

## II. The Context of Contemplative Practice

Fecisti nos ad te, et inquietem est cor nostrum,  
donec requiescat in te. (For you have made us  
for yourself, and our heart is anxious until it  
finds rest in you.)

Augustine

In what concept are you abiding in the fullness  
thereof, Sariputra?  
In the fullness of Emptiness, Lord.

Majjhima-nikaya III, 294

# 1. ESSENCE AND REALIZATION IN JOHN AND DŌGEN

## a. John of the Cross

"Union of the soul with God" is the theme of John's four major writings. He distinguishes two modes of this union, calling the first "substantial", "natural" or "essential" union, and the second "supernatural" union. The former is ontically given, the latter is acquired through psychological transformation. In John's words:

...In discussing union with God, we are not discussing the substantial union which is always existing, but the union and transformation of the soul in God. This union is not always existing, but we find it only where there is a likeness of love.... [It] exists when God's will and the soul's are in conformity.... When the soul rids itself of what is unconformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love (A2,5,3).

Essential union, then, is the union all souls enjoy by the very fact that they are. God, qua Being, preserves his creatures in their being; all manifestation shares the life of its Principle and in this way is united to It:

...God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially, even though it may be that of the greatest sinner in the world. This union between God and creatures always exists. By it He conserves their being so that if the union would end they would immediately be annihilated and cease to exist (A2,5,3).

...her [the soul's] life is radically and naturally centered in God, like that of all created things, centered in God, as St. Paul says: In Him we live and move and are. [Acts 17:28]. This was like saying: In God we have our life and our movement and our being. (C8,4; c.f. C38,8; F4,5,7).

By contrast, "supernatural union" is John's term for conscious realization of essential union. Supernatural union actualizes in conscious life what is naturally given in being. It adds nothing to essential union. The prefix "super" refers solely to John's belief in the presence of a Cosmic Complicity in the process of transformation. Supernatural union, then, is conscious realization of and lived participation in the union which, though eternally present, is ordinarily not conscious.

John never considers the possibility of losing the essential union; damnation is not a theme of his writings. As is common with contemplatives, his religious message partakes little of the rhetoric of salvation. He is more concerned with a fuller appreciation of God's dynamic presencing as Love. The primary concern of his contemplative way is to meet That Ontological Presencing with a consciousness sufficiently receptive to it: to meet God's Love with Love of God. For John, the evolution of "love" stands for a deep transformation of human intentionality which touches psychological structure at its root and turns it toward the Principle as the only adequate object of its energy.

b. Dōgen

In Dōgen, we readily find the same double relationship to the ontological Principle. Essential and supernatural unions with God are formally paralleled by unrealized and realized Buddha-nature. Dōgen puts the parallel into a pithy statement: "Although this Dharma/5/ is amply present in every person, unless one practices, it is not manifested; unless there is realization, it is not attained" (Dōgen's Bendōwa in Waddell and Abe, May 1971:129).

Buddha-nature is what all beings have--or are--by birthright; but to taste the fruit of this ontic inheritance, a certain realization must occur, a certain blindness be overcome:

The Way is basically perfect and all-pervading. How could it be contingent upon practice and realization?... And yet, if there is the slightest discrepancy, The Way is as distant as heaven from earth. If the least like or dislike arises, the Mind is lost in confusion.... You should therefore cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech, and learn the backward step that turns your light inward to illumine yourself (Dōgen's Fukanzazengi in Waddell and Abe, October 1973:121-122).

In Dōgen's view, entrance to the Dharma is sought for the benefit of all living beings. The practice of dropping off body and mind is a means for developing that quality of mind which fully and spontaneously intends such benefit. "Benefitting living beings," says Dōgen, "means causing

living beings to arouse the thought of emancipating all others even before he himself is emancipated. We cannot become Buddhas in any other way than through the power of causing this thought [intention] in others" (Dōgen's Hotsu bodai shin in Cook:43). Dōgen sees the evolution--indeed the universal circulation--of bodhisattvic compassion as the most encompassing horizon for the understanding and practice of the Buddha Way. Arousing and communicating the "thought of enlightenment", the "awakening of faith" and "dropping off mind and body" are some of the many ways Dōgen perceives and articulates the deep transformation of human intentionality, and with it the whole psychological structure, by which each living being, like a bright pearl, radiates its compassionate nature to others (Cook:35).

Though "God" and "Dharma" suggest quite different universes of discourse, we shall attempt only to focus our gaze on the similarity of response that these signifiers of an immanent-yet-unrealized Reality evoke in the contemplative aspirant. The important point about the foregoing is thus a structural one. To use the most general terms: Both John and Dōgen are interested in a discipline whereby what is potential in the human being becomes actual.

## 2. COSMIC COMPLICITY

In contexts where the value of yogic or contemplative effort is presupposed, the question of grace comes down to whether or not some aspect of the nature of things can be said to assist that effort. In Christianity's case the answer is obvious; the notion of grace is so ubiquitous that those who have sought to argue Christian mysticism's difference from or superiority to all others, have used it as their trump. By comparison, Zen's notion of grace is extremely subtle and at times all but invisible. Yet the difference between the Christian and Zen contemplatives on this matter is not absolute; it is relative, negotiable (H. Smith, October 1977:142). After a brief glance at John's sense of cosmic complicity in the contemplative effort our question for Dōgen and Zen will be: Does the Dharma assist the quest for Enlightenment?

### a. John of the Cross

Pseudo-Dionysus, whose writings set the guidelines for a millenium of Christian mystical theology, writes in The Divine Names:

...we press upwards to those beams...wherefrom we gain the light which leads us.... Thus do we learn that It is the Cause and Origin and Being and Life of all creation...an upward Guidance to them that are being drawn unto It.... (Rolt:54-56).

These words capture well the ontic current to which John of the Cross, the Aeropagite's spiritual descendant, testifies. The aspirant's transformation is possible only because there is a gravitational invitation from God to the soul written into the fabric and flow of reality. John teaches that,

It should be known that if a person is seeking God, his Beloved is seeking him much more....  
(F3,28)

God, like the sun, stands above souls ready to communicate Himself....(F3,47)

...When the soul...attains to emptiness...it is impossible that God fail to do his part by communicating Himself to it....(F3,46)

John's stress on the attitude of nada or emptiness reminds us that that ontic invitation is most properly responded to not in a gesture of addition by the supplicating consciousness, but rather one of subtraction: an undoing of mental activity so that the Activity of the Principle may proceed unimpeded in the human psyche.

In this solitude, away from all things, the soul is alone with God and He guides, moves and raises her to divine things.... Once the soul disencumbers these faculties and empties them of everything inferior and of attachment to even superior things...God engages them in the invisible and the divine (C35,5; cf. F3,38,50-1,28,46-7, and A3,2,8).

Such utterances suggest that John's sense of grace was not that of a bauble intermittently dispensed by a fickle God, but that of a gift with which reality is permeated. The nature of things is graceful and we need but a certain awakening to be fully conscious of it. John, it seems would subscribe to Ramakrishna's famous formula, "The winds of grace are always blowing; it is for us to raise our sails." Do Dōgen and his tradition exhibit a similar attitude toward the Buddha Way?

b. Dōgen and Zen

There is a saying in Zen which runs, "Sitting, only sitting, and the grass grows green by itself." Though these words are especially applicable to Dōgen's shikantaza, let them take us back for a moment to the very birth of Chinese Buddhism, to the days of the ko-i /6/, when the first great translators of Sanskrit Mahayana discourses into Chinese unhesitatingly exchanged the words Dharma and Tao. If the grass grows green by itself, it is because the great, inscrutable Tao has deemed it so. It is because the grass' natural greening is one aspect of its irresistible Will. The Tao was always more to the ancient Chinese than merely a naturalistic principle of order and procession. It was a creative metaphysical Field, embracing each one of us, a Power with which one could align oneself. As Lao Tzu tells of it,



The Way is like an empty vessel  
 That yet may be drawn from  
 Without ever needing to be filled....  
 It is like a deep pool that never dries.... (IV)  
 A force that though rarified  
 Is none the less efficacious  
 It is there within us all the while;  
 Draw upon it as you will, it never runs dry. (VI)  
 (Waley:146, 170, 149)

Some 600 years after Buddhism had first been planted in China's earth, perhaps 1500 years after Lao Tzu had spoken the words above, we hear Master Liang-chieh of Tung-shan, co-founder of the Ts'ao-t'ung sect of Ch'an Buddhism--progenitor of Soto Zen--speaking of the Buddhist Dharma in much the same manner:

Such is the Dharma  
 Inherited from the Buddhas and Patriarchs  
 Though its aim lies beyond (all) words  
 It is responsive to inquiring seekers....  
 Being a pattern for the living  
 Its function saves them from miseries....  
 (Luk:149)

In a text called Hokyōzammai, often recited in Soto temples, the same Liang-chieh reminds us that

Supreme Mind  
 In words can never be expressed, and yet  
 To all the trainees needs it does respond  
 (Masunaga:190)

Even in Theravada meditative practice, the heart of Buddhist self-reliance, a teacher of ours has repeatedly

counseled: "Your job is to pay attention. Maintain choiceless evenness of the mind. Let the Dhamma do the rest!"

The concept of special grace dispensed by a Supreme Being, though present in popular Buddhism, is, of course, ignored by Zen and Theravada alike. But to conclude that a sense of cosmic complicity in the aspirant's quest for enlightenment is therefore absent is surely a misreading. If grace goes largely unproclaimed in Zen it is because the fish does not think to comment upon the ocean. Far closer to the truth than the notion that grace is absent, is that it is always and everywhere present. One of Zen's laments is that we remain blind to the graceful immanence of the Buddha-nature, failing to draw on its Power, failing to see reality as it is by refusing to work on our habitually inattentive mode of ordinary consciousness.

If we take seriously the Buddhist teaching, unanimous in all its fundamental forms, of the illusory character of the human claim to selfhood, we understand at once that the Buddhist's goal, whatever it may be called, cannot be a passive object awaiting our laying hold of it. Because Enlightenment is in the deepest sense who and what we are, it is the source of our aspiration toward it as well as our capacity for faith in it. It is the subject of our quest as well as its ostensible object. This paradox is but the non-dualistic way of expressing a common contemplative intuition. In John's unabashed dualistic language: "If you are seeking the Beloved, indeed He is seeking thee much more."

In Dōgen's own writings we find further confirmation of this point. Often he speaks as if the essence of Zen lay not at all in jiriki, "self-power", but in tariki, "other-power":

When you let go of your mind and body and forget them completely, when you throw yourself into Buddha's abode, when everything is done by the Buddha, when you follow the Buddha Mind without effort or anxiety--you break free from life's suffering and become the Buddha (Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō Shōji, Masunaga, 1958:99).

Dōgen scholar Francis Cook is unequivocal in his agreement. "In the final analysis," writes Cook, "this event (the thought of Enlightenment) is the determination of the Buddha to realize himself through us (35). Dōgen's Zen," he says, "is not really Buddhism of self power...it is the Buddhism of other power.... His life was spent teaching a Buddhism of faith in the power of the Other, who is the Buddha" (28, 30). Dōgen proclaims that "through their boundless love the Buddhas and Patriarchs have flung open the vast gate of compassion for all beings" (Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō Shushōgi, in Masunaga, 1958:173). In his Bendōwa, he speaks of the realm in which Enlightenment abides as a "realm free of human agency" (Waddell and Abe, May 1971:138, 144). In Shōbōgenzō Gyōji, Dōgen speaks of the "Enlightenment which embraces all sentient beings" (DeBary:678).

Though we are innately of the nature of Buddha we must, nevertheless, in Dōgen's view, strive to realize this fact in its fullness. Yet perhaps more emphatically than in any other Buddhist view, Dōgen's sense of practice may be likened to the reception of an omnipresent Gift, rather than the attainment of a distant goal. This is apparent in Dōgen's notion of the identity of practice and enlightenment, the basis of admonitions like the following:

"Just to pass the time in sitting straight, without any thought of acquisition, without any sense of achieving enlightenment--this is the way of the patriarchs.... Truly the merit lies in the sitting" (Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki, in DeBary:370).

"Attainment of the Way is...achieved through the body as well as the mind.... To do away with mental deliberation and cognition, and simply go on sitting, is the method by which the Way is made an intimate part of our lives...." (loc. cit.).

The practice of "simply go on sitting", Dōgen calls shikantaza. In his own day, Dōgen reacted against what he perceived to be Rinzai's preoccupation with the momentary experience of enlightenment. He criticized the koan method as being directed too much toward "obtaining one thing". These practices, he felt, put too great a stress on intellection and not enough on the psychological transformation of the whole man in all his faculties. For this reason, Dōgen tirelessly encouraged the practice of zazen or "just sitting" without any thought of acquisition or attainment.

Though the actual experience of kenshō or satori could only be "sudden", it was, by the same token, momentary. The transformation of being which made it possible to live as a bodhisattva in the operative order was gradual, the life-long maturation of the whole man.

Zazen is, of course, the chief means of this gradual transformation. Since it is a non-activity of mind, or a letting-go of ordinary activity, there would seem to be a 'force' within emptiness which produces psychic maturation, a voidness nevertheless fertile. Dōgen calls this fertile quality of reality, zenki, which is rendered by his translators as "total dynamic working" (Waddell and Abe, May 1972: 70-80). Though Waddell and Abe admit that the precise nuance of the Japanese is untranslatable, they break zenki down into its component characters: "Zen means complete, a totality encompassing the entire universe with nothing excluded, and ki covers such significances as motive power, spring trigger, mechanism, opportunity." Thus zenki would seem to refer to ultimate reality conceived under the aspect of dynamism, apparently akin to pratitya-samutpada.

If we allow ourselves to slip into dualistic language, we may think of zenki as that which orders and transforms all things in accordance with Dharmic Will. The aspirant's chief task is, by means of zazen, to merge with this activity of the Real in the same way that a trickle of water finds confluence with a larger river. "The man in zazen," says Dōgen,

conforms totally in himself to the genuine Buddha-Dharma, and assists universally in performing the work of the Buddhas...circulating the inexhaustible, unceasing, incomprehensible, and immeasurable Buddha-Dharma inside and outside throughout the universe.... (This unperceived mutual assistance occurs) in the stillness of samadhi beyond human artifice, and is in itself realization (Dōgen's Bendōwa, Waddell and Abe, May 1971:134-35. Brackets belong to the translator.)

And, says Dōgen in the same writing:

...the principle of realization...function(s) unceasingly. Because of this, when even just one person, at one time, sits in zazen, he is performing the eternal and ceaseless work of guiding beings to enlightenment (136-37).

It is because one participates in essential cosmic activity (e.g. Buddha-tathagathas transmitting wondrous Dharma) when doing zazen that Dōgen calls the latter jiujyu-samadhi or the "samadhi of self-fulfilling activity" (Kim:68). Such samadhi is the sine qua non of our whole transformation in Buddha-nature. Thus did Dōgen stress practice rather than doctrine as that most worthy of the aspirant's attention:

For a Buddhist it is not a matter of debating the superiority or inferiority of a teaching... or of choosing the depth or superficiality of a teaching that matters; all we have to know is whether the practice is authentic or not (Dōgen's Bendōwa in Waddell and Abe, May 1971: 140).

The eight centuries that have passed between Dōgen and the late contemporary roshi Shunryu Suzuki have left this aspect of the teaching remarkably intact. Stressing both the importance of practice and the receptivity which allows reality to meet us halfway in our effort, Suzuki Roshi teaches that,

When you sit with your whole body and mind, and with the oneness of your mind and body under the control of the universal mind, you can easily attain this kind of right understanding (58).

Do not think about anything. Just remain on your cushion without expecting anything. Thus eventually you will resume your own true nature. That is to say, your own true nature resumes itself (49).

...the purpose of studying Buddhism is to study ourselves and to forget ourselves. When we forget ourselves, we actually are the true activity of the big existence, or reality itself.... The purpose of our practice is to be aware of this fact (79).

If the passages examined in the foregoing pages are representative for Dōgen and Soto Zen, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the Zen mind in transformation possesses an underlying sense of a cosmic complicity in the effort of self-awakening. Such sensibility violates neither Zen's sense of the impersonal nature of that complicity, nor its fundamental non-dualism: For the self which awakens discovers in some unimaginably total way, that it never was and that only Thusness is.

### 3. MORAL PURITY AND ASCETICISM

Taming the mind is not a simple task. To do so the aspirant must gradually acquire a certain psychological resilience, a growing strength in concentrative ability and an increasing freedom from his/her innumerable, automatic habit-reflexes. Periods of intensive interior work are, of course, designed to bring about such changes. But the interior work itself, this "deep and delicate listening", can hardly be begun or cannot progress very far without support from a larger behavioral context. For this reason, contemplative traditions have univocally favored a life of moral purity, complemented by some degree of asceticism or denial of natural appetites.

It is not difficult to demonstrate the moral purificatory element in John's contemplative Christianity and Dōgen's Zen, and this we shall do in brief compass. Neither is it difficult to show the ascetical element in both John and Dōgen, yet in this case the differences are more than minor and we are forced to consider their import. For in Soto practice, asceticism is almost uniformly subtle while in John it seems to verge on the gross. Unmitigated, this tension might throw into question our postulate of fundamental similarity in contemplative style. The antagonistic body/spirit dualism which John's utterances often reveal seems to stand in sharp contrast to the non-dualistic climate of Zen praxis. Below we shall attempt to soften this



apparent opposition. Knowing full well that it cannot be completely dissipated, we may however be successful in suggesting that the difference is less stark than one might normally suppose in this, a matter which is, in any case, circumstantial.

a. Moral Purification in John and Dōgen

It has been asserted widely that in the realm of contemplative praxis, moral purification is the first and most indispensable step, as well as constant companion, on the journey which leads to an integrated and unfettered interior life. Certainly this is true of John of the Cross. Biblical law and the practice of simple virtue are the unchanging background of John's writings, so unchanging in fact, that they are taken for granted. So concerned is John with the technical contemplative problem of moving from imaged meditation to imageless contemplation and with a psychological treatment of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity in the context of the via negativa, that the issue of moral purification, though everywhere apparent, is never directly addressed. Suffice it to say that for John's contemplative way a basic effort of the will to abstain from things unlawful and the cultivation of virtue under the aspects of Biblical Law, are the prerequisites for all further progress.

Our appreciation of Dōgen's attitude toward moral purification is heightened by an initial glance at the beginnings

of the Buddhist tradition. There, moral purity is spoken of not only as a good in itself but an essential aspect of the Eightfold Path and the indispensable basis for progress in mental culture. Without it, the deepening of dhyana and the awakening of prajna are deemed impossible. The late Theravadin meditation master, Mahasi Sayadaw, affirms that "the purification of conduct [is] the essential preliminary step towards the proper development of concentration" (1). A contemporary Mahayana monk and scholar is of the same opinion: "Attempting the practice of meditation without first having purified one's morality is like seizing the oars of a boat and trying to row before one has unhooked the hawser" (Sangharakshita:145).

Is the same stress on sila found within the Soto school of Zen? It could hardly be otherwise (Gomez, 1973; Brear, 1974). Zen is a flower of the Mahayana, a tradition whose ideal is the bodhisattva. Six perfections are traditionally ascribed to the bodhisattva, the second of which is morality/7/. Dōgen, himself, was a rather strict traditional disciplinarian. Where admonitions to simple virtue often are lost sight of in the light of the exquisite paradoxes of Mahayana wisdom, Dōgen, by contrast, considered them to be part of wisdom's core. The following admonition is taken from his Shōbōgenzō Taitaikoho (Rules for Junior Priests). It follows an enumeration of sixty-two rules of conduct for the meditation hall:

The foregoing code of behavior represents the True Body and Mind of the Buddhas and the Patriarchs. If you do not realize this to the full, the Pure Law will disappear.... Only those who have done good works in former existences will be able to comprehend the value of this behavioral code; it is the very perfection of the Mahayana (Kennet:76).

Jiyu Kennet, a contemporary Soto Roshi, underscores the words of her great predecessor and, in so doing, affirms that willed morality and spontaneous ethics are, respectively the seed and flower of the Buddhist way:

...the sixth stage of [Zen] study [is] the study of the Precepts...the other five stages being used to bring the trainee to a fit stage of mind for studying them.... When a trainee first comes to the temple, he knows the Ten Precepts...only in his brain and not deeply in his blood and bones.... By the time the trainee has undergone the strict moral training of the temple for several years, his character is beyond reproach...and he keeps the Precepts because it is his nature to do so.... When the teacher sees that the pupil has made the Buddhist moral code his natural way of life, he knows that the latter has finally taken the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for refuge in the true meaning of the words.... One has to live Buddhism to be Buddhist and to do this the Precepts must flow through one's veins as the very life-blood (Kennet:52-53).

#### b. Dōgen and Buddhist Asceticism

One of the reasons the Buddha's Middle Path is so named is its opposition to both the brutalization of the senses and their indulgence. In traditions that spawn some sort of

asceticism, brutalization seems to occur whenever that ascetical means is, to one degree or another, treated as an end. The occasion for this error is usually the presupposition that mind and body are substantially distinct and that for one to be victorious the other must be ravaged. The Buddhist tradition tells us that at one point just previous to his Enlightenment, Gautama was so weak from the practice of physical austerities as to be close to death. A bowl of fresh milk offered to him by a passerby gave him the strength necessary to resume his efforts and reach Nirvana. The story teaches the coinherence of mind and body, that they are interdependent aspects of a single process. The psychological wisdom behind the Buddha's middle way in regard to asceticism is obvious: the appetites should be subdued, the sense door guarded (Majjhima-nikaya, 38), only to the extent that their restraint can contribute to the ultimate psychosomatic art of contemplation. Negative preoccupation with the body is the usurpation of the end by the means. From a psychological viewpoint it is counterproductive.

As balanced as the Buddha's teaching was in this respect, early Buddhist praxis when placed side by side with Zen still seems quite anti-sensual (Conze, 1956:78-106). Depending on one's perspective, Zen either lacks or has outgrown the anti-sensual tone of many spiritualities. It never invites misinterpretation as world- or sense-negating. Yet it would be a mistake to think that Zen or any discipline concerned with the profound restructuring of

consciousness could dispense with some form of asceticism. On the contrary, Zen prescribes, albeit more subtly than Christianity, an emptying of the usual diet of the senses, fully aware of the role such emptying plays in the overall clarification of Mind.

Thus when Dōgen is speaking and writing mainly as Zen master and not as Zen philosopher, as for example in the Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki (Masunaga, 1971), we encounter various exhortations to Zen style ascesis. Dōgen encourages his monks to abide by the "eating regulations" (6), to endure a "tattered robe" and savorless food (17), and to bear up under general physical hardship, cold and hunger and mental agony (65). He inveighs against indecent and idle talk and in fact against all forms of dissipation that deflect one from singlemindedness on the Way (20-21, 34).

All of these practices, though important, merely sweep the path in anticipation of zazen, Dōgen's sine qua non of the Buddhist Way. We shall take a closer look at the psychological aspect of zazen in the latter part of this thesis, but let us now look briefly at its physical and ascetical aspects.

In the Fukanzazengi, Dōgen provides a set of instructions for the practice of zazen:

A quiet room is suitable. Eat and drink moderately. Cast aside all involvements and cease all affairs.... Cease all movements of the conscious mind.... Sit in the full or half-lotus position...in correct

bodily posture, neither inclining to the left or to the right, neither leaning forward nor backward. Be sure your ears are on a plane with your shoulders and your nose is in line with your navel. Place your tongue against the front roof of your mouth, with teeth and lips both shut. Your eyes should always remain open, and you should breathe gently through your nose (Waddell and Abe, October 1973:122-23).

When Dōgen asks his students to cast aside all involvements and cease all affairs he is referring to the general influx of the phenomenal world through our sense doors. To "bring to rest the ten thousand things" is to make a concerted effort to diminish the bombardment of the sense doors by environmental stimuli. Silence, then, is the first and most important aspect of the sensory emptying necessary for zazen.

Food and drink are taken in moderation so that the digestive processes steal neither attention nor energy from the contemplative work itself. Though most Zen teachers prescribe zazen with eyes open or half-open, those eyes are usually placed before a blank wall, or at the very least, a dimly lit room with a minimum of clutter. To face a room of objects or a pleasant outdoor scene would be to deliver the senses into the captivity of those objects.

Finally, the Zen practitioner is urged to sit abso-  
lutely still, thus diminishing the onslaught of stimuli brought to the organism through movement. The tripod-based full lotus is acclaimed as the simplest and most relaxed

way to maintain a motionless yet attentive state. Physical stillness is the precondition for the "dropping off of body and mind," Dōgen's favorite description of artful zazen.

Though zazen is profoundly different from a hairshirt asceticism which involves the cultivation of pain, pain nevertheless enters in. As J. van de Wetering's Japanese master told him, "that pain is for ever...but it will bother you less as concentration improves" (150). Kapleau provides the ascetic rationale for such discomfort when he says that "zazen makes plain...that pain, when courageously accepted is a means to liberation in that it frees our natural sympathies and compassion even as it enables us to experience pleasure and joy in new depth and purity" (1965:160; cf. Suzuki, 1974:94).

The most pervasive form of Zen asceticism is the mindfulness one is asked to bring to even the most trivial daily activities. Anyone who has ever attempted to keep his/her mind focused on what is being done and only what is being done knows the immense, counter-habitual effort this requires. Though the following words were written but a handful of years ago, there is no reason to doubt that Zen practice in Dōgen's day encouraged the same singleminded attention to the various acts and routines of ordinary life. This is how Zennists "pray without ceasing":

But all meditation is not just sitting. If one places one's slippers correctly--and this is the first thing to be taught a new-comer to a temple--it becomes a form of meditation. The small ceremony performed by oneself prior to bathing has the same purpose.... All washing must be done...in a special position.... All bathing, like everything else, is done in silence.... [Regarding] the use of the lavatory...a special position of the body must be used, not the conventional one, so as to remind one that all habits of mind and body must be changed completely if one is to understand the truth of Zen. One must make no noise in walking, and stand and sit in attitudes that are neither arrogant nor disrespectful to others. One must sleep on one's right side, with one's head on a meditation cushion.... When eating is over--and it must be done in silence--...the bowls are polished clean.... The housework must be done in the same spirit.... The garden is cleaned and tended in the same way.... Thus every aspect of life is made into a meditation on how to think of others and purify oneself (Kennet:32-34).

#### C. John and Christian Asceticism

"The spirituality of the prophets from Amos and Hosea to Jesus Christ," writes Matthew Fox,

was a sensual spirituality. None called for a 'mortification of the senses' but for a sharing of the Creator's gifts. The prophets needed the sensual both for their own enrichment and, as a taste of the visions they entertained for the people of God (1976:6)

Fox's words, of course, are written in reaction to the fact that the sensual has long since disappeared from Christian spirituality. The fault is not that of Jesus who



balanced his negative pronouncements on the body with a Semitic earthiness in both speech and act. Part of the blame lies, perhaps, with Paul and certainly much more can be laid on the Zeitgeist of the second and third centuries of the Roman Empire, a time when Christianity was still forging its own identity within pagan culture and amid gnostic, Manichean and neoplatonic influences. E.R. Dodds has written that "contempt for the human condition and hatred of the body was a disease endemic in the entire culture of the period" (35). When a single scapegoat is sought, the onus usually falls upon Augustine. The fourth century saint combined a religious genius of the first order with what is to the modern mind an embarrassingly backward attitude toward the body. An ineradicable tension between body and spirit was thus stamped on Christian praxis and led, at its worst, to the pathological abuses of the desert and the abbey.

John of the Cross was enmeshed in the Augustinian ascetical tradition. A consideration of his own ascetical teaching must, however, be a balancing act. Mild pronouncements stand side by side with the unbalanced and the questionable. We shall look at this phenomenon presently, but an initial summary statement may correctly guide our approach: Though irredeemably dualistic in utterance, John of the Cross is rarely in danger of confusing "means" with "end" on the subject of asceticism. Ascetical practices are always an adjunct, an accompaniment. This fact alone separates him

from the more unfortunate cases of Christian asceticism.

Let us begin with the worst. In the Ascent we came upon the following passage, the tone of which is not infrequent in John's writings:

Inordinate appetites for the things of the world...damage...the beauty of the soul.... If we try to express how ugly and dirty is the imprint that the appetites leave in the soul we find nothing comparable to it--neither a place full of cobwebs and lizards...nor the filthiest thing imaginable in this life.... In an inordinate soul there is a deposit of as miserable a variety of filth and degradation as the variety of its appetites for creatures (Al,3,4).

If these words told the entire story they would indeed present a rather bleak image of John's spirituality. But much else in his writings suggests that such passages are moments of fire and brimstone. In fact, we begin to suspect that such enthusiastic pronouncements are for the benefit of novices who need to be shocked into doing what is good for them--a questionable technique, perhaps, but understandable.

Other attempts to balance some of John's more gruesome pronouncements have been made by European sanjuanist scholars E. Oroczo (1959) and G. Morel (1960). The latter insists that John's bark is worse than his bite, his abstract theory far more negative in tone than his actual praxis. Mallory (1977) counters this by citing stories from John's life. We learn that, as a student, John slept on boards using a log for a pillow, wore hairshirts and was once discovered to

have been wearing a chain around his waist, links embedded in his flesh, which when disengaged caused profuse bleeding (9).

G. Brennan (1973), however, invites us to place such incidents in perspective, perhaps as indicative of a youthful heroic enthusiasm. For Brennan informs us that some of John's most profound writing poured out not at a time when he was undergoing severe austerities but when he lived in relative ease and comfort, "one of the happiest period of his life" (42). His pastoral style, too, is telling. He often took monks in his charge out of the abbey into the open fields and sun-drenched hills, there to sit or lie in the grass to contemplate God and the beauties of creation. His living quarters at this time were a small, sparsely furnished room which nevertheless had one outstanding feature: an open view to magnificent Spanish countryside. In fact, John seemed to show a predilection for rooms with a wide view as this was not the only time he found one (Brennan:48).

It would seem, then, that all judgment on John relative to the issue of asceticism finally rests upon how one wishes to see him and how boldly one attempts to separate what is essential in John's contemplative praxis from what is less so. Mallory's (1977) recent empirical study of John of the Cross' teachings with fifty-four contemplative nuns of John's Discalced Carmelite Order is perhaps the vanguard of such attempts. Mallory's data suggest that dualistic body versus spirit ascesis is irrelevant to contemplative development (69). The living core and effective power of

John's teachings, she argues, resides in its via negativa contemplation and the practice of the theological virtues (69)--precisely those aspects we shall examine in part three of the present thesis.

Given these preparatory remarks, let us now offer our own view of John's ascetical teaching.

John expresses the foundational importance he attributes to some kind of ascesis with an agricultural analogy:

As the tilling of the soil is necessary for its fruitfulness...mortification...is a requisite for man's spiritual fruitfulness.... Without [it] all that a man does for the sake of...knowledge of God and himself is no more profitable than a seed sown on uncultivated ground (A1,8,4).

Later in the Ascent, John teaches that, "by guarding the senses, the gates of the soul, one decidedly safeguards and brings increase to one's peace and purity of soul" (A3,23,3). Though John's writings contain sterner exhortations, this gentle prescription is finally a truer characterization of his attitude toward the body. John does declare war on the body's tendencies: on the curiosity of the senses as soon as it threatens to dissolve the single-mindedness of contemplative life; on over-keen passions which distract the soul from its effort toward God; on enjoyment and comfort and all that tends to lull the soul to sleep; on all, in a word, that may loosen from below the integral connections of the interior life. But though he

is thorough and firm, John avoids fanaticism. He prescribes a "guarding of the senses," not their brutalization in harsh ascetic practice. Rarely does he seem to be in danger of considering ascetic practice to be an end in itself, of stressing penance to the detriment of love, or of oppressing nature without fortifying the spirit.

If physical austerity cannot touch the root of the problem, neither can artificial disconnection from the world:

We are not discussing the mere lack of things; this lack will not divest the soul if it [still] craves for these objects. We are dealing with the denudation of the soul's appetites and gratifications....  
(Al,3,4,)

And it is not appetites as such that John attacks. Rather, he is concerned with their potential for breeding attachment and psychological bondage. Mortification "is what leaves them [the appetites] free and empty of all things even though it [the soul] possesses them" (Al,3,4). Scattered acts of different desires are not a serious obstacle; it is only the habitual appetites that must be transformed (Al,11,3). The problem thus lies in automatism, in the habit-patterns of the mind. John knows that simple starvation of these tendencies or, what is worse, a frenzied punishment inflicted upon sin's nearest occasion, the body, will do little to educate the senses, to restructure the

lines deeply etched in the body-mind. Neither sensation nor physicality are sin. Real sin stems from the uneducated will, easily deflected and dispersed by the community of cravings that vie for its attention:

Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance to or harm to it; rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within them that causes the damage (A1,3,4).

The real theme of mortification, then, is non-attachment wherein consciousness is left, in John's own words, "free and empty...even though it possesses." This typifies John's awareness that all mortification of the flesh can at best be a gross analogue to the subtle "mortification" taking place in the psychic field. Seclusion and physical deprivation are merely gross--though in some measure indispensable--accompaniments to the work which must be carried out in the soul.

John's Christian asceticism, we would like to believe, is no more morbid nor final than that portrayed in Zen's second oxherding picture which is accompanied by the verse:

I am in possession of a straw rope, and  
I pass it through his nose  
For once he makes a frantic attempt to run away,  
but he is severely whipped and whipped;  
The beast resists the training with all  
the power there is in nature wild and ungoverned  
But the rustic oxherd never relaxes  
his pulling tether and ever-ready whip  
(Suzuki, 1960:136).

When training begins to bear fruit, the whip is discarded or at least laid aside. Ascesis is not forgotten but it ceases to be a dominant mode of action. The training which for John necessitates a guarding of the senses and a shunning of the world leads ultimately to a joyous return to creation as divine manifestation. The inordinate soul is not the soul which has appetites, but the soul whose appetites prevent it from seeing that the final referent of those appetites is God.

John is not interested in obliterating desire but in tuning it finely. The practice of non-attachment in the "sensory part of the soul" is the necessary prelude to the ultimate work of contemplative emptying in the "spiritual part of the soul". Both forms of apophysis work in unison until the soul is directed toward God alone. As progress is made, the root intentionality of the soul, like the bow of a ship, pulls the dynamic network of its faculties in unison toward this supreme object of desire. By remembering the principal Energy which enables all things to be and by directing his desire toward it, the contemplative begins to take spontaneous pleasure in its manifestations:

He obtains more joy and recreation in creatures through the dispossession of them. He cannot rejoice in them if he beholds them with possessiveness for this is a care which like a bond fastens the spirit to the earth and does not allow it freedom of heart (A3,20,4).

For John, love of God and love of Nature, love of the Principle and delight in its manifestation are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is John's view that only a deep love of God, extending from the heart to the head and throughout the viscera, can free one for true delight in creation. When we read that "God so weans and recollects the appetites that they cannot find satisfaction in any other objects" (F3,22), we must remember that such statements are characteristic only of the preparatory ascetical 'stage'. We are correct in completing this sentence with the words, "but when love is grounded in God, the appetites find satisfaction, without attachment, in all their objects."

Without the total perspective gained through a study of John's entire corpus, his often morbid pronouncements on creatureliness in Dark Night of the Soul are prey to misunderstanding. In context, we may take them as representative of the first rough miles of the journey toward an increasingly vital celebration of creation and creatures:

Purged of imperfections and...clouds in the senses and spirit, she [the soul] feels a new spring, in spiritual freedom, breadth and gladness.... Such is the song of the soul in transformation that is hers in this life, the delight of which is beyond all exaggeration (C39,8,10).

Even though this happy night darkens the spirit...it does so only that he may reach out divinely to the enjoyment of all earthly and heavenly things with a general freedom of spirit in them all... (N2,9,1).



The Father did not merely beautify creatures partially, but...clothed them wholly in beauty and dignity (C5,4).

And here lies the remarkable delight of this awakening: the soul knows creatures through God and not God through creatures. In this movement it is the soul that is moved and awakened from the sleep of natural vision.... Hence it very adequately uses the term "awakening" (F4,5,6).

In these passages John's acceptance and joyous affirmation of creatureliness is unmistakable. They conclude our attempt to place the gloomy and matter-negating aspects of John's utterances in a larger frame, one that suggests those aspects to be of accidental rather than essential import. By the same token we hope we have mitigated, to some extent, the tension between the earthy spirituality of Dōgen and Zen and the Christian mysticism of St. John--at least to the extent that we can acknowledge their temperamental and cultural differences on this matter without letting it obfuscate or distract us from the central argument to follow.