INTRODUCTION

We take it for granted that every human person is in need of fulfillment. Every reader of these lines will have had some experience of the need of fulfillment. In the west Boethius in the sixth century attempted a definition of the human person: “an individual substance of rational nature”. Modern and contemporary philosophers returned via a variety of roots to catch new glimpses of a human person from newer perspectives. Sartre sometimes calls a human being “a useless passion”, in search of some fleeting fulfillment, ultimately doomed to frustration. Heidegger prefers to see the human person as a kind of project constantly looking forward. This constant looking forward seems to be the attitude of most people in our day-to-day meetings and encounters and we ourselves especially if we belong to the younger generation, find ourselves looking forward, sometimes, with great expectations. True, the older generation or rather many older individuals have a tendency to look backwards; but even among them are to be found forward looking people fitting in well with the description of Heidegger of the human person as a project. The Heideggerian project however, on closer analysis seems to be as much doomed to frustration as the Sartrean, because authentic existence seems to be time-bound, and terminated by death.

Whether time-bound or not, would the definition of Boethius of the human person as rational, contain implicitly the notion of a human person as a project looking for fulfillment is a question that deserves deeper research. Our present research sets out to examine, compare and contrast the views of Gautama Buddha and St. John of the Cross regarding the ways they propose
to the fulfillment of the human project. At first sight, they seem to agree with Boethius as regards the rationality of human beings. They also seem to agree with the common experience of humanity encapsulated in the Heideggerian description of the human person as a project. There is therefore, at least a first impression that human beings in their very constitution have something common and universal moving them, driving and compelling them towards their aim and a goal wherein they suspect and hope they will find fulfillment.

Apart from ancient and contemporary philosophers there are hundreds and thousands of thinkers including psychologists, men of literature, saints and sages who have reflected on the nature of the human person vis-à-vis his or her fulfillment.

The interesting thing about Gautama Buddha and St. John of the Cross, at least at first sight, is that the fulfillment expected and hoped for, is to be attained not by satisfying human cravings but by silencing and denying them. What these cravings actually are and how they are an obstacle to personal fulfillment will be explained among other things in the course of this work.

One more term in the title that may need explanation is “Happiness”. This is a term which has concerned philosophers in the east and the west since before the times of the Epicureans in the west and the Charvakas in the east. Before hedonism entered the corridors of ethics, Plato and Aristotle had established happiness as the goal of human life thus making room for eudaimonism. New trends have followed those classical views; but rather than assigning a label prematurely for the happiness dealt with in the present
research, I wish to identify its meaning for the present, as equivalent to fulfillment.

In the search for fulfillment and happiness with scientists and intellectuals showing the way humanity has acquired an immense amount of information and technology especially during the past two centuries. These advances no doubt, have brought with them countless benefits and comforts. The tragedy is that the benefits of science and technology don’t seem to have changed human nature and psychology much. Human selfishness, ambition, jalousies, rivalries have been using mass-media, communication and other technologies for the satisfaction of the cravings that lead to misery, terrorism, murder, suicide and war. As Marx pointed out, the haves grow richer and richer; the have-nots grow poorer and poorer. Every nation has to spend crores for its security against neighbouring nations and huge amounts of money are being spent for the maintenance of security forces and armies. Apparently the leaders of many nations feel obliged to neglect the personal happiness of citizens in order to see and attend to national security. On the other hand, lack of national security threatens the happiness of the citizens. What is the solution to this dilemma? The greatest threat looming over humanity at present is nuclear war. We cannot guarantee that researches like the present can avoid or even postpone war or national and international conflicts but we can hope that at least in some limited way this research will contribute to the personal fulfillment and happiness of its readers and show them the way to the enlightenment that was granted to Gautama Buddha and St. John of the Cross.
Objectives:

The objectives of this research are to investigate into the thinking of Sakyaamuni Gautama (c.563 - c.483 BC), popularly known as the Buddha, and attempt a comparative investigation into the views of St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) a Roman Catholic Saint, Philosopher, Spanish poet and Mystical writer. The focus of the research is primarily their ethical teachings concerning happiness and fulfillment and the means they prescribe for the attainment of that end.

Methodology:

I have employed the Historico-Critical, Analytical, Synthetic and Comparative Methods for my investigation into the theme.

Sources:

Since, historically speaking, the life and the original statements of Sakyaamuni Gautama are somewhat shrouded in antiquity and uncertainty, I have relied for my information, on the Dhammapada and other early Buddhist texts. Lacking knowledge of the Pāli and Sanskrit languages in which original Buddhist ideas were expressed, I had to rely on the translations available today. These translated sources therefore are regarded as primary for the purpose of this research. John of the Cross is much more accessible, not only in English translations, but also in his original Spanish. Hence, secondary sources are not as indispensable as in the case of Sakyaamuni Gautama. The primary sources for John of the Cross are his own writings.
Limitations:

One of the limitations of this research is ignorance of language. Although I had the opportunity of learning Spanish in which St. John of the Cross wrote all his works and also of getting acquainted with the Spanish culture, I had no chance of learning Pāli and had only a limited knowledge of Sanskrit, in which all the original Buddhist texts are written. Secondly, I also faced the difficulty of getting some basic Buddhist texts! Therefore, apart from the Dhammapada, all the other Buddhist texts are quoted as cited in the secondary sources, since also the numbering of the texts differs from translations to translations.

Contribution:

Many scholars and some practitioners of Vipassanā of Buddhist Insight Meditation and other Buddhist meditation and contemplation techniques who are acquainted also with the doctrine of St. John of the Cross have noted with astonishment, striking similarities between the two, especially as regards their attitudes towards attainment of tranquility, peace of mind, serenity of soul through the renouncement and even elimination of appetites, desires and cravings. Taking into account these first impressions not only of others but also mine own, and considering the world as it is today, a research of this type may be of use.

To sum up, ideas rule the world, as it is said, and the pen is mightier than the sword. I do hope that making known the spiritual and philosophical contributions of these two great spiritual masters may at least contribute towards making human beings less miserable.