansing and curing’¹⁰⁴ is the means by which ‘God makes the soul die to all that He is not, so that when it is stripped and flayed of its old skin, He may clothe it anew.’¹⁰⁵

The Importance of the Mending Gesture

Earlier on, I referred to the image John presents us with in the first chapter in Book One of *The Night*, where he portrays the figure of God as the nurturing and caressing mother. I drew the obvious analogy between John’s image and that of the good-enough mother in Winnicott’s description of the positive holding environment. The failure of the mother to respond accurately and in the minutest detail to the babies’ needs, most often expressed by the mother’s absence, is a vital aspect of the process of disillusionment which initiates the Me and not-Me differentiation that leads to objective object relations. However, the successful negotiation of the process which enables the transitional object to represent symbolically the maternal environment and the creative dynamics that accompany the formation of the True Self, rooted in *continuity of being*, depends on the way the mother, in Winnicott’s terms, mends her failures and remains present to the baby. Winnicott writes, ‘Human beings fail and fail; in the course of ordinary care a mother is all the time mending her failures. These relative

¹⁰² “Pero en medio de estas penas oscuras y amorosas siente el alma cierta compañía y fuerza en su interior, que la acompaña y esfuerza tanto, que, si se le acaba este peso de apretada tiniebla, muchas veces se siente sola, vacía, y floja.” 2N 11.7. (354/548)

¹⁰³ “Todo lo más que padece y siente en los trabajos de esta noche es ansia de pensar si tiene perdido a Dios y pensar si está dejada de El.” 2N 13. 5 (358/552)

¹⁰⁴ “Limpiarla y curarla” 2N 13. 11. (360/555).

¹⁰⁵ “Haciéndola Dios desfallecer [y desnudar] en esta manera a todo lo que no es Dios naturalmente, para irla vistiendo de nuevo, desnudada y desollada ya ella de su antiguo pellejo, y asíse le *renueve*.” *Ibid.*

failures with immediate remedy undoubtedly add up emotionally to a communication, so that the baby comes to know about success. Successful adaptation thus gives a sense of security, a feeling of having been loved.¹⁰⁶ This mending response from the mother enables the infant to undergo the necessary separation while still retaining a positive sense of the maternal relationship. The latter includes, of course, all the associated memories and experiences of the exercise of omnipotence and the use of illusion, which forms the basis of creativity and the capacity to form future relationships. As Winnicott says, ‘This mending of the ego structures re-establishes the baby’s capacity to use a symbol of union; the baby then comes once more to allow and even to benefit from the separation. This is the place that I have set out to examine, the separation that is not separation.’¹⁰⁷ This mending process obviously works because it is an integral part of the holding environment, and as Winnicott clearly puts it, ‘The mother is always traumatising within a framework of adaptation. In this way the infant passes from absolute to relative dependence.’¹⁰⁸ The maternal figure, and all she emotionally represents, is thus a central feature of the transitional object not only because she offers symbolically that continued opportunity for the sense of omnipotent creativity to be kept alive within the infant, but also because she holds within herself, for the infant, the paradox of separation and union that enables the anguish of abandonment to co-exist with the ecstasy of reciprocal love. She is the first emotional bridge that enables the baby to find its way of remaining connected with both inner and outer reality during the most painful times of transition and growth.

The Breath of the Spirit - the Mending Gesture of Christ the Bridegroom

The transitional dimension of God, as has been highlighted earlier, according to Rizzuto, is ‘created from representational materials whose sources are the representations of primary

¹⁰⁶ Winnicott, ‘Babies and Their Mothers,’ in *Winnicott and the Child*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁷ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, pp. 97-98.

¹⁰⁸ Winnicott, Donald W., ed. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, & Madeleine Davis, *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press., 1989. p. 146.

objects.¹⁰⁹ We can now see this insight at work as we follow the deepening of the relationship between bride and Bridegroom in *The Spiritual Canticle*.¹¹⁰ John, when describing the spiritual espousal of the soul to Christ, is very clear about the integral nature of the sufferings involved: ‘it should be pointed out that the absences of the Beloved, which the soul suffers in this state of spiritual espousal, are very painful; some are of such a kind that there is no suffering comparable to them...since she lives with that driving force of a fathomless desire for union with God.’¹¹¹ The baby’s desire for the continual uninterrupted presence of the mother clearly reflects the total dependence of the infant on her whose importance lies in the way love and environmental functioning are brought together. As we have seen, however, it is crucial that the mother releases the child from the enclosed world where the creative energy, that underpins *continuity of being*, can then be engaged in the search for external objects. However, the mending gestures are the key to maintaining the loving relationship, while, at the same time, allowing the environmental dimension of the infant’s experience to start expanding.

The latter must take place in such a way that the capacity for omnipotent creativity, which keeps alive the *continuity of being*, can undergo modification and transformation and so be available for the development of external relationships. Hence, the need for the transitional object and its bridging function. The Bridegroom, in *The Spiritual Canticle*, emerges as the figure that pre-eminently embodies this maternal dynamism. His transitional function and the description of the mending gesture of the breath of the Spirit brings this out with poetic clarity. The soul who is filled with ‘fathomless desire’¹¹² expresses this longing by crying out;

‘Be still, deadening north wind;

South wind come, you that waken love,

¹⁰⁹ Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God. A Psychoanalytic Study*, p. 76.

¹¹⁰ See here C. 14/15. 2. (463/645)

¹¹¹ “Conviene aquí advertir que las ausencias que padece el alma de su Amado en este estado de desposorio espiritual son aflictivas, y algunas son de manera que no hay pena que se le compare...porque, como ella está con aquella gran fuerza de deseo abisal por la unión con Dios.” C. 17.1. (478/807)

¹¹² “Deseo abisal” C. 17.1.(478/807)

Breathe through my garden,
 Let its fragrance flow,
 And the Beloved will feed amid the flowers.’¹¹³

The deadening north wind, which ‘dries up and withers the flowers and plants.’¹¹⁴ John describes as that darkness within the soul that comes from ‘the spiritual dryness and affective absence of the Beloved,’¹¹⁵ which, in its turn, ‘deadens the virtues and affective exercise,’¹¹⁶ that are the bases of prayer. This can only bear fruit, however, once the south wind, ‘a delightful breeze: it causes rain, makes the herbs and plants germinate, opens the flowers and scatters their fragrances,’¹¹⁷ is released. It is this divine breeze, that symbolises the Holy Spirit, Who awakens love in the soul and ‘when this divine breeze strikes her, it wholly enkindles and refreshes her, and quickens and awakens the will and elevates the previously fallen appetites that were asleep to the love of God.’¹¹⁸ Finally the command, ‘Breathe through my garden’¹¹⁹ is the invocation, ‘to breathe through the soul... to touch and put in motion the virtues and perfections already given., renewing and moving them in such a way that they of themselves afford the soul a wonderful fragrance and sweetness...’¹²⁰

This bringing alive in the soul its life of prayer, its spiritual gifts and its patterns of dynamic virtuous living, is the work of the Holy Spirit. However, it is the Bridegroom Who ‘sends His Spirit, as He sent His Apostles [Lk. 22.8.], to act as His quartermaster, to prepare His dwelling, the bride-soul, by raising her up in delight and adorning this garden, opening its

¹¹³ “Detente, cierzo muerto;/ven, austro, que recuerdas los amores,/aspira por mi huerto/y corran sus lores,/y pacerá el Amado entre las flores.” C. 17.1. (479/807)

¹¹⁴ “Que seca y marchita las flores y plantas.” C. 17.3. (479/808)

¹¹⁵ “La sequedad espiritual y la ausencia afectiva del Amado,” *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ “Porque todas las virtudes y ejercicio afectivo uqe tenía el alma tiene amortiguando,” *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ “Este aire apacible causa lluvias y hace germinar las yerbas y plantas y abrir las flores y derramar su olor.” C. 17. 4. (480/808)

¹¹⁸ “De tal manera la inflama toda y la regala y aviva y recuerda la voluntad y levanta los apetitos que antes estaban caídos y dormidos al amor de Dios.” *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ “aspira por mi huerto” C. 17.5. (480/808)

¹²⁰ “Y aspirar *por* el alma es hacer Dios toque y moción en las virtudes y perfecciones que ya le son dadas, renovándolas y moviéndolas de suerte que den sí admirable fragancia y suavidad al alma.” C. 17.5. (480/809)

flowers, uncovering its gifts, and decorating her with the tapestry of graces and riches.’¹²¹ The Holy Spirit is the Bridegroom’s mending gesture of love which, like the mending gesture of the mother, maintains the conditions within the soul which keep alive all its intrinsic capacity to respond to the Bridegroom’s love. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is the way He enables the soul to continue ‘the agreeable exercise of the perfect virtues,’¹²² through which the Bridegroom then ‘communicates Himself to her with more intimate love and grants her a more particular favour than before; she obtains that her Beloved delight more in her through this exercise of the virtues, and this is what she most enjoys (pleasing the Beloved).’¹²³ The deepening of the relationship described here beautifully echoes the experience of the baby who has experienced the mending gesture of the mother, whereby ‘it (the baby) comes to know about success. Successful adaptation thus gives a sense of security, a feeling of having been loved.’¹²⁴

Christ’s Dual Role

What becomes clear as we observe the soul’s complementary encounters with the figure of Christ, whose role is that of the transitional object, and the person of Christ who engages with the soul as an object, as it were, in His own right, is the necessity of the dual role in the light of the soul’s destiny. One of the primary functions of the transitional object is to enable the individual to establish a genuine sense of Me and not-Me identity between the soul and the external object. This is achieved where an intermediate area has been established that enables the creative capacities, that are a central part of the individual’s subjective reality, to interact with the objective world,¹²⁵ in a way that stimulates the sense of *continuity of being*. In *The Spiritual Canticle*, John presents us with the figure of Christ, the Bridegroom, whose whole

¹²¹ “Que por eso envía su Espíritu primero (como a los apóstoles), que es su Aposentador, para que le prepare la posada del alma esposa, levantándola en deleite, poniéndole el huerto a gesto, abriendo sus flores, descubriendo sus dones, arreándola de la tapicería de sus gracias y riquezas.” C. 17. 8. (481/810).

¹²² “ Porque gana el gozar las virtudes puestas en el punto de sabroso ejercicio.” *Ibid.*

¹²³ “Se comunica en ella con más estrecho amor y haciéndole más particular merced que antes; y gana que el Amado mucho más se deleita en ella por este ejercicio actual de virtudes, que es de lo que ella más gusta (es a saber, que guste su Amado).” *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Winnicott. ‘Babies and Their Mothers’, in *Winnicott on the Child*, p.76.

¹²⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 11.

identity centres on His desire to communicate Himself totally to the soul through an ecstatic union of love. His whole task is to offer Himself as the embodiment of total divine desire for the soul in a way that the bride herself begins to live ‘with that driving force of a fathomless desire for union with God.’¹²⁶ This union can only be authentically achieved where the bride herself has reached that fullness of personal identity that enables her to give and receive in an exchange of mutual reciprocity. John powerfully alludes to this when referring to the spiritual marriage between the bride and the Bridegroom where he says, ‘If before she had grace, He loved her only on account of Himself, now that she is in grace He loves her not only on account of Himself but also on account of herself.’¹²⁷ The state of being ‘in grace’ is, of course, precisely a result of the purifying transformation that has been effected through encounters with the transitional Christ. It is He Who has stirred up her longing for Him, and this longing has carried her into that response of faith, the intermediate space, ‘which contains and hides the image and the beauty of her Beloved.’¹²⁸ Purification, of its essence, liberates the soul from all that prevents it being creative and open to the fullness of relationship with ‘the other.’ As we have seen, the person of Christ, the Bridegroom, continually presents Himself in His objective persona, as ‘the other’, but in such a way that manages to combine an intensity of loving communion that, nonetheless, opens up still further a deeper need in the bride to experience the transitional process until the full differentiation of identity has been achieved. This is absolutely vital if that perfect union of love can then fulfil the deepest yearnings of desire that make up the very essence of the mystical marriage.

Mystical Marriage - Opening to the Father

We have now reached the final part of our reflection concerning the dynamic union of love. This, as has so clearly been shown to us by John, is consummated in the mystical marriage,

¹²⁶ “ gran fuerza de deseo abisal por la unión con Dios.” C. 17. 1 (478/807).

¹²⁷ “Si antes que estuviese en su gracia or sí solo la amaba, ahora [que] ya está en su gracia no sólo la ama por sí, sino también or ella.” C 33. 7. (539/871-872)

¹²⁸ “La que en sí encierra y encubre la figura y hermosura de su Amado.” C. 12.1. (453/780)

fired by a communion of desire, in the bride and Bridegroom, that by its very nature cannot remain static. This is immediately clear as John embarks upon his commentary of the last five stanzas of *The Spiritual Canticle*. The bride, having attained that independence of desire within herself, that has come to birth in all its fullness through a clear differentiation between the Me and not-Me, now exercises this desire in relation to the Bridegroom. In one of the most memorable passages in the whole corpus of John's works the bride proposes to the Bridegroom that they 'go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty,'¹²⁹ which is presented as a celebration of delight in each other's reflection. However, as John makes clear further on, 'The soul cannot see herself in the beauty of God, unless she is transformed in the wisdom of God,'¹³⁰ since 'the soul always possesses this desire to have a clear and pure understanding of the divine truths, and the greater her love, the more she longs to enter further into these truths.'¹³¹ John then presents us with two very graphic images that clarify for us the nature of this movement. The first is the thicket that contains 'your splendid works and profound judgements whose multitude and variety are such that we can use the term "thicket".'¹³² Entering the thicket will eventually bring further suffering which John sees as integral to the process of acquiring wisdom.

However, this wisdom, which the bride is willing to find even in the face of pain and suffering, specifically finds its centre 'in the knowledge of the mysteries of the Incarnation, in which is contained the highest and most savory of all His works.'¹³³ This then John amplifies with his second powerful image, that of the high caverns of the rock which contain the 'sublime, exalted and deep mysteries of God's wisdom in Christ.'¹³⁴ This wisdom, John tells

¹²⁹ "Y vámonos a ver en tu hermosura." C. 36.5. (547/880)

¹³⁰ "No puede verse en la hermosura de Dios el alma si no es transformándose en al sabiduría de Dios." C. 36. 8. (548/881)

¹³¹ "Este apetito tiene siempre el alma de entender clara y puramente las verdades divinas; y cuanto más ama, más adentro de ellas apetece entrar." C 36. 9. (548/881).

¹³² " De tus maravillosas obras y profundos juicos, cuya multitud es tanta y de tantas diferencias que se puede llamar *espesura*." C. 36. 10 (548/881)

¹³³ " Su entendimiento en Dios, según la noticia de los misterios de la Encarnación, como más alta y sabrosa sabiduría de todas sus obras." C 37.2. (550/ 883)

¹³⁴ " Las *subidas cavernas* de este *pedra* son los subidos y altos y profundos misterios de sabiduria de Dios que hay en Cristo." C . 37.3. (550/884)

us, enfolds ‘the hypostatic union of the human nature with the divine Word, and in the corresponding union of men with God.’¹³⁵ He then amplifies this even further to include ‘ the mystery of the harmony between God’s justice and mercy with respect to the manifestation of his judgements in the salvation of the human race.’¹³⁶ Mystical marriage, therefore, does not mean the establishment of a sealed off enclosed intimacy, but rather the complete reverse. Just as we have seen emerging clearly the complimentary role of the figure of Christ, Who, on the one hand, acts as a transitional agent preparing the bride/soul to enter the intermediate area of faith, and on the other, comes to the soul in that space as an objective object seeking relationship, we can now begin to observe how the complimentary role develops even further.

The Bridegroom, for John, being the person of Christ, is ,of course, the Second Person of the Trinity, Who shares fully in the glory of the Father, the Creator. This fundamental truth is always implicitly present in John’s presentation of the person of Christ, but, as he expounds more comprehensively the true nature of spiritual marriage, the real implications for the bride become more explicit. Taking up John’s commentary again, with the focus being on the high caverns of rock, that are ‘deep and have many recesses,’¹³⁷ John tells us that these contain the mysteries of God’s wisdom in Christ, and that each of the mysteries ‘is singularly deep in wisdom and contains many recesses of His secret judgements of predestination and foreknowledge concerning the sons of men.’¹³⁸ This sharing in the particular interior knowledge and wisdom of God, expresses, in a practical and tangible way, the nature of the total union that exists between Christ and the Father.

John thus makes two very important points regarding the progress of love in the spiritual marriage. The bride speaking in the first person tells the Bridegroom, ‘I shall be transformed

¹³⁵ “ La unión hipostática de la naturaleza humana con el Verbo divino.” *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ “ En la correspondencia que hay a ésta de la unión de los hombres en Dios, y en las conveniencias de justicia y misericordia de Dios sobre la salud del género humano en manifestación de sus juicios.’ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ “ Las cavernas son profundas y de muchos senos,” *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ “ Asi cada misterio de los que hay en Christo es profundísimo en sabiduría, y tiene muchos senos de juicios suyos ocultos de predestinación y pre[s]ciencia en los hijos de los hombres. Por lo cual dice luego.” *Ibid.*

in you, through love of these divine and delightful judgements.¹³⁹ John, then, himself makes this very significant statement, ‘In her knowledge about the predestination of the just and the foreknowledge of the damned...the soul is most sublimely and intimately transformed in the love of God. And with unspeakable delight she thanks and loves the Father again through His Son Jesus. She does this united with Christ, together with Christ.’¹⁴⁰ This image of the bride’s particular union with the person of Christ is a powerful reminder that the Bridegroom, in Himself, is the opening to the deeper reality, the person of the Father, Whose love is universal and enfolds the whole of reality.

If the bride/soul is to experience that total equality of love with Christ, the Bridegroom, she must, of necessity, have to participate in this relationship with the Father, but in such a way that enables her to retain her own fullness of identity. John describes this participation as the gift of ‘essential glory, consisting in the vision of God’s being.’¹⁴¹ It is this more than anything else that will complete the spiritual marriage and ‘until attaining this equality of love the soul is dissatisfied.’¹⁴² We are immediately reminded again of the need for some form of disillusionment as an ever present stimulus to experience a more intense loving encounter. It is important here to recall the reference made earlier to the bride’s pain during the period of spiritual espousal, aroused, often very deeply, by a sense of the Bridegroom’s absence. A clear analogy was developed between the bride’s pain and the anguish of the infant triggered by the mother’s lack of accurate response to its fundamental needs, and often combined with experiences of her absence. It was the mending gesture of the mother for the child and the grace of the Holy Spirit, ‘the delightful breeze’¹⁴³, that not only continually deepened the respective relationships but enabled further development to take place. In the commentary on

¹³⁹ “*Allí nos transformaremos, es a saber, yo en ti por el amor de estos dichos juicios divinos y sabrosos.*” C 37. 6.(552/885)

¹⁴⁰ “Porque en el conocimiento de la predestinación de los justos y presciencia de los malos...subidísima y estrechísimamente se transforma el alma en amor de Dios según estas noticias, agradeciendo y amando al Padre de nuevo con grande sabor y deleite por su Hijo Jesucristo. Y esto hace ella unida con Cristo juntamente con Cristo.” *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ “La gloria esencial, que consiste en ver a Dios.” C. 38. 5. (555/888)

¹⁴² “Hasta llegar a esta no está el alma contenta.” C. 38 4. 554/888.

¹⁴³ “Otro viento” C. 17 4. (480/808)

Stanza 39, we will now witness how the bride leads us into the final act of the drama that loving intimacy with the Bridegroom signifies, ‘the fruition she will enjoy in the beatific vision.’¹⁴⁴

The Fullness of Life in the Trinity

John, through the voice of the soul, offers us five specific ways in which this culmination of love will find expression. The first is the sending into the soul, once again, the gift of the Holy Spirit Who this time ‘informs her and makes her capable of breathing in God the same spiration of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father, which is the Holy Spirit Himself, Who in the Father and the Son breathes out to her in this transformation, in order to unite her to Himself.’¹⁴⁵ This image of spiration, being totally involved in the deepest communication of love between the Son and the Father, brings the process of transformation to that point of completion where the true identity of the soul is found in her resemblance to the person of God Who ‘created her in His image and likeness that she might attain such resemblance.’¹⁴⁶

What is essential for us to consistently keep in mind here is that the duality of Christ’s role, outlined above, is integral to the experience of the soul in the life of the Trinity. The figure of Christ as a transitional object, with all its historical implications, is woven into the very texture of loving interaction between Christ Himself and the soul. This is a necessary feature of the relationship as the fullness of love can only be fully realised where the Me and not-Me differentiation has been clearly established. It is this objective perception of personal identity that enables an individual to live in the intermediate area where relationships with external objects then become creative, as the inner and outer experience of the individual self can discover a deeper inter-relatedness.

¹⁴⁴ “ Algo de aquella fruición que entices gozará en la beatifica vista.” C.39.1. (57/891)

¹⁴⁵ “ La informa y habilita para que ella aspire en Dios la misma aspiración de amor que el Padre aspira en el Hijo y el Hijo en el Padre, que es el mismo Espíritu Santo que a ella la aspira en el Padre y el Hijo dicha transformación para unirla consigo.” C 39.3 (558/891)

¹⁴⁶ “Y para que pudiese venire a esto la crió a su imagen y semejanza.” C. 39.4. (558/892)

The person of Christ comes to the individual as precisely that objective presence which brings alive a deeper creative potential in the beloved soul. He does this by coming as the objective loving presence whose own identity contains this unique mutual communion with the Father. In order for Him, therefore, to enable the bride/soul to participate fully in the mutual loving exchange, where both parties share the fullness of themselves with the 'other', this Trinitarian dimension of Christ's identity must be integral to the relationship He has with the soul. He, in a literal sense, contains within Himself an intermediate space where His fullness of identity is celebrated in His relationship with the Father. This is where Ulanov says in her study, *Finding Space Winnicott and God and Psychic Reality*, 'The Father ceaselessly gives forth to the Son, who gives back again to the giver; this communication exists so intensely that its immediacy manifests itself as the living Spirit between them, stemming from both, expressing both, overflowing into the world, communicating being to us.'¹⁴⁷

Christ, therefore, in His very being, must keep alive in the soul the capacity for deeper union with Himself, as a dynamic expression of the intimacy they share, since he both contains the caverns of mysteries that 'are deep and have many recesses,¹⁴⁸ and is, in Himself, 'like an abundant mine with many recesses of treasures, so that however deep men go they never reach the end or bottom.'¹⁴⁹ To this is now added the most compelling and vital dimension of all, the necessary openness to the Father, which is the relational description of these eternal depths that the person of Christ embodies for the soul. It must be said, however, that this union between the Father and the soul can never be experienced as an exclusive independent exchange, it can only take place within the context of the communion that has already been established, and continues to exist between the soul and Christ. John, clarifies this himself when referring to the experience of these souls when he says, 'The Father loves them by

¹⁴⁷ Ulanov, *Finding Space Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality*, p. 130.

¹⁴⁸ "Las cavernas son profundas y de muchos senos," C. 37. 3. (550/884).

¹⁴⁹ "Porque es como una abundante mina con muchos senos de tesoros, que por más que ahonden, nunca les hallan fin ni término," C. 37.4. 551/884.

communicating to them the same love He communicates with the Son, though not naturally as to the Son, but as we said through union and transformation of love.’¹⁵⁰

The Continuity of the Transitional Experience - Life beyond Death

The figure of Christ, therefore, expresses His love for the soul by enabling it to grow in its capacity for total mutual exchange, and by incorporating into this loving union, through His transitional role, a movement of desire, within the soul, to enter more deeply into His depths, while retaining the joys of union already received. He then facilitates further this movement of creative love by enabling the soul to enter the eternal dimension of being through union with the Father, in which He fully participates. All the while Christ is able to achieve this facilitating role as He exercises His presence as a transitional and objective object that combines for the soul both active and passive dimensions of love that keep her in a state of creative expectation. The experience of participating in the life of the Trinity, however, can only reach total fulfilment once the soul has passed through physical death into the unlimited space of eternity, and as John says, ‘In the transformation which the soul possesses in this life, the same spiration passes from God to the soul and from the soul to God with notable frequency and blissful love, although not in the open and manifest degree proper to the next life.’¹⁵¹ For John, even in this ecstasy of communion between the bride/soul and Christ, the Bridegroom, there is still present a further transitional experience that can only be consummated in physical death.

In the most delicate and fascinating way John presents us with an image of God Who both encourages and incorporates this expectancy in the bride/soul in a way that enables it to be an integral part of the celebration of love that the bride and Bridegroom experience. He gives us

¹⁵⁰ “Que es comunicándoles el mismo amor que al Hijo, aunque no naturalmente como al Hijo, como habemos dicho, por unidad y transformación de amor.” C. 39. 5. (559/892).

¹⁵¹ “ Y en la transformación que el alma tiene en esta pasa esta misma aspiración de Dios al alma y del alma a Dios con mucha frecuencia con subidísimo deleite de amor en alma, aunque no enrevelado y manifesto grado como la otra vida.” C. 39 4. (558/892).

the beautiful image of the song of the nightingale where he says the bride ‘hears the sweet voice of her Bridegroom Who is her sweet nightingale... he calls her as He would call one now disposed to make the journey to eternal life.’¹⁵² This combination of joy and a still ever present sense of expectancy, which John does recognise as painful, will always be present in this life even when the bride has reached the complete state of union in love with the Bridegroom: ‘This is what happens to the soul that in this life is transformed through the perfection of love; although it is conformed, it still suffers a kind of pain and detriment.’¹⁵³ Hence, when the Bridegroom bestows on the bride a new vision of creation where earthly and heavenly creatures are perceived in a ‘wise, well-ordered, gracious and harmonious relationship,’¹⁵⁴ so that ‘the knowledge of this harmony fascinates and delights the soul,’¹⁵⁵ there is still a real sense of what John designates as ‘obscurity’. The experience of divine knowledge, a vision of reality that comes directly from the heart of God, is always the fruit of dark contemplation ‘a knowing by unknowing’¹⁵⁶, that is received in the silence and quietude of the spiritual faculty. It always carries with it a yearning for the vision of God that is clear and serene where, as the soul exclaims, speaking in the first person, ‘I shall delight in the essential vision of God, then the night of contemplation will have changed into day and light for my intellect.’¹⁵⁷

The Dynamic Identity of the True Self in Christ

Winnicott’s understanding of the emergence and development of the True Self, facilitated by the transitional object that opens up the intermediate space, is central to his concept of human

¹⁵² “ Siente la dulce voz de el Esposo, que es su *dulce filomena*; con la cual voz revovando y refrigerando la sustancia de su alma, como al alma ya bien dispuesta para caminar a vida eternal,” C. 39. 8. (560/893).

¹⁵³ “Lo cual acaece en el alma que en esta vida está transformada con perfección de amor, que, aunque hay conformidad, todavía padece alguna manera de pena y detrimento.” C. 39.14. (562/896)

¹⁵⁴ “La respondencia sabia, ordenada graciosa y amigable de unas a otras” C 39.11. (561/895).

¹⁵⁵ “Que es cosa que hace al alma gran donaire y deleite conserla.” *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ “*Entender no entendiendo*” C. 39.12. (561/895).

¹⁵⁷ “Esté en mis deleites de la vista esencial de Dios ya la noche de contemplación habrá amanecido en día y luz mi entendimiento.” C 39. 13. (562/895-896)

fulfilment. The capacity, in a person, to engage with external reality as quoted earlier, namely, ‘to take part in the establishment, maintenance, and alteration of the environment,’¹⁵⁸ while still maintaining a rootedness in the internal world of inner psychic reality, allows the *continuity of being* in the individual continued scope for expression. This True Self thrives on relationships that continue to offer possibilities for the further clarification of the Me and not-Me experience, while strengthening the personal sense of identity. This then allows for the creative expression of ‘the inherited potential’ that continually sets a seal on the sense of personal uniqueness in the individual. In this thesis I have presented Winnicott’s psychological interpretation of the growth of personal identity, that facilitates the necessary cohesion between inner and outer reality, as a realistically creative psychodynamic model for reflecting on the person of Christ that we see presented in John of the Cross’ vision of spiritual development through loving union. Referring back to my opening words in the Introduction, these two modes of thought have assisted me greatly in helping others understand the realistic implications of their call to grow in personal holiness and psychological maturity. John’s understanding of the role of Christ in the life of the soul is clearly one that strengthens and enables the True Self to find its ultimate sense of expression. For John, it is the person of Christ Who deepens our understanding of the creative interaction between the soul and creation, external reality, in a way that not only maintains His union with the us but actually deepens it. As we have seen, He facilitates, within Himself, the encounter between the soul’s *continuity of being*, uniquely defined by his own communion with her, and the essence of Eternal Being in the person of God the Father. This then deepens the experience of union and transformation that is repeated over and over again.

Desire, which is central to John’s understanding of the soul’s movement into complete loving interactive communion within the life of Trinity is, therefore, interwoven into Winnicott’s theory of *continuity of being* in the person of Christ Who emerges in John’s writings as the dynamic centre of the soul’s existence. He figuratively forms a bridge, for the two writers,

¹⁵⁸ Winnicott, *The Family and Individual Development*, p. 102.

between the figure of the mother, who brings the child to birth and provides *continuity of being* in the holding environment, and God the Father, Who has created the individual soul in love and continues to care for her with the nurturing sensitivity of maternal love. As the transitional object Christ is presented to the individual as the one who in Himself can activate the very specific need for an object relationship that can embrace both the sensual and spiritual desires for fulfilment. This need is then met when He Himself offers an objective relationship of love in which He is experienced more and more as totally 'other', the Not-Me presence, that further stimulates a creative differentiation, enabling the individual to feel more and more, in Winnicott's words, 'creative and real.'¹⁵⁹ As this process is then repeated over and over again, as we saw in the dynamic interaction between the soul/bride and the person of Christ/Bridegroom in *The Spiritual Canticle*, the essence of desire is thus continually refined. It is in this way that the soul is then prepared for its dynamic inclusion in the loving relationship that exists between the Three Persons of the Trinity, this inclusion being continually facilitated through the transitional and objective role of the person of Christ in the life of the soul.

¹⁵⁹ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 292.

Conclusion

The Search for Authentic Self Identity

In the Introduction to this thesis I pointed out that the search for an authentic experience of self identity is a central feature in both spheres of my ministry as spiritual director and psychotherapist. A dynamic sense and growing knowledge of who one is as an individual, both in relation to oneself and others, is an integral part of psychological and spiritual health. It is the desire for this dynamic experience, coupled with the challenge of facing the conflicts and obstacles relating to growth and the need to overcome and resolve them, that can provide the impetus for authentic personal development. The movement of self-transcendence, as Walter E. Conn makes clear in two of his most widely read works, is, therefore, a key component in the discovery of self knowledge as it enables an individual to experience a sense of personal freedom and the potential for creative living.¹

In this connection I referred to an article by Stanley J. Grenz in which he discusses what he considers to be a serious negative feature of our present day post-modern culture, the destabilisation of self identity that has lost a sense of internal coherence and is constantly looking to external relationships for clarity and meaning.² He points out that one of the truly damaging results of this is what Francis Jameson refers to as ‘psychic fragmentation’,³ which arouses not only an intense anxiety but also a hunger for stability and meaning in which personal growth and development can again take place. Now what is significant in Grenz’s description of the rise and demise of the concept of the self is the way he traces the original

¹ Conn, Walter, *Christian Conversion, A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender*, New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1986., p.66.

The Desiring Self, Rooting Pastoral Counselling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence. New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press., 1998. pp.71-75.

² Grenz, Stanley J., ‘The Social God and the Relational Self, Toward a Theology of the Imago Dei in the Post-modern Context’, in (eds.) Lints Richard, Horton Michael S., & Talbot Mark R., *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, Grand Rapids MI, William B.Erdmanns Publishing Company, 2006. p. 70.

³ Jameson, Francis *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1995. p.90.

establishment of a strong coherent sense of a spiritual self back to St. Augustine of Hippo⁴ who made the essential link between self identity and the life of the Trinity.⁵

This, as we subsequently saw, received further development over the following centuries that culminated in the thematic framework of the teaching of St. John of the Cross. Now Grenz understands the demise of the stable and coherent sense of self as intimately linked not only to the abandonment of the Augustinian/mystical understanding of the nature of a person, developed as a foundation stone of Christian spirituality, but also to the rise of the Renaissance Protagorean concept of man that became the hallmark of the post-Enlightenment scientific understanding of human nature that we associate with the Age of Reason and its particular enunciation in Darwin's *Origin of the Species*.⁶ It was, subsequently, within this rationalistic framework that a strictly psychological interpretation of human experience began to emerge and found a particularly influential and persuasive presentation in the psychoanalytic theories of Freud. These offered a new context in which the person, as a psychological entity, human behaviour, and all the exigencies of human growth, could be observed and interpreted through a recognised system of theory and belief, rooted in scientific method.⁷

Psychological Context - The Choice of Winnicott

The advent of psychoanalysis, concomitant as we saw with early attempts to strike up a dialogue between religion and psychology, seen significantly in the works of Brennan, Maher, Starbuck and James, however, presented the world of religious belief with a serious challenge. According to Freud, religious practice was rooted and empowered through infantile

⁴ Grenz, 'The Social God and the Rational Self, Toward a Theology of the Imago Dei', p. 71.

⁵ .McGinn, Bernard, 'Imago Trinitatis: the Trinitarian Basis of Augustine's Mysticism', in *The Foundations of Mysticism Origins to the Fifth Century*, New York, Crossroad New York. 2005. pp .243-248.

⁶ Grenz, 'The Social God and the Rational Self Towards a Theology of the Imago Dei', p. 73

⁷ Meissner, William, *Life and Faith, Psychological Perspectives in Religious Experience*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C. 1987, p.22.

neurosis and this could be diagnosed as a psychopathological tendency in an individual who clearly needed to grow beyond the state of infantile fixation.⁸ In order for a creative dialogue to begin to take place, therefore, between a psychological and spiritual understanding of the origins of human behaviour, a psychodynamic context that could envisage religious belief as a positive channel for growth in a person needed to be engaged. This gradually became possible when psychological theorists were able to break through the somewhat omnipotent control that Freud had exercised over the interpretation of psychological growth, and its accompanying pathologies. This was particularly necessary since, according to J. Rubin, a strictly psychoanalytic response can overemphasise a reified, egoistic individualism that in the end eclipses the movement of self-transcendence and the spiritual search for ‘a non-centric mode of being.’⁹ It was, subsequently, in the theoretical approaches of Jung, Fromm and Erikson that we saw a clear departure taking influential shape. This was then followed, within the psychoanalytic movement itself, by a thematic shift, in the words of J. McDargh, ‘from the more mental operation to those insights of Freud which gave pride of place to personal relationships as the matrix within which the human psyche is found.’¹⁰ This new starting point, according to H. Guntrip, was initiated by M. Klein ‘who made possible a subtle but enormously important change of atmosphere in psychoanalytic thinking; from the *mechanistic* to the *personal*, from the study of mental phenomena, the clash of psychic forces, to the study of the human being’s struggle for self-realisation as a person in personal relationship.’¹¹

This new focus, as I then pointed out, was then carried forward significantly within the theoretical framework of two key figures in the post-war psychoanalytic world, W. R

⁸ Freud, Sigmund, ‘Totem and Taboo’, in *The Origins of Religion*, London, Penguin Books, 1990. vol.13. p. 209.

⁹ Rubin, Jeffrey B., ‘Psychoanalysis is Self-Centred’, ed. C. Spezzano & C.J. Garggiulo, in *Soul on the Couch, Spirituality Religion & Morality in Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, The Analytic Press, London. 1997. p. 79.

¹⁰ McDargh John, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion, On Faith and the Image of God*. New York, University Press of America Inc., 1983.p. 138.

¹¹ Guntrip, Harry, *Schizoid Phenomena Object Relations and the Self*, London , Karnac Books, 1992.pp. 407-408.

Fairbairn and Donald Winnicott. It was Fairbairn who explicitly stated in his paper, *A Revised Psychopathology of the Psychoses and the Psychoneuroses*, that ‘it would appear as if the point had now been reached at which, in the interests of progress, the classic libido theory would have to be transformed into a theory of development based essentially upon object relationships’.¹² The drive for personal fulfilment was, therefore, to be found within a relational context that could galvanise the movement of instinctual desire in ways that would allow for the creative incorporation of all different levels of affect and imagination. I then showed how this relational vision of psychological growth received further major development through Donald Winnicott, the paediatrician and psychoanalyst, who was influenced by the insights of Klein, particularly concerning the experience of the infant in relation to the mother, and the subsequent patterns of growth that clarified even further the object relations theory of Fairbairn.¹³

It was then that I proposed Winnicott, with his intuitive and yet empirical understanding of the developmental challenges that face a person in the yearning for fulfilment in relationships, as a potentially creative partner for John of the Cross in the reflective dialogue concerning the search for self identity. Winnicott, as we came to observe, outlines in great detail the process of relational growth, from the earliest experience of the infant in the mother/baby dyad right through to the development of external object relationships. Furthermore, he does this with very clear references to all the psychological effects that are brought into play through the demands of growth. Self transcendence is a central feature of Winnicott’s vision of human development that in no way leads to an isolated or exclusive understanding of fulfilment, but on the contrary enhances the entirety of human experience in relationships and, above all, in those of love and friendship.

¹² Fairbairn, W. Ronald, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*. London, Tavistock/Routledge. 1981. p.31

¹³ Kahr, Brett, *D. W. Winnicott, A Biological Portrait*, London, Karnac Books, 1997. p. 59.

The Spiritual Partner in Dialogue - St. John of the Cross

My choice of John of the Cross as a partner in this reflective dialogue was based on three important considerations. The first was rooted in John's standing in the Western spiritual tradition as he is considered, in the words of Peter Feldmeier quoted in my Introduction, 'one of the greatest expositors of the contemplative mystical path,'¹⁴ reflected in the reverence in which he is held by many sincere believers today. Secondly, in the opening section of my second chapter, which deals with John's mystical teaching, I pointed out the significance of John's two strands of presentation, the poetic and the narrative. In this I referred to Colin Thompson's statement in which he says, 'the cause of the poetry is intense mystical experience which cannot be captured in words which...is not beyond the power to represent, however inadequately.'¹⁵ In all his poems John powerfully expresses the many different levels of spiritual experience not only in relation to the inner world of deep personal emotions and impulses, that generate a whole variety of feelings, but also the external world with all its engaging imagery.

John's narrative reflections, therefore, are rooted in the immediacy of personal experiences and however intricate and literary they appear, they have this experiential connection which speaks immediately to the hearts of his readers. Winnicott's insightful theories are also based firmly in his experience as a paediatrician¹⁶ and psychotherapist which professionally has given him a clinical credibility that others have subsequently built upon. One of the major themes of this thesis has, therefore, been an attempt to find an authentic correspondence between these two practitioners of human experience, and to present it in such a way that does

¹⁴ Feldmeier, Peter, *The Developing Christian, Spiritual Growth Through the Life Cycle*, Mahwah/New York, Paulist Press. 2007. p. 76.

¹⁵ Thompson, Colin, *St John of the Cross, Songs in the Night*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London. 2002. p. 271.

¹⁶ Winnicott, Donald, 'Child Department Consultations', in *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, London, Karnac Books, 1992. pp. 70-85

not distort their respective positions, but rather facilitates a fresh exchange between body and spirit within the person.

Finally, this brings me to the third and in some ways most significant reason for choosing John of the Cross as a reflective partner for Donald Winnicott. In my first chapter I demonstrated how the major themes related to spiritual development, that we see in John's works, in particular his narrative commentaries, were a consolidation of the development that had taken place in Western spiritual consciousness. Recalling Grenz's observation that the rise of the concept of the self could be intimately linked to Augustine's vision of personal conversion and spiritual growth, I then went on to highlight what I considered to be the major theoretical developments in the Christian mystical tradition that have a particularly significant place in John's writings. My intention was to illustrate John's attention to the gradual emergence of the living presence of Christ Who, in Himself, brings together all the different levels of spiritual experience through loving union with the individual soul. I highlighted in particular certain key themes in the Western mystical tradition that John incorporated into his writings. These not only underpin the Christological dimension of his vision of entry into loving union, but also offer creative opportunities for the deeper dialogical encounter with Winnicott's understanding of the growth of True Self identity.

I particularly emphasised the importance of the apophatic journey of faith, the spiritual context for total transformation, that involves the soul in a purification that is powerfully reflected in John's understanding of the active and passive nights of faith and spirit. It is a transformation that does not change the essence of humanity, but rather reveals its essential truth, its innate capacity to experience, in Christ, a new internal relationship forming within, between body and spirit. I then showed how this movement of transformation had, at its core, the presence of eros, the desire in God, manifested in the person of Christ, for spousal union, a mutual ecstatic relationship of love that finds its most moving expression in the passion and death of Christ on the Cross. It is this deeper, paschal understanding of the nature of Christ's

love for the soul that enables the whole spectrum of human experience, particularly suffering, to be included in the relationship of total union. Every aspect of the inner world of the affect is then drawn into the process of transformation which then enables the soul to experience its authentic identity through self-transcendence, at the heart of which is the dynamic presence of Christ Who is able to weave himself into the very tissues of human development.

Complementary Movements; – Desire in John – *Continuity of Being* in Winnicott

It was upon these evaluations, particularly centring on their respective treatments of the dynamics of human experience, that I then proceeded to construct an initial ‘conversation’ between their theoretical positions that I had carefully outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. I began by establishing a comparative reflection between John’s understanding of the movement of desire in the soul, as it is drawn into loving union with God, and Winnicott’s concept of *continuity of being*, that holds the ‘inherited potential’ of the individual. Clearly defining these movements towards specific forms of fulfilment, that are central to human experience, I showed firstly how desire, which, for John, is rooted in the very essence of the soul, having been activated by the exclusive love of God Himself, then seeks loving union and complete identification, which is destined to find total fulfilment in the exchange of love in the Trinity.¹⁷ I then showed how *continuity of being* in Winnicott holds the ‘inherited potential’ of the individual that ultimately finds its fulfilment through experiencing a sense of aliveness and creativity which unfolds in the experience of object relationships with others.¹⁸ It is within this relational context that a sense of the True Self is discovered and continues to be nurtured. Having established these comparative starting points, I then introduced what I considered to be the key aspects of both John’s and Winnicott’s trajectories of growth, which enable a person, within their respective contexts, to experience self-realisation.

¹⁷ “Y así, engrandece aquí el alma al Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo, encareciendo tres grandes mercedes y bienes que en ella hacen, por haberle trocado su muerte en vida, transformándola en sí.” L 2.1. (595/943)

¹⁸ Winnicott, Donald W. *Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, London, Karnac Books, 1989. p.54.

The Centrality of the Person of Christ

For John, movement in the soul is always initiated by the experience of desire in God penetrating and challenging the world of innate desire in the soul. The stimulus for change in the direction of this desire is first and foremost an internal experience of the touch of God's love.¹⁹ However, once this desire is activated deep within the person it needs to be nurtured through a responsive context, physically and personally, and this will be found in the nurturing faith environment of family relationships and the domestic faith community, that hold the child and growing adult in the primary spiritual encounter with God's loving desire for union. It is from within the faith community that the person of Christ is presented as the one alone Who has the power to facilitate the flow of desire that leads to true identity. This, as we then saw, is powerfully illustrated in John's exultation, 'First, have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with His.'²⁰ The figure of Christ, for John, is the central role model Who links the internal and external world of the soul as He rises out of the experience of the nurturing community which itself finds expression in the Sacred Scriptures and the teaching of the Church. It is the combination of the personal and communal stimuli that then impels the fundamental desire in the soul to seek fulfilment and surrender to the process that will bring it to fruition.

The Transitional Object in Winnicott

Turning now to Winnicott, it is the maternal holding environment that facilitates the creative activation of *continuity of being* within the child. However, its creative drive is initially enclosed in the illusory process of omnipotent creation and re-creation, centred on the

¹⁹ " Y así, si de algo se sirve es de que el alma se engrandezca, y como no hay otra cosa en que más la pueda engrandecer que igualándola consigo, por so solamente se sirve de que le ame." C. 28.1 (520/851)

²⁰ " Lo primero, traiga un ordinario apetito de imitar a Cristo en todas sus cosas , conformándose con su vida" 1.S 13.3. (102/289)

mother's breast, as discussed in Chapter Three.²¹ Now this creativity needs to undergo transformation so that it can engage with the demands of external reality in such a way that will enable the infant to start relating to the mother and others as separate individuals. This experience is facilitated through the process of disillusionment in the infant that is set in motion by the de-adaptation the mother must undergo in order to re-establish her own independence after the birth trauma, and also the weaning of the infant, not only from breast feeding, but also that state of absolute dependency which stifles growth. This involves a vital process of transition whereby the *continuity of being* can gradually evolve out of the enclosed dependent environment of the maternal relationship, in such a way that the flow of development can then lead to the formation of objective relationships. Hence, we saw the importance of the transitional object²² that on the one hand can provide a holding context for the psychologically transforming experience of growth, and on the other facilitate a fluidity of development that allows *continuity of being* the necessary creative outlets it needs to foster the growth of the 'inherited potential'. This I then pointed out prepared the way for what Winnicott describes as transitional phenomena, experiences 'that have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between inner reality and the external world,'²³ a space where creative movement can take place and self identity can continue to come alive.

A Healing Dimension

Having established these complementary pathways to personal growth, I then subsequently pointed out how both, in their own respective ways, can experience deep frustrations through factors outside their individual control. The deformation of desire, that for John is integral to the inheritance of Original Sin, can result in the construction of a way life that is both inauthentic and destructively obsessional. This, I pointed out, finds a genuine echo in the

²¹ Winnicott, Donald W., ed. Christopher Bollas, Madeleine Davis, & Ray Shepherd, *Human Nature* London,, Free Association Books, London, 1988.p.101.

²² Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, London, Karnac Books, 1992. p.233.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.232.

development of the False Self in Winnicott that is the result of the failure of the maternal holding environment.²⁴ This in turn, renders the infant vulnerable to negative impingements that frustrate the flow of *continuity of being*, forcing the infant to construct an inauthentic compliant self that conceals, through different levels of intensity, the presence of the True Self. In both cases I was able to show how the presentation of the person of Christ as Redeemer by the supportive faith community in John, and the transitional object by the maternal substitute in Winnicott, added a further healing and restorative dimension to the complementary trajectories of growth that enabled desire and *continuity of being* to discover their respective contexts for creative development. These I then identified as the movement into contemplative prayer in John, which enabled the transformation of desire to take place through purification of sense and spirit²⁵, with the corresponding development of loving union with God in the Trinity. In Winnicott, it was to be found in his understanding of the gradual deepening capacity in the individual for object relationships thus enabling *continuity of being* to find its fulfilment in creativity and the discovery of the True Self.²⁶

The Creative Experience of Aggression

In both contexts we observed how destructive instincts could be harnessed and placed at the service of love and the development of relationships. In John, the renunciation of sensory gratification and the voiding of the faculties, as they are transformed into theological virtues, prepares the soul for the night of passive purification where a sense of annihilation accompanies the transformation of spirit.²⁷ These movements, moreover, are undergone, for

²⁴ Winnicott, Donald W., *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, London, Karnac Books, 19884, pp. 144-145.

²⁵ “Conviene ir por este estilo desembarazando y vaciando y hacienda negar a las potencias su jurisdicción natural y operaciones, para que se dé lugar a que sean infundidas e ilustradas de lo sobrenatural;” 3S 2.2. (215/403)

²⁶ Winnicott, Donald W., *Playing and Reality*, London, Routledge, , 1999. p. 54.

²⁷ “Ha de vaciarse de todo lo que puede caer en ella perfectamente y voluntariamente, ahora sea de arriba, ahora de abajo, según el afecto, digo, y voluntad, en cuanto es de su parte; porque a Dios, quién le quitará que El no haga lo que quisiere en el alma resignada, anihilada y desnuda?” 2S 4 .2. (112/298)

John, in communion with the person of Christ Who unites the soul, in all its anguish and suffering, directly with His death and Resurrection.²⁸ It is from this union that total fulfilment is found in the ecstatic life of the Trinity, the communion of love where true identity comes fully alive.²⁹ This is the essence of contemplative prayer which becomes that mystical space where union between the soul and God, in Christ, is experienced as a communion of love which in itself mysteriously clarifies the sense of differentiated identity while intensifying the sense of union.

For Winnicott, aggression plays an integral part in the development of object relationships where the clarity of Me not-Me differentiation and a sense of personal identity are established which can then flourish in the presence of the 'other' in their uniqueness. Primary aggression first appears in the maternal relationship³⁰, initially symbolised in the mother's breast. What is important to remember here is that the mother's survival of the destructive onslaughts provides a symbolic paradigm for the imaginative representation of the surviving object.³¹ This is then carried into the relationship with the transitional object which reinforces this experience through its own survival of aggressive treatment in play. According to Winnicott, this slowly enables an internal response to develop whereby destructive instincts are then lived out in fantasy.³² Then, as the relationships with external objects develop, eros and aggression find deeper ways of coming together. Aggression, assisting the differentiating process, and eros, allowing for creative bonding with the 'other' to take place through the presence of concern, can then nourish *continuity of being*, facilitating relationships of love and friendship.³³ It is the transitional object, above all, that opens up the movement from the maternal environment into that of the external object, which then plays a crucial role in the

²⁸ "Así en el árbol de la cruz fue redimida y reparada, dándola allí la mano de su favor y misericordia por medio de su muerte y pasión." C 23. 2. (500/830)

²⁹ "Porque el Espíritu Santo, que es amor también se compara en la divina Escritura al *aire*, porque es aspirando de el Padre y el Hijo...así aquí a este amor de el alma llama el Esposo *aire*, porque de la contemplación y noticia que a este tiempo tiene de Dios le procede." C 13. 11 (461/788)

³⁰ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p. 154

³¹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 92.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³³ Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, p.217.

creative utilisation of aggression and its integration.³⁴ It also prepares the individual to utilise the intermediate space which can further the process of the constructive use of aggressive instincts in recreation and play.

Christ as Transitional Object

Having reflected upon these fundamental themes in John's and Winnicott's, thought I then proposed that they constitute signposts to a deeper encounter between their respective theories, which we have seen emerging in the course of this thesis, through the discovery of an authentic sense of self identity that is the fruit of personal growth. This encounter finds its centre in a recognition of the figure of Christ, Who contains, within Himself, the role of transitional object as He accompanies the soul on its journey into loving union, by weaving His presence into the transitional process of transformation. John, as we have already seen, encourages his readers to take the person of Christ as a model and to study His life.³⁵ He does this not with the intention of encouraging his readers to take a dry academic interest in the person of Christ, but in the spirit of the faith community of the Church, that encourages its members to come to know Christ through a personal relationship. This is achieved through discovering ways of experiencing personal identification through taking Christ as an imitative and associative model, a tangible presence Who can arouse and touch the whole inner world of feelings and needs for consolation both in body and spirit.

This is initially achieved through meditation that associates the person with Christ through forms and images. Christ's transitional role, however, starts to emerge when John tells us how a person is gradually drawn away from discursive meditation into the contemplative night of faith where they are initially held in a state of tranquillity and peaceful awareness of God's

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

³⁵ "La cual debe considerar para saberla imitar y haberse en todas las cosas como se hubiera él." 1S 13. 3(102/289)

presence.³⁶ It is the presence of the transitional object, as we have seen, that evokes for the infant the mother's loving presence and the intimate holding experience for the incommunicado self to find its regenerative power in its unintegrated state. The same is true of the transitional presence of Christ as He holds the soul in the initial phase of interior purification, which is a necessary part of spiritual growth. However, the sensual drive to experience consolation through the enjoyment of emotive images, the need to create the person of God according to personal needs and tastes, or even to assuage basic fears, must be removed to make way for a receptivity of the spirit that can engage with Christ in his uniqueness; his not-Me identity.³⁷ Now it is the task of the transitional object to initiate the process of the Me not-Me differentiation and in the person of Christ we see this very subtly taking place in his relationship with the soul

We have seen how the transitional object has several roles, two of which are particularly pertinent to this thesis. On the one hand it symbolises the maternal holding environment of love that has activated the *continuity of being*. On the other it introduces the not-Me element of experience as a prelude to further object relating. Christ, in a very profound and intimate way, embodies this role as He enables the desire in the soul to become free for a deeper encounter with God, as He is in Himself. Just as the transitional object enables abrogation of omnipotence to take place through providing a symbolic reassuring experience of the mother's love, so it is with Christ. As the soul undergoes purification and the interior suffering that is involved, John shows how the suffering Christ, in his passion and death, accompanies the suffering soul as it too undergoes its purifying transformation.³⁸ The sense of

³⁶ "De estarse a solas con atención amorosa a Dios sin particular consideración, en paz interior y quietud y descanso, y sin actos y ejercicios de las potencias, memoria, entendimiento y voluntad.." 2S 13.4. (141/327)

³⁷ "Queriéndolos Dios recoger {a bienes} más espirituales interiores y invisibles, quitándoles ya el gusto y jugo de la meditación discursiva, ellos no acaban ni se atreven ni saben desasirse de aquellos modos palpables a que están acostumbrados, y así, todavía trabaja por tenerlos, queriendo ir por consideración y meditación de formas, como antes." 2S 12.6. (141/325).

³⁸ "Y porque he dicho que Cristo es el camino, y que este camino es morir a nuestra naturaleza en sensitivo y espiritual, quiero dar a entender cómo sea esto a ejemplo de Cristo, porque él es nuestro ejemplo y luz." 2S 7.9. (124/310)

loving identification with the person of Christ as the ‘Suffering Servant’ enables the soul to experience a deep loving connection with God. It is this love that has activated the soul’s own movement of inner desire and now continues to inflame it, even as the soul experiences the pain of transformation.

Christ the Bridegroom – the Objective Presence of Love

As this purification takes place the true nature of the person of Christ, in his not-Me status, then comes alive, emerging in all His uniqueness of being. As a consequence, He is able to offer an objective relationship that takes the soul to the deepest levels of spiritual maturity. This, we see, taking place, as the other dimension of His passion and death, namely the presence of sinful aggression in the souls of all human beings, that has played an integral part in His personal suffering, echoing the destruction of the object in Winnicott, that survives and therefore reveals the fullness of the not-Me status. The latter, for John, finds its most powerful expression in the figure Christ, coming to the soul as Bridegroom, the Risen Lord, Who has survived His suffering and death, yet still carrying a transitional dimension within Himself, but in a much deeper and subtler sense. As the initial role of Christ recedes, reflecting that of the transitional object as it is relegated to limbo, echoing Winnicott’s description of the cathexis of the transitional object, Christ then begins to offer himself as the Bridegroom. However, he does this, as I have just said, while still maintaining a transitional dimension by His presence, since the intensity of the love that He offers carries with it the deep emotional associations of that total unconditional love that connects with the earliest experiences in primary relationships. Hence, He touches the bride/soul with His spousal love but then leaves her with a profound sense of longing³⁹ that is analogous with the state of disillusionment, within the infant, caused by the mother’s absence or non response. However, like the mother, He sends her mending gestures, in the form of the gifts of the Spirit, all the while holding her in His love that she may recognise Him, even while sensing of His absence. This is so as the

³⁹ “ Y Porque la sequedad espiritual y la ausencia afectiva del Amado.” C 17. 3. (479/808)

transformation of desire in itself is now recognised as a spiritually experiential confirmation of Christ's continued loving presence. This purification of desire facilitates even deeper encounters where the differentiation between the person of Christ and the soul enables a mutuality of desire to express itself in ecstatic celebration and confirms the uniqueness of the Bridegroom and bride in their respective identifications.⁴⁰ Finally, the movement of desire is carried through the person of Christ as Bridegroom into the very heart of the Trinity, as He enables the bride/soul to encounter the very source of this desire, that activated the whole movement of growth in the first place, God the Father. The person of Christ as transitional object then reaches its fullest and most profound form of expression.

Christ in His Complementary Role

The complementary role of the transitional and objective object, in relation to the bride, finds its most profound and beautiful expression, therefore, as it initiates her into the life of the Trinity.⁴¹ The person of Christ comes to the individual as precisely that objective presence that calls into being the soul's deeper and more creative potential for love. Since it is vital that both Christ and the soul share themselves completely with each other, so too must the relationship that Christ has with the Father, which is central to His entire existence, be shared with her but in such a way that the Father can engage the soul's true identity. This is where the truly dynamic role of Christ, comes to its fulfilment. By keeping alive in the bride the dynamic desire for deeper union, in the transitional mode that we have witnessed, He then acts as the bridge between the bride/soul and the Father, while maintaining His relationship of total self-gift with each of them⁴². In other words, He literally opens up the life of the Trinity

⁴⁰ “ Esto es, que de tal manera esté yo transformada en *tu hermosura*, que siendo semejante en *hermosura* nos veamos entrambos en tu *hermosura*, teniendo ya tu misma *hermosura*.” C. 36. 5 (547/880)

⁴¹ “Y cómo esto sea no hay más saber ni poder para decirlo, sino dar a entender cómo el Hijo de Dios nos alcanzó este alto estado y nos mereció este subido puesto de poder *ser hijos de Dios*” C. 39. 5. (558/892)

⁴² “Que es comunicándoles el mismo amor que al Hijo, aunque no naturalmente como al Hijo, sino, como hemos dicho, por unidad y transformación de amor.” *Ibid.*

as the transitional space that facilitates encounter with the bride/soul, at the same time retaining the transitional aspect of His identity that then enables him to continue the process of differentiation which clarifies mutual authentic identity. And this, as we have seen, is integral to the whole discovery of self identity.

The Creative Contribution of Winnicott to John's Understanding of Union

At the beginning of this Conclusion I referred to the opening statement that I made in my Introduction, that in the light of my ministry, both as spiritual director and psychotherapist, it was vital for me to discover a complementary relationship between those theories that related specifically to both spiritual and psychological wholeness. This necessity was particularly highlighted in relation to the whole search for authentic self identity that could answer not only the need for a deep sense of self-fulfilment but also that of spiritual value within the person. What is particularly clear, concerning spiritual growth, that we have seen emerging from the post-Augustinian tradition, is the centrality of the need to develop a personal intimate relationship with Jesus Christ in such a way that the sense of authentic self identity can emerge as integral to the process of this growing intimacy. In order for an effective and illuminating dialogue to take place between the spiritual and psychological dimensions of lived reality, it is, therefore, vital that a system of psychological theory be engaged that has developed an understanding of relational dynamics which can work within a faith perspective. This, as we have seen, can only take place when it is centred on the whole experience of self-transcendence that occurs within a clear relational context.

In this thesis I have attempted to demonstrate how the psychological theories of Donald Winnicott, relating to personal development, can offer a truly creative opportunity for serious dialogue with the world of Catholic spirituality when brought into a developmental encounter with one of its most important spiritual writers, St. John of the Cross. Winnicott, working out of a strictly empirical framework that, nonetheless, does recognise the presence of the

indefinable potential for growth, symbolised in the transitional space, offers a developmental perspective that embraces the reality of physical experiences, emotional and psychological, but in a way that can shed light on the dynamics of spiritual growth. The salvific role of Christ in the life of the soul has depths and dimensions that will always transcend any attempts to confine its description to one interpretive system of thought. However, one can, nonetheless, use different models of interpretation to illuminate particular aspects of His saving initiative. This I have attempted to do by presenting the different ways that Christ engages with the soul, using Winnicott's concept of the transitional object and the nature of the objective relationship. It is the latter, as we have seen, that offers a differentiating experience of the not-Me presence of the 'other' which both enriches the sense of uniqueness within the individual and facilitates their capacity to engage with external reality.

One of John's key concepts, that we saw earlier, echoed in the work of Maximus the Confessor, is that of the physical world of the senses which is ultimately not purified to the point of extinction but is finally incorporated into the world of the spirit, which, in turn, enables the senses to be experienced in a totally new and fresh light. The proposal that emerges from this thesis is that through a Winnicottian interpretation of the development of the relationship between the soul/bride and the person of Christ/ Bridegroom in John we can see how the capacity for self-transcendent love can grow within an individual soul in such a way that the very essence of the person is revealed and transformed in its whole relational capacity. Since the growth in spiritual maturity, therefore, does not seal this off but incorporates it, a new harmony is then able to emerge in a person's perception of themselves as a living entity, composed of body and spirit, that will find its expression in all forms of relationships with others. Both the psychological and spiritual perspectives of experience can, therefore, enrich the other within the transitional space that the person of Christ is continually facilitating through his presence. And it is here, as John has so beautifully described, that the love of the Father, the Being of Eternal Desire, is revealed, and Who alone can offer *continuity of being* its context for total fulfilment.

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