

Theology of Marital Suffering in the Light of Detachment of Saint John of the Cross

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Abstract

Marital indissolubility is a contentious issue in contemporary Catholic marriages. This qualitative study interviewed eight wives who have endured suffering in their marriages while remaining faithful to the gospel and Church teachings. They viewed their suffering as an ascetic path that leads to spiritual growth. This research explores Saint John of the Cross's theology of detachment to understand marital suffering. Asceticism within marriage is seen as a means to achieve deeper self-giving to one's spouse and God. Detachment, a core element of asceticism, purifies one's being, fostering spiritual growth. John of the Cross's detachment theology can help couples see their suffering as an avenue to detachment, facilitating divine purification and the ability to transcend marital difficulties without being bound by anything outside of God. This suggests that detachment is a relevant concept in fostering spiritual growth and enhancing self-giving in marriage.

Keywords: marriage, suffering, detachment, John of the Cross, asceticism

Introduction

Marriages that aim to bring happiness and well-being to husbands are often a source of suffering. Marital suffering or marriage problems encompass the difficulties and challenges that couples may face in their relationship. Throughout their lives, couples encounter challenges and trials that can either strengthen or destroy their marital bonds. The inability to cope with marriage problems can escalate conflicts to the point of divorce. The divorce rate is rising, as evidenced by data from the Central Statistical Agency (BPS) in 2019, which reported 438,992 divorces in Indonesia. This represents an increase of 17,702 cases compared to 2018, when there were 421,290 divorces. The proportion of divorces to the number of marriages in Indonesia has also increased in recent years. In 2019, the divorce-to-marriage ratio was 23.7%, up from 22.5% in 2018. Even the number of annulment cases filed by Catholic couples has increased. For instance, in Surabaya City, there were 5,198 cases in 2021 and 6,315 cases in 2022 (source: data from the Surabaya Diocese Tribunal).

John of the Cross speaks of two kinds of suffering. First, suffering and difficulties amid the world, such as poverty, sickness, problems in relationships, and so on. Second is the suffering from the wounds of love as John the Cross wrote in his book *The Living Flame of Love* (Howard et al., 2000, p. 311). John of the Cross often describes suffering as the primary instrument of God's spiritual growth by increasing reliance on God.

Christianity has given rise to the modern family, a community of love based on human nature, in which Christ makes a source of grace for spouses. Marriage is one of the seven sacraments that allow people to participate in the divine life. God's grace perfects the nature of conjugal love, establishing marriage as a sacrament and married life as a divine vocation as written in *Gaudium et spes* 49 (Paul VI, 1965). The mutual fidelity between Christ and the Church is marked by sacramental marriage. The family is rooted in marriage, created by the free, irrevocable personal consent of a man and a woman. By receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony, a man and a woman enter an indissoluble covenant because they are already members of the Body of Christ, the Church, by being baptized; they are persons who have already united to Christ and His Spouse, the Church. This marriage between Christ and the Church gives the character and example of its indissolubility (Danilevičius, 2023, pp. 7–23).

This study wants to explore how detachment from John the Cross can be a treatment for problems in marriage so that suffering in marriage is not in vain but can be the way to spiritual growth. The doctrine of John the Cross's detachment is relevant because detachment specifically teaches one not to attach to everything except God. Detachment was meant by John of the Cross, a straight and narrow path, emptying oneself from the sensory objects, releasing and removing barriers related to the spiritual part of the soul as written in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel II*, 7, 2 (John of the Cross, 1991a, p. 169). St. John of the Cross emphasizes the spiritual value over wealth. It is therefore, this research expects that the theology of detachment can have significant implications in dealing with the suffering in marriage, which deals with worldly affairs such as financial problems, economic abuse, lack of effect from the partner, sexual orientation, sexual, physical, economic, mental abuse, gender inequality, early marriage, lack of love and affirmation, consanguineous marriages, and child marriage can all contribute to marital suffering and its associated psychological consequences. These problems can have significant impacts on individuals' mental and physical health. Detachment can be a way to a more harmonious relationship in marriage without being bound to material and intangible things. Detachment can be understood as an ascetic form of the teaching of John the Cross (Aumann, 2006).

John of the Cross speaks of the detachment by quoting the Old Testament (Genesis 22:16-17b, Genesis 31:26; Numbers 17:20; Joshua 6:18-21; Jeremiah 2:2. Deuteronomy 2:1-3) as in the acts of

Abraham for Isaac's sacrifice (Gn. 22:16-17b). His obedience and love for God are more significant than his love for his son, Isaac. John of the Cross speaks of the detachment in the New Testament (Matthew 4:18-22; Matthew 10:37; Mathew 19:16-24; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 5:11; Luke 5:28; Luke 14:26; Luke 14:33; Luke 18:22; Lukas 18:29; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 3:7-8; 2 Corinthians 6:10, Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:22-24).

Previous studies on the application of detachment in marriage are minimal. Detachment can be found in certain written works, such as those by Stephen M. Matuszak. Matuszak explored John Paul II's belief in the significance of asceticism and purification in marriage. According to Matuszak, attaining the necessary freedom for self-giving in any vocation, particularly in the context of a spousal relationship, can only be achieved through the purification of the senses and desires. When internal unity is lacking due to the disordering of desires, the essential freedom for self-giving in marriage is diminished. The most effective way to address this disorder is through active and passive mortification of the senses and the spirit. Matuszak also highlights that God allows various trials as a means of further purification and enlightenment. These trials, known as passive nights of the senses and spirit, deepen the bond between lovers, despite their unpleasant nature. In essence, this is the central doctrine of Saint John of the Cross, applicable not only to religious life but also to the married state (Matuszak, 2000, p. 7).

The challenges faced by husbands and wives can be seen as forms of the night. David Sanderlin (1993) asserts that purification in marriage, in order to fully give oneself to the spouse and God, requires the revival of the concept of detachment as taught by John the Cross (Sanderlin, 1993, pp. 87–112). Susan Muto, in "John of the Cross for Today: The Ascent" (1991) and "John of the Cross for Today: The Dark Night" (2000), reaffirmed the importance of detachment in experiencing spiritual freedom, which is crucial in contemporary marriages (Muto, 1991, 2000). David C. Weickert in *The Virtue of Detachment in the Christian Tradition: A Study of St. John of the Cross and Thomas Merton* affirms that detachment is an important element in the growth of theological virtue and must therefore be part of the life of every Christian (Weickert, 2012).

This topic is to understand marital suffering in the light of detachment, as expounded by John of the Cross. Extensive scholarly work has explored the theological aspects of marital suffering in general. Furthermore, the reviewed literature rarely incorporated John of the Cross's teachings on detachment in marital relationships. All these previous studies show the importance of detachment, but it has not been studied how it applies in the context of marriage. As this study aims to explore how individuals draw upon the teachings of John of the Cross, the literature review served as a critical first step in identifying gaps and unexplored avenues within theological discussions of marital suffering. These gaps underscore the necessity of conducting qualitative research to delve deeper into individual's lived experiences and the theological significance of detachment in the face of marital challenges.

This research paper discusses the concept of marital suffering in relation to detachment, as explained by John of the Cross. By understanding marital suffering within the context of detachment, we gain a new perspective on the challenges and opportunities for growth in marriage. This study aims to explore how couples can apply detachment as taught by John of the Cross to cope with marital suffering and potentially find an effective treatment for it. The paper focuses on evaluating theological perspectives on marital suffering and examining the role of John of the Cross's spirituality on detachment. Ultimately, we hope that couples can find a path to holiness through the inevitable struggles of marriage.

Method

This study uses qualitative methods and conducted in-depth interviews with the Subjects as key informants. They are eight wives who have been married for more than ten years. Ten years of marriage is considered to have passed the marital test of various challenges in marriage (Saidiyah & Julianto, 2017). Subjects stay in marriage even with many problems, among others, because they try to practice the teachings of the Catholic faith on indissolubility of marriage. The subject is not necessarily someone who knows or understands the teachings of John of the Cross on detachment. However, by living the value of the Gospel in daily life, the Subject is practicing the first and foremost teaching of Jesus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). This teaching is at the root of John of the Cross' teaching of detachment.

The subjects reside in Makassar, Surabaya, Manado, Malang, Pasuruan and Tangerang. This selection is based on practical purposes because the researcher is often in these areas. The subjects in this case are wives considering that the paternalistic culture that still colors the pattern of husband-wife relationships in Indonesia puts women in a weak bargaining position and often becomes victims. In addition, economic pressure has a significant impact on women's emotions. Economic strain had a direct effect on marital problems, and the indirect effect of strain, via emotional distress, was only significant for women (Aytac & Rankin, 2009).

Interviews were conducted many times until there were enough deep meanings, life narratives, descriptions of significant daily events, and researchers could capture language and symbolism as authentically as possible (Riyanto, 2020) After the interview data was transcribed, the data was coded and classified based on themes (Riyanto, 2020). In observing and appreciating the transcripts, the researcher can make descriptive, linguistic or conceptual comments on the original transcripts. Furthermore, themes (emergent themes) can be drawn out in the form of words or phrases as a result of the researcher's reflection on the transcripts and comments (Kahija, 2017, p. 118). Emergent themes that have similarities are classified into superordinate themes. If all subjects have been analyzed, patterns or intertwined themes from all subjects are found or can be referred to as superordinate themes between participants (Kahija, 2017). This inter-participant theme is what connects all participants. After the data was analyzed, the researcher then interpreted the findings. This interpretation helps researchers understand the underlying meaning of the subject's experience and provides a deeper understanding of the experience. To demonstrate the validity of research, accurate data must be obtained through an honest presentation of the subject's life experiences. One way to ensure validity is by triangulating information from multiple sources to build justification.

To fully understand the relationship between the subject and St. John of the Cross, one must not only study the writings of St. John of the Cross, but also understand the themes of detachment in the Bible and the teachings of the Church. Texts are never a final experience and can always be interpreted and re-contextualized based on the reader's perspective.

This research aims to examine how individuals cope with marital suffering and the role of detachment in their strategies. Additionally, the research explores the teachings of Saint John of the Cross on detachment through library research. The collected data is analyzed theologically. The primary objective of this study is to describe and analyze the experience of marital suffering in the context of John of the Cross's teachings on detachment.

Findings and Discussion

Detachment According to John of the Cross

John of the Cross

John of the Cross (24 June 1542-14 December 1591) was a Carmelite priest. He is a Spanish poet and is considered one of the greatest mystics in Catholic church. He was a mystic of action who responded prophetically to the social and religious issues of his time. By being firmly rooted in the eremite-prophetic Carmelite tradition, John was able to reach out to those in need by his apostolic ministry (Fuentes, 2020, p. 20). John of the Cross is best known for his teaching on detachment and dark night as the path to union with God. John Cross' life was shaped much by sufferings such as poverty, losing his father at a young age and being imprisoned by his own order. Suffering and imprisonment did not destroy John of the Cross but became a moment of experiencing God's goodness and mercy. John the Cross' writings are a summary of his life and teachings. The journey of faith through the dark night became an essential theme in his writings especially in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*. But in all the purification that took place in the dark night, love became the strength for his soul to endure. For John of the Cross, the whole journey to God including the dark night was related to love as written in *The Ascent*, I, 14, 2: "The soul, then, states that "fired with love's urgent longings" it passed through this night of sense to union with the Beloved...love of the soul's Bridegroom is necessary for the vanquishing of the appetites and the denial of this pleasure" (John of the Cross, 1991a). When speaking of passive dark nights, John of the Cross invites those who want to unite with God to create a place for burning love, as stated in *The Dark Night* I, 10, 6: "...make room in the spirit for the enkindling and burning of the love that this dark and secret contemplation bears and communicate to the soul" (John of the Cross, 1991b, p. 382). The dark journey of faith is the path of self-giving in trust and love (John of the Cross, 1991b). John of the Cross outlines in more detail the way of love in *The Spiritual Cantic* and *The Living Flame of Love*.

Detachment According to John of the Cross

John of the Cross drew inspiration from key Old Testament verses to emphasize the importance of detachment in spiritual growth. Genesis 22:16-17b, exemplifying trust in God's plan through Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, highlights the need to let go of attachments. Genesis 31:26 reflects Jacob's detachment from possessions in favor of following God's guidance. Numbers 17:20 underscores the importance of God's guidance and approval in one's spiritual journey, necessitating detachment from personal desires. Joshua 6:18-21 emphasizes obedience to God's commands and detachment from worldly distractions. Jeremiah 2:2 symbolizes the profound union with God that requires detachment from other allegiances. Deuteronomy 2:1-3 illustrates a spiritual journey, with detachment from the past and reliance on God's guidance as integral components.

John of the Cross's teachings on detachment are further illuminated by various New Testament verses. In Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 10:17-22, the call to leave behind material possessions and follow Jesus underscores the theme of detachment. Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26 and 33 emphasize the need to prioritize one's relationship with God over worldly attachments. In Luke 5:11 and 28, the disciples' willingness to leave their occupations to follow Jesus exemplifies detachment. Luke 18:22 and 29 underscore the importance of letting go of personal possessions for spiritual gain. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, the discipline of self-control and self-denial is highlighted. Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 3:7-8, 2

Corinthians 6:10, Colossians 3:9-10, and Ephesians 4:22-24 all encourage the transformation of one's character and desires to align with God's will, reinforcing the concept of detachment and spiritual growth. These New Testament passages provide a rich foundation for John of the Cross's teachings on detachment and the pursuit of a deeper spiritual connection with God.

Detachment, according to John of the Cross, is the process of letting go of worldly attachment and desires in order to achieve a deeper relationship with God. He believed that detachment was necessary for the soul to be purified and to reach a state of union with God. This detachment involves renouncing material possessions, worldly pleasures, and even one's own will in order to surrender completely to God's will. John of the Cross emphasized the importance of self-emptying and self denial as a means to detach oneself from the distractions and temptations of the world. It is the process of letting go of unhealthy attachments that obstruct the soul from uniting with God.

Detachment according to John of the Cross is seen as an integral part of his spirituality. John of the cross uses many words synonymous with *desprendimiento* such as dispossession, renunciation, turning away from something. In expressing detachment, John of the Cross also often uses words such as purification, nakedness, negation, empty, nothing. The doctrine of the detachment of John of the Cross is that of non-attachment to world affairs and all its attributes are not a rejection of the world, neither is the doctrines of nihilism (Pacho, 2009, p. 543). In *Spiritual Canticle* Stanza 1, John of the Cross wrote that the word 'no' or 'nothing' does not refer to emptiness but to the fullness of love (John of the Cross, 1991c, p. 484). Purification and transformation are necessary for unity with God by integrating and maturing the personality in the Divine (Kourie, 2016, p. 1).

The theology of detachment, as explained by John of the Cross, is closely related to the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. According to John of the Cross, faith is the process of darkening the mind of all-natural understanding to prepare for the union with divine wisdom. Hope involves emptying the memory of all that it has and directing it towards uniting with God. Love, on the other hand, entails emptying the heart of affections for anything that is not God and directing that love towards the will to unite with God (John of the Cross, 1991b). These three theological virtues serve as the meeting point between man and God. The process of purification and dark night takes place in these three faculties.

Detachment can be seen as part of the dark night of the soul. John of the Cross described the 'Dark Night of the Soul' as a process of spiritual purification, which involves a sense of detachment. The experience of spiritual dryness and *acedia* can be seen as a form of detachment (Büssing et al., 2021). This experience can be seen as a necessary step towards spiritual growth and union with the divine. Nelstrop explores the concept of non-doing and action in the English mystical tradition, which includes the teachings of John of the Cross. Non-doing refers to a detached form of action, where one acts in accordance with the divine will rather than personal desires or attachments. This concepts align with John of the Cross's teachings on detachment and surrendering to God's will (Nelstrop, 2023). England proposes 'desireless desire' to reconcile the tension between human desire and the pursuit of union with God in John of the Cross' writings. Desire can become virtuous if it seeks only what is necessary for human beings to be authentic and accords with reason. John of the Cross' works can be read through the lens of desire (England, 2013, pp. 79, 92). M.C. Benitan discusses divinization in John of the Cross from an Orthodox perspective. Divinization is becoming more like God and attaining union with Him. Detachment is crucial in this process, as it involves letting go of one's will to align with the divine (Benitan, 2023).

Marital Suffering

The Catholic theology of marital suffering is rooted in the belief that marriage is a sacred covenant between a man and a woman, and that suffering is an inherent part of the human condition. According to Catholic teachings, marriage is a vocation that calls couples to love and support each other through both joy and hardships as it stated in *Humanae Vitae* 8, 9 (Paul VI, 1968).

1 Peter 4:13-19 explains that suffering is a test of faith that develops perseverance and strengthens the believer's faith. Innocent suffering has led Christians to question God's will and relationship with creation. However, through the theology of suffering, humans can accept it as God's sovereignty. Suffering is biblical and should be expected by all Christians, unlike the prosperity theology (Woyesa, 2021).

St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body, a catechesis on 'Human Love in the Divine Plan has contributed significantly to the Church's understanding of sexuality, marriage, family and celibacy. John Paul II asserts that the body is not irrelevant to salvation; it must participate and be incorporated in the process of redemption. The physical dimension is not in opposition of the spiritual dimension, but serves as a locus of experience for the unity of the person. Swantek seeks to apply John Paul II's theology of the body to suffering and death (Swantek, 2019).

Research has shown that marital conflict directly leads to increases in depression and functional impairment. This conflict can also indirectly contribute to depression through functional impairment (Choi & Marks, 2008, p. 377). Alcohol harms both spouses. Husbands' cognitive decline causes poor health and well-being in their wives (Kiecolt-Glaser & Wilson, 2017). Financial stress can cause marital problems and increase the risk of health issues. Financial stress can cause marital problems and increase the risk of health issues (Blom et al., 2019; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020; Robles, 2014; Shahraki et al., 2018). Consistently married mothers experience unique biological and psychological problems due to financial stress (Wickrama et al., 2022, pp. 3436–3457). Khezri indicated that income and economic can exert a positive effect on the couple's satisfaction which can be one of the important factors affecting marital satisfaction (Khezri et al., 2020). Blom concluded both objective and subjective economic uncertainty can affect individual's perception of the quality of their relationship (Blom et al., 2019). Couples with enduring vulnerabilities experience more negative interactions and fewer positive interactions. External stressors may amplify these effects (Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020). Unemployment is associated with poor mental well-being and lower self-esteem, which can cause individuals to become withdrawn and less communicative (Blom & Perelly-Haris, 2021). Comprehensive methodological review of the literature assessing the factors affecting marital satisfaction and marital communication among marital women showed that the income and economic status can be one of the important factors affecting marital satisfaction. The influential effect of some factors such as occupation, length of marriage, age, number of children, economic factor and income had been emphasized. All these factors can impact the overall quality of the marital relationship.

Table 1 presents an overview of this study's objectives, focusing on the exploration of suffering within marriages and its potential implications. Through a series of carefully crafted questions, this research seeks to gain insight into the subject's experiences and expressions of marital suffering. The questions encompass various facets, from the current marital situation (A) and feelings toward marriage (B) to emotions directed at the partner (C). Additionally, the study delves into the reasons for remaining in a suffering marriage (D), investigating the subjects' broader perspectives on life, self, relationships, and their views on marriage and God. The examination also encompasses the changes experienced during the course of enduring marital suffering (E) and the subject's expectations moving forward (F).

This comprehensive analysis provides a deeper understanding of the subject's attitudes towards detachment after enduring marital suffering and the processes they undergo to maintain their marriage, all of which are intricately intertwined with their relationship and perception of God (G). The subsequent sections present the research findings in detail.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Description of Marital Life Situation (compared to before marriage)	Which is felt as suffering in marriage	The most dominant feeling towards the husband	Why stay in a suffering marriage	Changes Experienced in Marriage	What to Expect Now	Views about God/ Who is God to you?
Yes, it's far, it's delicious before marriage, what do your parents want to give it to you?"	"My husband kicked me out, hit me, kicked me, slapped me, forced me to have sex, my in-laws didn't defend me, I wasn't given any money."	"I'm annoyed, I want to divorce, I can't stand it anymore. I don't think he's there. Just shadows flickering past like that."	"Where else are you going, I don't have any money, I can't support my children. It's like eating simalakama fruit, going forward and going backwards	"more surrender, more patience, more respect"	"I don't want anything more unless my husband repents"	"dependence"
"Just like hell, no one ever defended me."	"I'm like a doll or something you can do with whatever you want."	"I don't love you anymore, I'm like a lover "	"I'm old, what else can I do, spend the remaining time."	"I was adamant. Now I give up. Start accepting the unexpected. No need to be too idealistic. My husband hasn't changed."	"so that my husband gives up drugs"	"a source of strength and hope that I can rely on"
"Marriage is suffocating"	"cheated me, went bankrupt but didn't want to try anymore"	"bid"	"Yes, you can't get a divorce in the Catholic Church."	"more prayers"	"Can live peacefully without a husband"	"My helper, when I'm in trouble"
"My body is getting thinner" "I'm so fragile that I'm fragile"	"Husband curses, makes sarcasm, gets angry"	"hate, disgust"	"Fear of breaking God's commandments"	"suffering more"	"Serving God, helping others"	"God is good, I believe in Him"
"Since the beginning of marriage, the relationship has not been healthy"	"I feel like I have no one to support me"	"I feel like I exist as a wife, there is nothing other than in bed"	"I want to live because God loves me"	"used to see marriage as a burden, now as a blessing"	"Since I was little, life was difficult so I didn't want to buy this or that"	"Through prayer I can serve my husband sincerely"
"Too afraid of my husband, deifying my husband"	"Harsh words, shouting over trivial matters"	"I haven't had sex in ten years. Disappointed can't. I regret that because my body is still good, my skin is still good, why don't I use it. When you get old, you'll get wrinkles."	"I gave in, I feel sorry for the children. For the sake of my child, I have to accept it and live with it."	"more prayers"	"Finally now I cannot want (sexual intercourse) after years of not having it"	"My pride is my suffering, the story of my life with God's help and the scars of my wounds"

"Praise God, conditions forced me to be like this. Wherever you want to run, people don't have anything."	"I was considered just a passing wind"	"sad, angry and empty"	"I don't have a job"	"Now there's nothing to lose "	"apart from the desires of the flesh because it cannot be in marriage"	"In the absence of any pleasure you can only seek God"
"No rights whatsoever, no enjoyment whatsoever"	"Usually marriage belongs to the husband as well as to us. But you don't have the right to do shopping and managing the house."	"I don't care, whatever he wants, I don't care."	"Can't choose. If you refuse to suffer, you are going against God."	"The worst conditions made me give up dogma"	"I really don't want anything anymore"	"Having nothing, I have no attachments"

Table 1. Intersubject Experience Classification Data: The Interrelationship of Suffering and Detachment

Analyzing data about the marital life situation obtained from interviews, important to consider the experiences and feelings expressed by the individuals in the context of their marriage. The data suggests that many individuals are facing significant suffering in their marriages, with various forms of abuse, lack of support, and financial difficulties being reported. The dominant feeling towards husbands and wives is often negative, with emotions such as annoyance, disgust, sad, anger, disappointment being expressed. Despite all the suffering, the participants choose to stay in the marriage due to financial constraints, fear of being alone, or catholic teaching about indissolubility in marriage.

The changes experienced in marriage are described as negative, with individuals feeling that their relationship have become unhealthy and suffocating. The expectation for the future are often bleak with little hope for improvement or change in the husband’s behavior. Participants express a desire for their husbands to repent and change their behaviors or way of life but they also acknowledge that this may not happen.

In terms of their views about God, the individuals have different perspectives. Some see God as a source of strength and hope, relying on prayer and faith to cope with their difficult situations. Other view God as a reason to stay in the marriage, fearing the consequences of breaking religious commandments. There are also participants felt abandoned by God and question their faith in the face of their suffering.

The data showed that individuals’ experiences in marriage have had a significant impact on their overall well-being. They report feeling fragile, thin, and emotionally drained. The husband’s abusive behavior, harsh words, and lack of support contribute to their suffering. Some individuals express a sense of resignation and acceptance, while others feel trapped and devalued.

In terms of their expectations for the future, participants have different perspectives. Some see marriage as a burden and long for a peaceful life without a husband. Others finally view marriage as a blessing and an opportunity to serve God and help others. The individuals also express a desire for personal growth and self-improvement, seeking to overcome their suffering and find meaning in their experiences, and also the expression of detachment such as ‘nothing to lose’, “I really don’t want anything, anymore.”

The data highlights the complex and challenging nature of marital life for these participants. It underscores the importance of addressing issues such as abuse, lack of support, financial difficulties in

order to improve the well-being of those in troubled marriages. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach that takes into account the individual's religious beliefs, personal values, and emotional well-being when providing support and guidance in these situations.

Theology of Marital Suffering in Detachment of Saint John of the Cross

John of the Cross believed the importance of both active and contemplative life that they should be integrated in the life events and thought of a person (Fuentes, 2020). His teaching meant to be applied to everyday life. John of the Cross' teaching on detachment when applied to marriage can be interpreted as detachment or a heart free from everything that hinders the spiritual growth and holiness of a husband or wife in a husband-wife relationship.

Suffering and marriage problems are entry points to detachment. Financial problems caused by the husband not working, the husband not giving money to the wife and not caring about the wife's personal needs resulted in the wife harboring many desires. Wives who do not work depend on their husbands for the household economy. Regarding personal desires, they thought more about the needs of children than herself. In economic limitations, they prioritize the interests of the family.

The conditions that required them to harbor many desires eventually became an exercise that released them from many desires for goods and pleasures. A participant said: "From childhood life was hard so I don't want to buy this or that." Some participants see the lack of money and pleasure release them from many worldly desires. A participant said: "Without any enjoyment, I can only seek God." Another said: "Not having anything, I have no attachments."

According to John Paul II's study of John of the Cross, God allows hardships to purify us. Trials in marriage can be compared to dark nights, as explained by Stephen M. (Matuszak, 2000, pp. 6–7). Detachment is a process that requires both divine intervention and human response. This process is accompanied by suffering because we must prioritize God's will over worldly desires. However, experiencing the emptiness of material things can help us focus on spiritual matters (2 Corinthians 4:16). Economic, emotional, and sensual limitations can force us to detach ourselves from worldly desires and control our passions. St. John of the Cross teaches that in all forms of suffering, we can learn to detach ourselves from worldly attachments and find comfort and strength in God, even when lacking in material possessions. The Church's teaching on marital indissolubility opens the spiritual door by not running away from suffering. Couples who endure suffering can experience growth in their relationship with God. In the context of marriage, suffering can strengthen the bond between spouses, deepen their love and commitment, and contribute to their spiritual growth.

Detachment becomes a time when God works in man and man allows himself to be transformed by God Himself (Lina & Wijanarko, 2022). This transformative union in Christ will transform the natural souls into divine ones (Bharathi, 2021). John of the Cross depicts a spiritual journey where painful yearning transforms into satisfaction through mutual love and union with God, conforming human to divine desire (Howells, 2019). This process will greatly help the married couple to grow in virtue and strength to overcome problems in the marriage.

Conclusion

St. John of the Cross' teachings on detachment can be applied to marriage. Detachment enables the growth of theological virtues that liberate humans from the disorder of their passions and unite their souls with God. It is the moment when God works in humans and they allow themselves to be transformed by Him to attain union with Him. This process will greatly help the couple to grow in virtue

and more like Christ. This transformative union in Christ will also transform the soul's natural potentials into divine ones. The process of changing these potentials will enable the individual to have divine strength and power, so that many weaknesses or defects will be overcome and be able to be directed correctly and well according to God's grace.

For John of the Cross the theological virtue is the special way that unites God and man. The soul is not united to God through understanding, enjoyment, imagination or any of the senses, but only through faith in the intellect, hope in the memory, love in the will. To walk towards God, the intellect must be perfected in the darkness of faith, the memory in the emptiness of hope, and the will in the nakedness and absence of every affection. Detachment allows husbands and wives to let go of unrealistic views, concepts and ideas, painful memories, let go of disordered desires and direct them to God. Husbands and wives who persevere through hardships in marriage, thrive in perseverance, strength and resignation. Suffering in the dark night is a divine suffering that becomes a remedy for the natural suffering in marriage.

The ability to detach oneself in a difficult marriage can impact how one processes suffering and maintains the marriage. As spiritual development occurs, the relationship between husband and wife can improve. Enduring legitimate suffering within a marriage can be likened to a dark night. Strengthening marital spirituality, especially the appreciation of detachment, is a solution to maintain and improve the quality of marriages. The teaching of detachment of St. John of the Cross can be applied in marriages as treatment for suffering marriages to help couples grow in their spiritual life. Marital suffering become a way for detachment from the bonds of the world or material things that enable the spiritual development of the Subject.

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