

**THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ST THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX:
CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONTEMPORARY
UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
*FAITH AND SIN***

by

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

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Abstract

This dissertation is a result of my being challenged by a phrase that is used by the most recently named Doctor of the Church, St Thérèse of Lisieux: 'sin against faith ... through the abuse of grace'. What did that phrase mean for Thérèse and does it have meaning and application for today?

Given Thérèse's publicly acclaimed spiritual transformation, the initial aim was to examine Thérèse's religious experiences relating to *faith* and *sin* and to determine their contribution to her life of holiness. It sought to do this by engaging the hermeneutical triad of understanding, interpretation and application. However, rather than moving around these stages in circular motion in coming to an appreciation of Thérèse's autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, a more helpful way was to spiral round them, for the Theresian text seems capable of throwing up endlessly new material to the careful reader. The main goal in my reading, then, was to decide whether this work could be interpreted through the lens of *faith* and *sin* - thus providing a new analysis of, and approach to, her work. Having decided early that this was a worthwhile project with contemporary relevance, it was then necessary to understand and interpret her many figures of speech and to determine which of them carry her theological insights relating to *faith* and *sin*. The particular hermeneutic of *holiness* itself seemed a suitable one by which to unify this approach.

The subsequent aim was to determine how the dynamic relationship between faith and sin in Thérèse's writing might be applied to today's world. Her own text 'I am seeking only the truth' provided the answer. It was but a small step from speaking of *faith* and *sin* in Thérèse's life to realizing that this interaction really occurs in the life of all of us when we seek to know the truth, to live it and to do it in social action. The Paschal Mystery is the dissertation's specific religiously theoretical framework.

Key terms and the dissertation's methodology are described in Chapter 1. Because this thesis is undertaken within 'spirituality as an academic discipline', attention is paid to describing that concept. Indeed, this chapter looks at many different understandings of the term 'spirituality', including Sandra Schneiders' definition in terms of 'the ultimate value one perceives'. The latter has been important to consider because the dissertation sought, where the text permitted, to cast its vision beyond the boundaries of Roman Catholicism. Chapter 2 overviews related literature. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 deal with Thérèse's life through the text of her autobiography, though not exclusively. Her letters, poems and one of her plays have also contributed to the discussion. Chapter 6 suggests that, while not all people have full religious faith and, maybe, no religious faith, still all can live an authentic existence by seeking the *truth* as Thérèse did.

The final chapter lists twelve conclusions, five of which are summarised here:

1. It was by fully engaging in the dynamic relationship between faith and sin that Thérèse became holy.
2. This engagement is the path to holiness for all people

3. In exploring the meaning of Atheism for today, we find that Thérèse's view regarding this attitude to belief requires modification if it is to fit today's understanding of the 'sin against faith'.
4. Still, it remains possible for one to commit the 'sin against faith' today.
5. Thérèse's statement, 'all is grace', signals her intuitive understanding of the universality of salvation - formally pronounced by the members of Vatican Council II.

This last chapter serves as a bridge between post-nineteenth century unbelief and today's postmodernism by contributing an analysis of Atheism. This thus provides a basis for one of the major conclusions of the thesis: that Thérèse's statement — 'there were really souls who have no faith, and who, through the abuse of grace, lost this precious treasure, the source of the only real and pure joys' — cannot be applied to today's world without modification.

Finally, the dissertation points to the need in the context of today's postmodernism for further study in the areas of *faith* and *sin*. It suggests a way of doing this might be for church and maybe, academia, to consider giving serious attention to accepting personal professions of faith and creative images of salvation as part of a broad, valuable and acceptable conceptualisation and understanding of what it means to have faith.

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Acknowledgements

For a long time I have been fascinated by the apparent paradox between simplicity and complexity. This paradox, it seems to me, often lies behind the beauty in sport and art. This pattern of simplicity in complexity emerges, in particular, in the spiritual journey of very holy people, for example, Thérèse of Lisieux whose complex personality finally finds resolution in entering into a prolonged, yet simple (or immediate) gaze on Truth. A sister once remarked to Thérèse: ‘Your soul is extremely *simple*, but when you will be perfect, you will be even *more simple*; the closer one approaches to God, the simpler one becomes’.¹ Thérèse herself said: ‘For simple souls there must be no complicated ways; I am of their number’.² These kinds of musings led me to a study of Thérèse of Lisieux and then to develop one aspect of that study for the purposes of this dissertation — the relationship between faith and sin in her writings. It was the engagement of these two realities that, I believe, led Thérèse to spiritual simplicity — the loving unconditional surrender of herself to God's merciful love.

This work, which has had something of a long journey to its point of completion, owes much to those people who assisted and encouraged me along the way and to them I owe a special word of gratitude. In 2001, I met with Walter and Joanne Wolski Conn as a result of my interest in Walter Conn's book, *The Desiring Self*.³ This, in turn, led to conversation with Peter Beer, Sebastian Moore and Matthew Ogilvie as I sought to understand Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*.⁴ I also received help around that early time from Mary Frohlich and Barbara Reid. Throughout the writing, my supervisor, Patrick Oliver, gave his time, expertise and kindness unstintingly. Gerard Hall, the assistant supervisor, was particularly helpful. Tom Ryan provided an invaluable and ongoing critique of the work.

¹ SS Manuscript A, 151. This was a remark made to Thérèse by Sister Fébronie, the Sub-prioress in the years 1888-1890.

² SS Manuscript C, 254.

³ Walter E. Conn, *The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counselling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998).

⁴ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Darton Longman & Todd, 1972 / University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, Toronto, 1999).

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Bernard Lonergan claims that religious experience is something exceedingly simple and, in time, also exceedingly simplifying, but it also is something exceedingly rich and enriching.⁵ May the readers of this dissertation experience something of the exceeding richness reflected in the life and works of Thérèse of Lisieux.

⁵ Bernard J. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 290.

Abbreviations

Primary Sources:

<i>GC</i>	General Correspondence – Thérèse's Letters in 2 volumes
<i>LC</i>	Last Conversations of Thérèse with her sisters
<i>PN</i>	Thérèse's poetry
<i>Pri</i>	Thérèse's prayers
<i>RP</i>	Recreation Pieces written by Thérèse
<i>SS</i>	Story of a Soul – Thérèse's Autobiography in 3 distinct Manuscripts: A, B, C.

Secondary Sources:

<i>ACR</i>	Australasian Catholic Record
<i>AEJT</i>	Australian Ejournal Theology – Issues 1-8
<i>AG</i>	<i>Ad Gentes</i> (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity)
<i>CCC</i>	Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994)
<i>CCCC</i>	Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2005)
<i>DAS</i>	<i>Divini Amoris Spiritu</i> (Apostolic Letter)
<i>DM</i>	<i>Dives in Misericordia</i> (Encyclical Letter)
<i>DP</i>	<i>Dialogue and Proclamation</i> (Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue)
<i>DV</i>	<i>Dei Verbum</i> (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)
<i>EA</i>	<i>Ecclesia in Asia</i> (Apostolic Exhortation)
<i>FR</i>	<i>Fides et Ratio</i> (Encyclical Letter)
<i>GS</i>	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> (Pastoral Constitution of the Church)
<i>LG</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)
<i>NA</i>	<i>Nostra Aetate</i> (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian religions)
<i>NCR</i>	National Catholic Reporter
<i>NDCS</i>	The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality
<i>NDT</i>	New Dictionary of Theology [CD-Rom]

<i>NTS</i>	New Testament Studies
<i>NWDCS</i>	New Westminster Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality
<i>RP</i>	<i>Reconciliatio et Paenitentia</i> (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation)
<i>RM</i>	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> (Encyclical Letter)
<i>SL</i>	Spiritual Life: A Journal of Contemporary Spirituality
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa Theologiae</i> (Thomas Aquinas)
<i>TS</i>	Theological Studies
<i>VIS</i>	Vatican Information Service
<i>VS</i>	<i>Veritatis Splendor</i> (Encyclical Letter)

All scripture texts used in this thesis have been taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

The form and style of this thesis have been taken from:

A Style Manual for the Presentation of Papers and Thesis in Religion and Theology compiled by Lawrence D. McIntosh (Centre for Information Studies in association with Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association and Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools). The Note-Bibliography System of Referencing used in this dissertation has been taken from this manual.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Marie-François-Thérèse Martin, later to be known as St Thérèse of Lisieux, was born in Alençon, Normandy, France in 1873 and died in Lisieux 1897, aged twenty-four years and nine months. She entered the Carmelite Convent in Lisieux at the age of fifteen and lived there until her death nine years later. She was the youngest member of her family of five girls, all of whom entered the Religious Life. Four of Thérèse's other siblings died in their early childhood. Thérèse's parents were devout Catholics and also fine citizens of their town. They were compassionate and had an entrepreneurial flair for creative business dealings — 'two craftsmen, clockmaker and lacemaker', as described by one author.¹

After Thérèse's death and in response to the many miracles worked through her intercession and answers granted to the many petitions addressed to her, Pope Pius X signed on 10 June 1914 the Decree for the Introduction of the Cause of confirming her sanctity. On 14 August 1921, Pope Benedict XV promulgated the Decree on the Heroicity of her Virtues and delivered a homily on *Spiritual Childhood*. Thérèse was beatified by Pope Pius XI on 29 April 1923 and canonised by the same Pope on 27 May 1925. This same Pope proclaimed St Thérèse of Lisieux Universal Patron of the Missions, alongside St Francis Xavier, on 14 December 1927. Pope John Paul II proclaimed St Thérèse the thirty-third Doctor of the Church on Mission Sunday, 19 October 1997.

¹ See Henri Ghéon, *The Secret of the Little Flower*, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Sheet & Ward, 1934), 31.

Thérèse is the third female saint to be named a Doctor of the Universal Church. Both St Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) and St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) were given this title in 1970. These three women join a group of outstanding contributors to the Christian and catholic way of life. In Roman Catholicism, a Doctor of the Church is a theologian from whose teachings the whole Christian church is held to have derived great advantage and to whom eminent learning and great sanctity have been attributed by a proclamation of the Pope.² The Doctorate conferred upon St Thérèse of Lisieux in 1997 confirms the eminence of her writings.³ In a church whose centre of culture is shifting from Europe and North America to countries like Africa, India, and South America, what can this young French nun say to humankind?⁴

A. THESIS PURPOSE

Through a study of Thérèse and her writings, this thesis seeks to present, from the viewpoint of spirituality rather than of theology,⁵ a critical reflection on the subjects of *faith* and *sin* as they are understood in the Judaic-Christian (Catholic) tradition and as Thérèse presents them, and to place that understanding within the wider context of today's post-modern world. The dissertation's specific religiously theoretical

² See <http://www.answers.com/topic/doctor-of-the-church>. [Accessed 29/10/2005]. See also, Steven Payne, *St Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor of the Universal Church* (New York: St Pauls, 2002).

³ 'Eminence of the writings' is a condition for receiving the title 'Doctor of the Church'. Pope John Paul II elaborates on the Church's interpretation of the eminence of Thérèse's writings in his Sunday Angelus Talk on Thérèse, 'Doctor of the Church', 19 October 1997, and in his Apostolic Letter *Divini Amoris Scientia* (DAS), 19 October 1997: In the former, the pope said: 'Fulfilling the desires of many ... and consulting the Congregation of the Causes of Saints and hearing the opinion of the Congregation regarding her eminent doctrine ... we declare ...'; in DAS, the pope wrote: 'Thérèse is a teacher of the spiritual life with a doctrine both spiritual and profound, which she drew from the Gospel sources under the guidance of the divine Teacher and then imparted to her brothers and sisters in the Church with the greatest effectiveness', # 3. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) cites from Thérèse's writings six times: # 2011, # 826, # 956, # 1011, # 127, # 2558 (see Joseph F. Schmidt, 'St Thérèse's Contribution to the Catechism', *Review for Religious* 67/2 (2008): 255-265).

⁴ The present dissertation struggles for an understanding of 'Universal Church' that is true, ecumenical and inter-religious. In one sense it understands the term as the Catholic Church of pope, bishops, laity. In another sense it understands 'universal' to be the true meaning of 'catholic', that is, inclusive of all people. The dissertation recognises a value of truth in each approach and aims at holding in tension the juridical and the mystical, the human and the divine. It is, perhaps, only a contemplative mind like that of Thérèse's that can embrace all people without needing to entertain an analysis of degrees of 'belonging'.

⁵ Good theology bridges the historic division between love and knowledge in the human approach to God. Likewise, good spirituality is also good theology. This thesis, primarily dealing with personal faith and human experience in the life and writings of St Thérèse of Lisieux, aims at a unity of theology and spirituality while *focusing* on spirituality.

framework is the Paschal Mystery.⁶ This structure allows for easy reference to a number of issues: the gospel motif of 'losing one's life and finding it' (cf. Mk 8:35) which Jesus in his person lived out fully in his death and resurrection; Thérèse's aim to overcome her 'false self' and to live by her 'true self'; her strong desire to avoid sin in any of its forms and to live by faith instead; and to addressing the crisis of Christian / Catholic faith today and loss of the sense of sin⁷ which might easily fit under the umbrella title of *relativism* as used by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI).⁸

Thérèse's faith was certainly not relative. For Thérèse, Jesus *is* God. 'To keep the word of Jesus, that is the sole condition of our happiness, the proof of our love for Him. But what, then, is this word? ... It seems to me that the word of Jesus is *Himself*.'⁹ There are twenty-seven references in her writings to verses John 1:1–14. She knew Jesus as 'the Word made flesh' (Jn 1:1); she knew him as God and man. It has been well said that:

[T]he God to whom Thérèse of Lisieux has drawn so many millions of people is not Pure Act, nor Infinite, Perfect and Necessary Being. Thérèse always had

⁶ This is a term favoured by Vatican Council II to indicate the saving act of Jesus, specifically his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. At times, Jesus spoke of his coming death in plain terms — 'Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise' (Mk 8:31); at other times he addressed it in imagery — 'destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it' (Jn 2:19).

⁷ 'Over the course of generations, the Christian mind has gained from the Gospel as it is read in the ecclesial community a fine sensitivity and an acute perception of the *seeds of death* contained in sin, as well as a sensitivity and an acuteness of perception for identifying them in the thousand guises under which sin shows itself. This is what is commonly called the *sense of sin*.' (see John Paul II, *RP*, # 18). See also Susan Muldoon, 'St Thérèse: Light in the Culture of Death', in *Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate*, ed., *St Thérèse: Doctor of the Little Way* (New Bedford MA: Park Press, 1997): 99-105.

⁸ 'Relativism, in so far as it concerns faith and belief can, itself, be refined to refer to two issues relating to doctrines of the Christian faith: (1) Instead of being the man who *is* God, Christ becomes the one who has *experienced* God in a special way; (2) Instead of God, the Personal One who can be called on — to speak, to hear, and to answer — there is now no longer an essential difference to be noted between the theistic and nontheistic forms of religion. Hence, in this scenario, there is no positive relationship between God and the world' (see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 'Preface to the new edition' (2000) in *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster. New Preface translated by Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1969, 2000), 21-23. 'Any doctrine which denies, universally or in regard to some restricted sphere of being, the existence of absolute values, may be termed Relativism' (see 'Relativism', www.newadvent.org. [Accessed 06/09/2008]).

⁹ GC II, 862. This is one of twenty-seven references to Jn 1: 1–14 in Thérèse's writings. See *La Bible avec Thérèse de Lisieux* (Les Editions du Cerf et Desclée De Brouwer, 1979), 232-234.

before her eyes Jesus, the Word of God who was made man, died and rose from the dead for the salvation of the world.¹⁰

B. Situating the Work

Specific Aim

In the last eighteen months of her life Thérèse enters a 'night of faith'. She, who was always so faith-filled, is tempted to disbelieve in the existence of life after death. Her temptation mirrors the atheism beginning to take hold as a result of the radical expression of the Enlightenment (Age of Reason), namely, the French Revolution (1789). The problem of unbelief in the wider French society of her day, her own temptation against the faith, and her ill health nevertheless combined to intensify Thérèse's determination to make even more 'acts of faith' than usual, and to work and pray even more diligently for the 'salvation of souls' — especially those in mission lands. Her motto in Carmel was 'to love Jesus and to make him loved'.¹¹ Thérèse's call to mission also impelled her to authorise her sisters to make known her *petite voie*¹² after her death so that others might follow the way to God that she, herself, had found most helpful.

Nine months prior to this threefold 'attack', Thérèse had made a formal offering of herself to God's Merciful Love. Her 'trial', therefore, is to be seen within the compass of God's love in a manner parallel to that which sees the passion of Jesus within the loving embrace of God, his Father. I argue that this was a special mystical grace for Thérèse which was inviting her to enter, in a particular way, into the drama of Redemption — that is, the call to faith and refusal to sin.¹³ In this regard, her words

¹⁰ See Giovanni Gennari and A Discalced Carmelite nun, *An Echo of the Heart of God & Studies of the Self-Offering of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. from French Jacques Philippe et al., trans. from Italian Hilary Doran et al (Nedlands WA: Carmelite Monastery, 2002), 32.

¹¹ See GC II, 1058.

¹² Thérèse uses these particular words to name what became known as her 'way of spiritual childhood' — her 'way' of going to God, her approach to God.

¹³ We cannot enter into a prolonged discussion of the Redemption. However, the Redemption is an important underlying topic in this thesis because Thérèse is associated in a special way with Jesus' saving act. In the Christian dispensation, *faith* and *sin* are realities very much connected to the Redemption of humankind by Jesus Christ. The Redemption is God's saving plan accomplished 'once for all' (Heb 9:26) by Jesus Christ. The restoration of humankind from the bondage of sin to the liberty

are important for they tell us that this trial was within the will of God for her: 'Never have I felt before this ... how sweet and merciful the Lord really is, for He did not send me this trial until the moment I was capable of bearing it. A little earlier I believe it would have plunged me into a state of discouragement'.¹⁴ Further, it is in this final period of Thérèse's life that her powerful understanding of *agape* (selfless loving) reaches its zenith: 'I no longer have any great desires except that of loving to the point of dying of love'.¹⁵ This kind of love and suffering is grounded in very strong relational faith.

Using the twin emphases of love and faith-in-suffering as a springboard, then, we focus on faith and sin¹⁶ and their dynamic relationship as found in the writings of St Thérèse of Lisieux and expressed often through image, metaphor and symbol. The dissertation is concerned with her entire life — not just the last eighteen months — and it argues that the pilgrimage to holiness¹⁷ in Thérèse's life is through the

of the children of God through the satisfactions and merits of Christ is the mystery of our salvation. Our salvation (or our being redeemed from the bondage of sin) is a mystery of faith. Even sin itself is a mystery; that it exists is certain, yet why it exists is less certain. Salvation (or our being redeemed) is broadly concerned, then, not only with faith, but also with that from which we are redeemed, namely, sin. The Redemption makes it possible for all people to accept the grace of faith expressed in love (cf. CCC # 155, 571, 599-605).

¹⁴ SS Manuscript C, 214.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The theological terms of faith, sin and grace will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Here, briefly: *faith* is belief in the existence of God, of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and God's continuing self-communication within the communion of believers through the power of the Holy Spirit; *sin* is the intentional refusal to obey God's law and God's offer of Godself in loving friendship; *grace* is the totally free and undeserved gift of God's Self-communication to humankind.

¹⁷ The basic category of 'holiness' refers, in the first place, to the Source of holiness — God, and secondly, to the imperative placed upon all human person — 'made in his image and likeness' (cf. Gen 1:26) — to respond positively to God's creative act by freely growing in bonds of friendship with God. For a Christian, holiness has its primary exemplar in the person of Jesus Christ and consists of a growing, aided by the Spirit, into the likeness of Jesus. Defining 'spirituality', Sandra Schneiders claims that for the Christian, his or her 'horizon of ultimate value is the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ', Holiness, then, can be said to involve 'the living of his paschal mystery in the context of the Church community through the gift of the Holy Spirit' (cf. Sandra M. Schneiders, 'The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline', in Elizabeth A. Dreyer & Mark S. Burrows, ed., *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005: 5-24, at 6). Thomas Merton states: 'Christian holiness in our age means more than ever the awareness of our common responsibility to cooperate with the mysterious designs of God for the human race ...' (see Thomas Merton, *Life and Holiness* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1963), 10). Hans Urs von Balthasar holds that 'Thérèse received a mission in the Church to rescue the notion of holiness from an accountancy or pharisaic mentality and to present in the Little Way an ideal of genuine holiness for our time' (cited in Christopher O'Donnell, *Love in the Heart of the Church*, 213). O'Donnell takes the references from Balthasar's *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux* and

interaction of these two realities.¹⁸ This interaction in Thérèse, of course, occurs in the life of any Christian — and in some form, in the life of every person. However, this thesis highlights the importance of it in Thérèse's life — especially in light of what many today see as indifference to faith and loss of a sense of sin. The 'trial of faith' in her last months focuses the discussion because it is there, in Manuscript C,¹⁹ that Thérèse describes her experience and where she specifically uses the phrase 'sin against faith' and other significant references to this trial. P. Marie-Eugène writes:

This trial held in check the sensible outpourings of Love, but its principal effect was to make Thérèse share in the drama of divine Love here below, in its grievous struggle against sin. It was the interior drama of Gethsemane and Calvary, a fight to the death between Love and sin's hatred.²⁰

Elizabeth of the Trinity, trans. Donald Nichols, Anne Englund Nash, Dennis Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992): 237-270; 270-301.

Ida Görres writes: 'Holiness is not, in the Christian sense of the word, surpassing ethical achievement, ascetic record-breaking, possession of rare and strange forces drawn from mysterious marginal realms of the psychic life, like clairvoyance or healing powers. It is not genius expressing itself in religious vision. Holiness is hallowedness, is a state of being seized and marked by God who alone is holy. That human soul is holy who responds to the hallowing divinity, "Yes", who responds with all his [sic] forces and at any cost, in free and loving obedience. "What God asks of you is that you should sanctify yourselves" (1 Thess 4:3). That the seed and the seal of all holiness, sanctifying grace, is received in baptism; that the human being permits himself [sic], in freedom, to be moulded by it in imitation of his Lord, though also in pain; that he recognizes the will of God and submits to it, is filled and sustained by it as is the skin by flesh and bone — these are the realities, these are indispensable ... "You and Marie will have no difficulties with her upbringing", Madame Martin wrote to Pauline in the spring of 1877, when she felt the approach of death. "Her disposition is so good. She is a chosen spirit." In voicing this, which must console her for the anguish of parting, she meant more than "choice" in the sense of precious. This devout mother already glimpsed something she would see only after she had crossed the threshold: that God had laid his hand upon Thérèse' (see Ida Friederike Görres, *The Hidden Face: A Study of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Burns & Oates, 1959), 59f. 'It needs more than intelligence to understand holiness, more than sensibility to recognize it, more than a nicely balanced judgement to criticize it. Anyone may say "I will be a saint". But holiness must be willed wholeheartedly, with a will stronger than the might of nature and of sin, with a resolution equal to that of the grace which can bring down the "dark night" upon us for our own good.' (see Ghéon, *The Secret of The Little Flower*, 63).

¹⁸ See 'The Universal Call to Holiness' in *LG*, # 39-# 42. Michael Buckley states: 'The highest form of the categorical disclosure of God is in the lives of holiness. God emerges in the interaction and struggles in which human beings act and are drawn, in which they move towards God in accord with their longings and the structures of their consciousness and then undergo a response that they may not even at that time realize as divine' (see Michael J. Buckley, 'The Rise of Modern Atheism and the Religious *Epoche*'. Presidential Address, *CTSA Proceedings* 47 (1992): 69-83).

¹⁹ See the following chapter for explanation of Thérèse's *Story of a Soul* — compiled from Manuscripts A, B and C.

²⁰ Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *Under the Torrent of His Love: Thérèse of Lisieux, A Spiritual Genius*, foreword Bishop Patrick V. Ahern, preface Bishop Guy Gaucher, trans. Sister Mary Thomas Noble (New York: Alba House, 1995), 107.

Thérèse does not, of course, directly discuss *faith* and *sin* as theology. Thérèse was not a theologian in the strict sense of the word; her journey to holiness and hence her understanding of these realities and her expression of them as a lived spirituality was not in explicit theological discourse.

Nevertheless, her theological insights are present, and, as noted above, her conversation regarding them is often conducted under the cover of imagery, the use of which is a feature of her writing. In this present dissertation, however, it has been necessary to limit the choice of these figures of speech in order to manage the abundance of examples. Another limitation is that the dissertation cannot make an analysis of Thérèse's *petite voie* nor of her spirituality *per se*. Rather does its main interest lie in showing the inter-relationship between *faith* and *sin* in Thérèse's life's journey though, inevitably, these aforementioned two subjects are addressed during the discussion.

One presupposition of this current work is that one can discuss interior states of conscience from an objective point of view only. Another is the recognition that the dissertation's interpretation of today's culture as containing elements of 'desolation' and 'toxicity' is a value judgment. The author recognises many 'signs of life' within today's culture — but these are not principally under discussion.

The underlying current of argument throughout the dissertation is that 'sin is the refusal to obey the call to faith that is offered through grace'. More specifically expressed for the person of Christian faith, it is that 'sin is the more or less conscious refusal to allow oneself to be loved by Jesus'.²¹ The thesis therefore asks questions like: Who is Jesus? What is sin? Is there 'sin against faith'? What did 'sin against faith' mean for Thérèse? What does 'sin against faith' mean today?

²¹ See Jean Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, trans. Florestine Audette (Sherbrook, Canada: Médiaspaul, 2004), 151. Referring to Peter's denial of Jesus, Lafrance writes: 'Peter's sin was not only that of betraying Christ, it especially consisted in his more or less conscious refusal to let himself be loved by Jesus'. Peter misunderstood Jesus and it was not until the moment when Jesus looked on Peter at the time of Jesus' arrest that Peter was converted. He understood then that his betrayal of Jesus had not started on that morning. For a long time previously, 'Peter had refused a certain face of Jesus, going to Jerusalem, suffering at the hands of the high priests and dying on the cross. That is the sin that Jesus wanted to reveal to him, the betrayal being only the consequence of this fundamental flaw', 151.

The dissertation is undertaken within the academic discipline of spirituality and written from within the catholic tradition as experienced in Australia in the twenty-first century. It looks out from there to the world we all share.

Contemporary Context

The following description of the contemporary situation is a collated version of Albert Nolan's judgment of today's 'signs of the times'.²²

We, in the twenty-first century, live in the period of postmodernism where absolute authority is no longer tenable.²³ There are no longer any 'grand narratives' that offer salvation. There is a crisis of individualism where one's 'false self', one's *ego*, one's own self-fulfilment is the source of a sham sense of power and authority. Today there is interest in genuine spirituality but concurrently a fascination with vampires, aliens, magic, the occult, the supernatural, and the preternatural.²⁴ There is an overload of bad news. 'People today are living in a state of suppressed despair, trying to find ways of distracting themselves from the hard realities of our times'.²⁵

Today, all traditional cultures are slowly disintegrating. Some people turn to drink or drugs. Some commit suicide. Some seek an imagined security in wealth and possessions while others use sport, entertainment or sex to divert attention from the worries of life.²⁶ The cultural ideal of the Western industrialized world is the self-made, self-sufficient, autonomous individual who stands by himself or herself, not needing any one else (except sex) and not beholden to anyone for anything.²⁷ The overarching inequality today is between the rich and the poor.²⁸

²² See Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 5.

²³ Postmodernism is a general and wide-ranging term which is applied to literature, art, philosophy, architecture, fiction, and cultural and literary criticism, among others. Postmodernism is 'post' because it denies the existence of any ultimate principles, and it lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody — a characteristic of the so-called 'modern' mind. The paradox of the postmodern position is that, in placing all principles under the scrutiny of its scepticism, it must realize that even its own principles are not beyond questioning (cf. Glossary Definition: Postmodernism: www.pbs.org/faithandreason/gengloss/postmbody.html). [Accessed 30/07/2008].

²⁴ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 5.

²⁵ Nolan, 5f.

²⁶ Nolan, 6.

²⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁸ Ibid., 30.

Yet Nolan also notes more positive signs of the times. There is a genuine and sincere hunger for spirituality.

People are discovering what the mystics have always said, that we must undertake the painful and difficult task of moving beyond our self-centeredness, our individualism, and our egos. Programs that ignore this truth and offer a self-fulfilment or follow-your-bliss kind of spirituality are totally misleading.²⁹

There is also the positive awareness of one's duty to care for the earth. Further, previously suppressed voices are now being heard in the public forum: those of women, black people, indigenous people, workers, peasants, the poor, the untouchables, and even children.³⁰ There is a new scientific worldview 'which stands today as a sign of a very exciting tomorrow'.³¹ There is a movement of anti-globalization to overcome dominating structures of oppressive power.

Nineteenth Century Context

In her time, Thérèse carried in her psyche the positive and negative outcomes of the Enlightenment (18th and 19th centuries), the French Revolution (1789) with its ideals of *liberty*, *equality*, and *fraternity*, the later Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), the impact of the Franco-Prussian War with the surrender of French land to Germany in 1870, and a peace settlement with that country in 1871 — but without return of the annexed Alsace-Lorraine territory. She was a product of her time and absorbed her country's response to these issues in the Third French Republic (1871-1940). Her writings at times reveal this influence, for example, her interest in and devotion to Joan of Arc.³²

²⁹ Ibid., 17.

³⁰ Ibid., 29.

³¹ Ibid., 38.

³² For example, Thérèse considered her religious vows to be her 'weapons': 'If I have the powerful armor of the Warrior, / If I imitate him and fight bravely, / Like the Virgin of ravishing graces, / I also want to sing as I fight. / You make the strings of my lyre vibrate, / And this lyre, O Jesus, / is my heart! Then I can sing of the strength and sweetness of your Mercies. / Smiling, I bravely face the fire. / And in your arms, O my Divine Spouse, / I shall die singing on the battlefield, / My Weapons in hand! ...' (cf. *PN* 58, 196, stanza 5). Thérèse also composed two Recreational Skits on the subject of Joan of Arc: *The Mission of Joan of Arc* or the *Shepherd of Domremy Listening to Voices* (RP 1894) and *Joan of Arc Accomplishing her Mission* (RP 1895). In her autobiography we read: 'When reading the accounts of the patriotic deeds of French heroines, especially the Venerable Joan of Arc, I had a great desire to imitate them; and it seemed I felt within me the same burning zeal with which they were animated, the same heavenly inspiration' (SS Manuscript A, 72).

This aspect of Thérèse's writing covers a metaphorical though, perhaps, unconscious recognition of her own toughness, a strength of will in her personality that belies an accusation of soft and sweet piety that the title 'little flower' surely suggests: 'Thérèse of Lisieux, beneath the appearance of a very nice little girl, is a soldier, a warrior. She is the equal of the greatest among the giants God has recommended to us, but under the most banal exterior'.³³

In describing Thérèse's period in history,³⁴ Mary Frohlich (1999) writes: 'many of the concerns about Thérèse's doctorate arise from uneasiness with the character of the culture and upbringing that humanly shaped her'.³⁵ Frohlich notes Thérèse's bourgeois, royalist, and ultramontane milieu that practiced a highly visible and insular form of Roman Catholicism: devotion to the pope, obedience to the laws and customs of the Church, reverence for priests, and the almost ostentatious practice of multiple devotions and penances were [sic] *de rigueur*.³⁶

There was opposition to what was perceived as 'the world',³⁷ all the evils of materialism, positivism, liberalism, republicanism, and anticlericalism; and instead, these French Catholics 'developed a fortress mentality' giving great attention to their families and others of like mind. Further, the 'grand narrative'

³³ Bernard Bro, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996, 2003), 22.

³⁴ See also Leopold Glueckert, 'The World of Thérèse: France, Church and State in the Late Nineteenth Century', in John Sullivan, ed., *Experiencing St Thérèse Today* (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1990): 10-27.

³⁵ Mary Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: "Doctor for the Third Millennium?"', *New Theology Review* 12/2 (May 1999): 27-38. Academic Doctorates are seen to be earned in an academic *milieu* where freedom, breadth of expression, and written evidence of scholarship form the mind and justify one's conclusions. Thérèse's Doctorate (Doctor of the Church), as noted earlier, confirms the eminence of her writings within the Roman Catholic Church's interpretation's of the value of her teaching and her holiness. These two seemingly divergent approaches call for careful attention as to how, in this instance, science and theology might inform each other. This present dissertation is mindful of that 'call'.

³⁶ See Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux', 28.

³⁷ Thérèse was not ignorant of the world of her day. Her Uncle Guérin wrote editorially on current events at home and abroad for the monarchist paper *Le Normand* from 1891. The Third French Republic came into existence in 1871 but by 1875 it began to show hostility towards the Catholic Church. Isidore Guérin was always ready to defend the church whenever it was attacked. 'World' appears 221 times in Thérèse's writings. The references reflect Thérèse's choice made in love to 'leave the world' and a rejection of the false values of the world. She 'left the world' though to 'save souls'; and so it can be said that, though withdrawn from the world, 'she carried the world in her heart, especially sinners and priests' (see Christopher O'Donnell, 'Thérèse and the World', in *Love in the Heart of the Church* (Dublin: Veritas, 1997): 99-114, at 114. Lafrance writes: 'The world is an ambivalent reality. In the Gospel, it appears, on the one hand, as the Kingdom of the Prince of this world, and on the other, as a reality able to be saved and loved by God. It is the milieu in which the Kingdom of God comes to be. It is the field in the process of growth and evolution, for the good wheat is mixed with the darnel' (cf. Jean Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, 137, fn. 17).

of penance, spiritual warfare, trial, and heroic sacrifice on earth, followed by the reward of eternal life in heaven, shaped everything that these believers did.³⁸

In bringing her description of this period to a close, Frohlich writes:

Much of the piety of these French Catholics was sentimental and lacking in theological or aesthetic depth. It was also often legalistic and rigoristic, encouraging believers to count up their devotions and penances so as to earn divine favour and, ultimately, assure their entrance to heaven.³⁹

Stéphane-Joseph Piat (1948), writing much earlier than Frohlich, sees all the customs of the Martin household as serving only one end — that of doing God's Will. He writes:

Those who are not afraid of cradles must be fond of work. To face conjugal duties cheerfully means making up one's mind to many cares, long busy days in an age when all the conditions of social life are envisaged and arranged according to the niggardly measure of the individual ... to accept a large family meant a call to heroism. M and Mme. Martin did not shrink from this prospect.⁴⁰

This way of understanding, that is, viewing selfless heroism in the home through meeting the demands made by a large family differs from today's understanding of family life. Today, a woman can combine professional and domestic life. It is nevertheless true Thérèse's parents seemed selflessly heroic and had deep faith. Do we look, then, at Piat's view as out-dated? From the perspective of the twenty-first century, it is. However, in its defence, we note that the Martin home produced a saint and would have gladly had not one, but seven, including the parents themselves.⁴¹

³⁸ Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux', 28.

³⁹ Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux', 28.

⁴⁰ Stéphane-Joseph Piat, *The Story of a Family: The Home of St Thérèse of Lisieux (The Little Flower)*, definitive ed., trans., a Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey (Rockford ILL: Tan Books, 1948), 66.

⁴¹ Of additional interest here is that the cause for M. and Mme. Martin's Beatification has now been completed with the Beatification ceremony in the Lisieux cathedral on 19 October 2008. M. and Mme. Martin exemplified the role of 'parent' in their time. And yet, their Beatification can raise a question regarding the parents' deep faith, similar to the question Mary Frohlich raises in her paper relating to Thérèse (see 'Thérèse of Lisieux: "Doctor for the Third Millennium?"' (cf. page 12 above): Were Thérèse's parents *free* to choose the faith or was their faith of each so heavily formed by their *milieu* that they were not free to choose otherwise? Much later, Thérèse's 'trial of faith' *impelled* her to *choose*, and choose again, to believe, and in this experience 'her life and work uniquely address the needs of humanity' today. Her writing, therefore, is not 'essentially a confirmation of traditional, premodern understandings of the Christian way' (Frohlich 'Thérèse of Lisieux', 27). In the light of this short *excursus* into 'freedom of choice', maybe a positive effect of the current trend in Western society

Thérèse's times, notes Christopher O'Donnell (1997), knew a crisis of faith.

From the time of the Enlightenment there was a rationalistic rejection of faith in the name of science and reason; there was also a defensive retreat into pietism. The society of her time was marked by a militant anti-clericalism and atheism.⁴²

Bernard Bro speaks of the 'firm, simple, and profound affection that existed between Thérèse and her father' and, in relation to her mother, he writes: 'Like her mother, Thérèse would be surprisingly strong and realistic.'⁴³ In, perhaps, an overly-sentimental judgment, he also notes that in the Martin family there was 'the climate of heart': 'no pointless settling of accounts, no retrospective discontent, no tension, bitterness, jealousy [but] an affection normally expressed with joy'.⁴⁴

Without a doubt, Thérèse is partly the product of her environment; but there is another ingredient in the formation of a saint, that of *grace*, and Thérèse acknowledges both in her autobiography.⁴⁵

In reference to a 'crisis of faith' that Benedict XVI's interpretation of relativism would judge to be prevalent today, there is similarity between Thérèse's times and ours. Her time was shaken in its faith by the preference of reason to belief; for us today, faith is also shaken by changing ideologies that can prevent the proclamation of the gospel message from having its novel and powerful impact. I consider that Thérèse's doctorate takes on added significance when viewed in the light of her commitment (her obedience) to faith. Her commitment raises the question of the sinfulness of infidelity to the faith not only in her time but also in ours.

to, perhaps, relativise central Christian doctrines is that this trend can *oblige* one to make a choice either for or against Christian belief similar to the way Thérèse's trial impelled her to choose.

⁴² O'Donnell, *Love in the Heart of the Church* (Dublin: Veritas, 1997), 166.

⁴³ Bro, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*, 42.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁵ Grace was always present in the lives of each member of the Martin household, and not only in Thérèse. See SS Manuscript A: Thérèse was born on 'holy soil', 15; 'I have the good fortune to belong to Parents without equal', 16; 'The flower about to tell her story rejoices at having to publish the totally gratuitous gifts of Jesus. She knows that nothing in herself was capable of attracting the divine glances, and His mercy alone brought about everything that is good in her', 15.

C. Spirituality

This dissertation is situated within the area of spirituality. Spirituality can be interpreted in light of the basic term ‘holiness’. When this is the case, one becomes very aware of the tension that exists between one's true and false self and of one's need not only to 'defeat', so to speak, the false self but also to rely on the help of God to come into being that for which one is created. The emergence of the true self is not automatic. It demands close alignment with Jesus Christ and with the example he left us while on earth. To transcend even the true self, is finally, the gift of God. While one surely shares in the holiness of God by receiving God's grace all through life, the final gift of transformation in Christ is the goal to be desired. God created humankind for that very purpose — to share God's life as fully as is possible for a human person. When one receives that gift, one is holy indeed. For Thérèse, holiness came at the cost of a total dispossession of herself in order to attain to an intimate knowledge and love of Christ.

The Meaning of the Word *Spirituality*

The word ‘spirituality’ derives from the Latin *spiritualitas*, an abstract word related to *spiritus* and *spiritualis*, which were used to translate Paul's *pneuma* and *pneumatikos*.⁴⁶ The word ‘spirituality’ has a relatively short pedigree and was confined, until recently, to Roman Catholic and Anglican circles.⁴⁷ ‘Spirituality’ is the basic word which has forced all other names for the field of spirituality into the background. The core process evoked by the term ‘spirituality’ is the dynamic relation

⁴⁶ See Walter H. Principe, ‘Spirituality, Christian’, in *NDCS*, 931. The author continues: ‘In Pauline theology “spirit” (*pneuma*) is opposed to “flesh” (Greek *sarx*; Latin *caro*), and “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) is set over against either “fleshly” (Greek *sarkikos*; Latin *carnalis* — Gal 3:3; 5:13; 16:25; 1 Cor 3: 1-3; Rom 7:14-8:14) or “animal” (Greek *psychikos*; Latin *animalis* — 1 Cor 2:14-15), but, significantly for later developments, they are contrasted neither with “body” (Greek *soma*; Latin *corpus*) or “bodily” (Greek *somatikos*; Latin *corporalis*) not with “matter” (Greek *hylē*; Latin *materia*). For Paul, the “pneumatic” or spiritual person is one whose whole being and life are ordered, led, or influenced by the “Spirit of God” (Greek *Pneuma Theou*; Latin *Spiritus Dei* — see 1 Cor 2:12, 14), whereas the person who is “sarkic”, that is, “carnal” or “fleshly”, or who is “psychic” or “animal”, is one whose whole being and life are opposed to God's Spirit. The opposition, for Paul, is not between the incorporeal and the corporeal or between the immaterial and material, but between two ways of life. Thus one's body and one's psychic soul (Greek *psychē*; Latin *anima*) can, like one's spirit, be spiritual if led by the Spirit, and one's spirit, mind, or will can be carnal if opposed to the Spirit’.

⁴⁷ See Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998), 35.

between the divine Spirit and the human spirit.⁴⁸ Kees Waaijam attempts an answer to 'what in fact is spirituality?' from within lived spirituality and from within the discipline of spirituality. He proposes this definition: 'Materially, spirituality is the jointed process of the divine-human relation which is, formally, a layered process of transformation'.⁴⁹ In spirituality, the relation between lived spirituality (practice; praxis; participation; involvement) and the study of spirituality is an ever-recurring issue in this entire conversation.⁵⁰

Nowadays, the concept of 'spirituality' is not limited to the Christian religion and is in fact increasingly used even beyond explicitly religious circles. As a result, there have been attempts to define 'spirituality' generically, for example, as 'that which gives meaning to life and allows us to participate in the larger whole'.⁵¹ Sandra Schneiders states that, in a wide sense, spirituality refers to 'the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives'.⁵² A definition such as this one seeks to transcend the

⁴⁸ See Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality, Forms, Foundations, Methods*, trans. John Vriend (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 360f.

⁴⁹ Ibid., vii.

⁵⁰ See Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 311, where he mentions several key personnel involved in conversation between lived spirituality and the study of spirituality.

⁵¹ See John Shea, 'Spirituality, Psychology and Psychotherapy', in Philip Sheldrake, ed., *NWDCS* (Louisville – Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 49.

⁵² Sandra M. Schneiders, 'The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline', in Elizabeth A. Dreyer & Mark S. Burrows, ed., *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005): 5-24. See also Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Spirituality in the Academy', *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 676-697; 'Religion and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?' *The Santa Clara Lectures* 6/2 (Feb 2000).

<http://www.scu.edu/bannancenter/SantaClaraLectures/SchneidersLecture.pdf>. [Accessed 16/04/03].

The word 'self-transcendence' puts us in touch with Bernard Lonergan's transcendental precepts which, by themselves, make a good definition of 'spirituality' in a broad sense: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, and be in love (see *Method in Theology*, 2nd rev. edn. (Great Britain: Darton Longman & Todd, 1972/3), 231, 111 — 'I have conceived being in love with God as an ultimate fulfilment of man's [sic] capacity for self-transcendence.' See also 'Transcendental Method' in William Johnston, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love* (London: HarperCollins, 1995): 111-116. The jacket cover to Joseph Chilton Pearce, *The Biology of Transcendence: A Blueprint of the Human Spirit* (Rochester Vt.: Park Street Press, 2002) states that transcendence is part of human nature: 'Neurocardiology ... is the dynamic interaction of our head brain (intellect) and heart brain (intelligence) that allows transcendence from one evolutionary place to the next — we are, quite literally, made to transcend ... transcendence itself [is] our biological imperative, a state we have been moving toward for millennia'. In addressing the question 'Eternal Life — what is it?', Benedict XVI, taking note of Augustine's writing, states: 'We do not know what we would really like; we do not know this "true life"; and yet we know that there must be something we do not know towards which we feel driven' (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* Encyclical Letter (2007), # 11. That statement implicitly affirms humankind's imperative to self-transcendence.

assumption of specific religious traditions. In so far as it can, this dissertation takes a broad classification of spirituality into account; but, in the main, it necessarily treats Christian spirituality.

Christian Spirituality

Philip Sheldrake answers the question: 'What is Christian Spirituality?'

In Christian terms, 'spirituality' concerns how people subjectively appropriate traditional beliefs about God, the human person, creation, and their interrelationship, and then express these in worship, basic values and lifestyle. Thus, Christian spirituality is the whole of human life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and within the community of believers.⁵³

At its most authentic, Christian spirituality includes in its scope humanity, the rest of creation, and notice of what is happening in the contemporary world. Schneiders says that Christian spirituality gives Christian content to her previous broad definition of spirituality:

The horizon of ultimate value is the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ, and the project involves the living of his paschal mystery in the context of the Church community through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Living within this horizon of ultimate value, one relates in a particular way to all of reality, and it is this relationship to the whole of reality and to reality as a whole in a specifically Christian way which constitutes Christian spirituality.⁵⁴

Michael Paul Gallagher states that a particular Christian spirituality will be uniquely shaped by four central Christian mysteries: It will be a lived relationship with God who loves us; it will be inspired and accompanied by the person of Jesus Christ; it will live courageously in the giftedness of the Holy Spirit; and it will be marked by care for the wounded of the world and by forgiveness.⁵⁵

⁵³ Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 34f.

⁵⁴ See Schneiders, 'The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline', 6.

⁵⁵ See Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York/Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1998, 2003), 161.

Spirituality as an Academic Discipline

Walter Principe notes that ‘several different but related levels of [Christian] spirituality can be distinguished: The Real or Existential Level of Lived Experience; Spirituality of Groups and Varying Spiritual Traditions; and The Study of [Christian] Spirituality.’⁵⁶ Though principally undertaken within the academic study of spirituality, this dissertation nevertheless takes all three levels into account.

The study of spirituality is the third of Principe’s related but also distinct levels of spirituality. As an academic discipline, Spirituality is still in the early stages of development. In recent decades, studies in spirituality have shown a strong increase in academic activities. Sheldrake lists these as: the publication of monographs and serial works, the editions of mystical writers, the development of graduate programs and the founding of research institutes. He continues: ‘At the same time this academic expansion has brought to light the ambivalent position in which the discipline of spirituality finds itself. On the one hand, it has a long history: reflection of lived spirituality goes back to the first centuries of Christianity. Contemporary spirituality, on the other hand, has forcibly brought about large-scale discontinuity *vis-à-vis* the traditional discipline of spirituality.’⁵⁷ The question is: How can the phenomenon of spirituality be properly viewed as an object of science, now that it has so radically enlarged itself and detached itself from its original context?⁵⁸ A difficult question to answer! The study of the lives of the saints, such as Thérèse Martin, is one way; another is study of works like those of Henry Chadwick.⁵⁹

As a field of ‘study’, ‘spirituality’ examines human existence from a variety of standpoints, of which the theological, historical and phenomenological are the most

⁵⁶ See Principe: ‘Spirituality, Christian’, 931- 938.

⁵⁷ See Philip Sheldrake, ‘Contemporary Spirituality’, Essay, in *NWDCS*: 7-18.

⁵⁸ See Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 310, where he is in major dialogue with Sandra Schneiders. This is the particular issue I raised earlier (see fn. 35).

⁵⁹ *The Sydney Morning Herald* describes Chadwick: ‘The Reverend Sir Henry Chadwick was an Anglican priest, professor, editor, translator and author whose historical voyages into early Christianity won praise for depth, insight and even-handedness and helped to shed light on modern religious problems’. ‘The Anglican Church may not have a pope, but it does have Henry Chadwick’, said Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury (see ‘Aristocrat among Anglican scholars’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Weekend Edition 12-13 July 2008, 51). Was Williams perhaps implying that Chadwick’s ‘ability’ levels with that of the present pope, Benedict XVI?

common.⁶⁰ Schneiders claims that the *study* can be constructed on three levels: the material object (the *what* being studied) and the formal object (*the perspective from which* something is investigated)⁶¹ A third level (though it ties in with the *what*) is that which ‘determines *how* the object must be studied’.⁶² Schneiders also claims that in Christian spirituality, it is the ‘lived experience of the faith experience’ that is the formal object of the study; and an interdisciplinary approach to method characterizes the study.⁶³ The ‘study’ of Thérèse’s ‘lived experience of faith’ falls appropriately within this category. Undertaken within this discipline, this dissertation also draws upon biblical exegesis and the study of psychology.

Carmelite Spirituality

Given the interest of this thesis in the Carmelite, Thérèse of Lisieux, we give a brief overview of Carmelite Spirituality.⁶⁴ This overview falls within the second level of Walter Principe’s levels of spirituality, that of groups and varying spiritual traditions.

The Carmelite way of life, which gives precedence to contemplation over apostolic service, belongs to the monastic tradition within the Catholic Church. The monastic life fosters a certain separation from worldly cares, the ordering of time and activities and the practice of certain ascetic exercises. Liturgy, a ‘sacred space’, and silence are very important components of the monastic life.⁶⁵ One would expect that people in monasteries practise some form of contemplative prayer. Yet, contemplative prayer is practised by people outside monasteries as well, for example, in Christian Meditation and Contemplative Prayer groups. The basic word ‘contemplation’ brings to the fore a specific reading of the reality that is available to all people. It can be described as:

⁶⁰ Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 35.

⁶¹ See Schneiders, ‘The Study of Christian Spirituality. Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline’, 5.

⁶² Ibid., 5f. and Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 308f. This dissertation studies the religious experience in the life and writings of Thérèse of Lisieux with specific focus on the interaction between faith and sin and through the lens of holiness.

⁶³ Schneiders, ‘The Study of Christian Spirituality. Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline’, 6.

⁶⁴ See also Kees Waaijman, *The Mystical Space of Carmel: A Commentary on the Carmelite Rule*, trans. John Vriend (Leuven: Peeters, 1999).

⁶⁵ See Waaijman, ‘The monastic life’, in *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, 340-342.

The attentive God-seeking endeavour which so orders time and space that there arises a reserved area in which God's impassioned involvement with his creation can be tasted. This endeavour is aimed at the acquisition of a pure and deeply loving knowledge of God.⁶⁶

Given the disciplined routine in daily monastic living, the attentive God-seeking endeavour is the focus of the lifestyle. Secular life has multiple *foci* and this makes the God-seeking endeavour, perhaps, more difficult. In secular life 'a certain tension between one's ordinary conduct and a contemplative lifestyle is programmatically present from the beginning'.⁶⁷

Yet, Carmelite spirituality *is* apostolic; it is always looking outwards to the many concerns in the world. Thérèse entered Carmel to 'save souls'⁶⁸ and, as stated above, 'to make Jesus loved'. Translated into today's language, Thérèse entered Carmel to give her life in prayer and penance for the wounded people of the world so that they might come to know and to believe in the loving mercy of God. If Thérèse were alive today, would she employ this kind of language to state her mission?

Thérèse's Spirituality

In proclaiming Thérèse a Doctor of the Church, Pope John Paul II said: 'The Spirit of God allowed her heart to reveal directly to the people of our time the *fundamental mystery*, the reality of the Gospel'.⁶⁹ 'In the face of Jansenism'⁷⁰, perfectionism, and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 344. Contemplation and apostolic service (evangelisation or involvement in the Church's mission to 'proclaim the reign of God') are present in all forms of religious life — the contemplative and the apostolic. It is the emphasis that differs.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ The word 'soul' will occur frequently in this dissertation. It carries the meaning of 'the human individual's inherent capacity for selfhood, self-awareness and subjectivity, the principle of human knowing and responsible freedom'. It points to the truth that, 'within the Christian tradition, human beings are spirit as well as flesh'. 'Karl Rahner pointed out that treatment of the soul as form ('livingness') of the body is a philosophical approach whose implications would preclude ever dealing with either soul or body independently of the other, in life or in death' (see Suzanne Noffke, 'Soul' in *NWDCS*: 592-594). The human person, according to Christian anthropology, 'states that man [sic] is both *person* and *subject*.' The meaning of those words includes a range of issues: human transcendence, personal responsibility and freedom, orientation towards the incomprehensible mystery, being in history and in the world, and the social nature of the human person (see Karl Rahner, 'Man as Person and Subject', in *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 26; see also the previous footnote (fn. 46). No intention of dualism is implied in the word 'soul' when it is used in this dissertation.

⁶⁹ John Paul II, *DAS*, # 10. Thérèse possessed a great knowledge and understanding of scripture. There are over 1,000 biblical quotations in her writings.

Pelagianism, Thérèse's teaching was something of a purification of doctrine, bringing the church back to the gospel holiness that is accessible to everyone.'⁷¹ Thomas Keating says that, in his view, 'St Thérèse is the key figure in the recovery of the contemplative dimension of the Gospel in our time'.⁷² Bernard Bro states that Thérèse's life is 'a paradox of Divine Mercy' where the mystery of love at its most ardent is 'being deliberately hidden under such commonplace externals'.⁷³ And a little later, 'Thérèse is pre-eminently the human being confronted with the abyss of freedom and of possibilities of choice; and confronted by an answering abyss which is called God'.⁷⁴ Ruth Burrows states that Thérèse 'is a mistress of spirituality every bit as much as her mother' [Teresa of Avila].⁷⁵

Mysticism

Mysticism — a sub-set of spirituality — is difficult to define. Yet Thérèse has been, and still is called, a mystic, and the topic of mysticism holds fascination today.

⁷⁰ Jansenism takes its name from Cornelius Jansen (1585-1634), a professor of theology in Louvain and eventually Bishop of Ypres in what is, today, Belgium. In 1640 he wrote a book called *Augustinus*. Five theses were drawn out of this book and condemned as heretical by the Roman authorities in 1653. What particularly was condemned in Jansen's book was a very pessimistic view of human nature which was seen as leading to the denial of free will in human beings, and, from that, to the denial that human beings could refuse grace — which inevitably leads to the denial of the universality of the salvation gained by the death of Christ. This therefore involved the predestination of some to salvation and of others to condemnation. Discussion continued among Jansenists and their opponents as to the accuracy of the Roman reading of Jansen's work. However, the important continuation of 'Jansenism' was not so much a strictly theological movement as an attitude and way of life within the Church. What is commonly referred to as 'Jansenism' or 'Jansenistic', is a severe and demanding form of Catholicism with little tolerance for human weakness. This attitude was common from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. Being founded on a rather negative view of human nature, it was wary of any laxity in the approach to sin and was unconvinced by talk of the primacy of God's love over human sinfulness. It set very demanding standards for the reception of Holy Communion. It required a high sense of worthiness and so promoted the necessity of confessing one's sins before reception. It discouraged frequent Communion (see Frank O'Loughlin, *The Future of the Sacrament of Penance* (Strathfield NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2007), 99f.

⁷¹ Joseph F. Schmidt, *Everything Is Grace: The Life and Way of Thérèse of Lisieux* (Ijamsville MD: The Word Among Us, 2007), 25.

⁷² Thomas Keating, *St Thérèse of Lisieux: A Transformation in Christ* (New York NY: Lantern Books, 2001), 6.

⁷³ Bernard Bro, *The Little Way: The Spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Alan Neame, intro. Paul McPartlan (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979, 1997), 2.

⁷⁴ See Bro, *The Little Way: The Spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux*, 4.

⁷⁵ Ruth Burrows, *Interior Castle Explored: St. Teresa's Teaching on the Life of Deep Union with God* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1981), 53.

Neither the noun *mysticism* nor the adjective *mystical* (Greek *mystikos*) appears in the New Testament, but their meaning in early Christian literature cannot properly be understood apart from the New Testament term *mystery* (Greek *mysterion*).⁷⁶ The two words *mystery* and *mysterion* are etymologically related to the verb *mysien* ('to close', for example, to close the eyes or lips) and accordingly convey a sense of what is hidden or sacred.⁷⁷ *Mysterion* was a fundamental term used by the Fathers of the Church, for example, Origen (ca. 185 – ca. 253), to explain the many ways in which Scripture centres on Christ. Origen spoke of the 'mystical sense' of the text, its 'inner meaning' seen from one who has the 'mind of Christ'.⁷⁸ *Mysterion* is another word for Sacrament, particularly in the Orthodox Church. In Christianity, the Sacrament of Marriage (*mysterion*) is the sacrament of the love relationship that exists, not only between spouses, but also between Christ and the Church and between Christ and the 'soul'. When this relationship between Christ and the soul is strong, the term 'mystical marriage' can apply. Of interest in this context is that 'bridal' imagery is strong in Thérèse's writings — 228 references. Broadly speaking, though, Christian mysticism is 'the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effects produced by, the immediate presence of God'.⁷⁹ Joyce Rogers explains it in these words:

[Mysticism is] an immediate knowledge of God attained in this life through personal religious experience. It is primarily a state of prayer, and as such admits of various degrees, from short and rare Divine 'touches' to the practically permanent union with God in the so-called 'mystic marriage'. The mystic is the person who attains to this union. The mystic is one who goes beyond *knowing about* a closeness to God to being in a personal relationship with God. The effects of drawing close to God in such a personal way are an increase of humility, charity, and love.⁸⁰

Mystical experience can be accompanied by mystical phenomena such as visions, ecstasies, locutions, levitation, or similar phenomena, but these are not of the essence of the experience. Judaeo-Christian mysticism is love between God and the 'soul'. It

⁷⁶ See James A. Wiseman, 'Mysticism', in *NDCS*, 683.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

⁷⁹ Bernard McGinn, 'The Role of the Carmelites in the History of Western Mysticism', in Kevin Culligan and Regis Jordan, ed., *Carmel and Contemplation: Transforming Human Consciousness* (Washington DC: ICS Publications: 3-50, at 31.

⁸⁰ See Joyce Rogers, 'Mysticism as a way of spirituality', in *Spirituality Today*, 40/2 (Summer 1988): 100-108, at 100.

is a union of love and will where the two remain distinct and yet can be, at the same time, experienced as one, as a union. Thomas Merton states that Christian contemplatives speak of 'the awakening of the inner self and the consequent awareness of God'. Acknowledging that 'all metaphors are unsatisfactory' in describing 'this delicate matter', he continues: 'Since our inmost "I" is the perfect image of God, then when that "I" awakens, he [sic] finds within himself the Presence of Him Whose image he is. And, by a paradox beyond all human expression, God and the soul seem to have but one single "I"'. 'They are', Merton says, '(by divine grace) as though one single person. They breathe and live and act as one. Neither of the two is seen as object'.⁸¹ Cynthia Bourgeault addresses this point in her discussion of the psychological aspects of Centering Prayer. There she states that the ego must transcend the 'experience / experiencer dualism, the subject / object polarity produced by the self-reflexive "I" if it is to come to "transforming union"'.⁸² where — in adjusting Merton's words — 'neither God nor the "I"(the True Self) is seen from a subject / object polarity but are seen as one'. Bourgeault also states that 'whatever the "true self" may look like when described theologically, *operationally* it involves the shift to a different kind of consciousness (called non-dual or "unitive" in the classic Christian terminology), which flows out from that deeper place within us'.⁸³ Christian mysticism is 'dying the spiritual death in which one's exterior self is destroyed and

⁸¹ Thomas Merton, 'The inner Experience' in Lawrence S. Cunningham, ed., *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master* (New York: Paulist Press): 294-356, at 309.

⁸² See Cynthia Bourgeault, 'From Healing to Wholeness', in *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, foreword by Thomas Keating (Lanham MD: Cowley Publications, 2004), 104.

⁸³ Bourgeault, 104. As I understand Bourgeault, the healthy ego, or the healed false self or true self is still 'inescapably tied to the domain of the lower, or provisional, selfhood'. This self must transcend itself to touch the True Self, which, in Christian Spirituality, is the God Self, the Self in which God sees Godself imaged. Touching this True Self frequently, causes one to grow in God's likeness. And here we are in the realm of a 'transforming union' — or whatever else one may call it — that might or might not express itself in mystical phenomena. This state is also experienced as a new and different level of consciousness. I argue that Thérèse experienced transformation in Christ in the particular aspect of Christ's *kenosis* and, in that state which gradually became permanent, she also came to experience a new level of consciousness — mostly without mystical phenomena. (For a discussion of the meaning of the terms 'true self' and 'false self' see the article, 'Self' by Joann Wolski Conn and Walter Conn *NDCS*: 865-875). Still, some ambiguity surrounds the exact distinction of the true and false self. I am using the terms 'true' and 'false' self in the sense described by Bourgeault. The emergence of Thérèse's 'true self' is, at times — particularly in her childhood — 'blurred' by the false self's role in self-deception. Yet, even after her 'conversion' experience when the 'false self' was 'healed' at its core point of 'infection', Thérèse's spiritual growth results not only in the clear emergence of her 'true self' but also in her great desire to surrender it to the True Self within her, God's Spirit. It seems to me that while it is 'technically' possible for one to come to the True Self, the actual 'arrival' or 'state' is *gift* and not acquired by human effort. This gifted state is the 'mystical' state, *par excellence*. In this state one enjoys infused wisdom and knowledge. Thérèse 'knew' this state experientially.

one's inner self rises from death by faith and lives again "unto God".⁸⁴ This mysticism recognizes that the Reality to which it penetrates transcends the soul and the cosmos. Thérèse intuitively understood that — even though her theological knowledge did not teach it to her. In Christian mysticism, Reality equals God. Evelyn Underhill claims that mysticism 'is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the love of God ... the art of establishing a conscious relation with the Absolute'.⁸⁵

In clearing away confusion surrounding certain other terms, like 'transforming union', 'mystical marriage', 'infused contemplation', we can say that these terms indicate the end point of the spiritual pilgrimage of 'the universal call to holiness'⁸⁶ offered to all people.

The Mysticism of Everyday Life

Karl Rahner⁸⁷ has coined the term 'the mysticism of everyday life'⁸⁸ where, he says, 'mysticism must be conceived of as falling within the framework of ordinary grace and faith'.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ See Merton, 'The Inner Experience', 326.

⁸⁵ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1911), 81. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Gifford Lectures (New York: The Modern Library, 1994) is also a basic source on this topic.

⁸⁶ LG, Chapter 5. 'In the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God ...' # 41.

⁸⁷ Karl Rahner, great theologian as he is, held a poor opinion of Thérèse. He failed to see beyond the limitations of her style of language. Rahner is reported as saying: 'I find many aspects of this saint's personality and writing irritating or merely boring. And if I were to explain what I find almost repulsive about them so that you could see why, it certainly wouldn't justify the trouble of doing so. There are so many other things worth thinking about in the world, and not needing elaborate explanation' (cf. Bernard Bro, *The Little Way: The Spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux*. trans. Alan Neame, intro. Paul McPartlan (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979, 2997), 1.

⁸⁸ See Karl Rahner, 'The Theology of Mysticism', in Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt, ed., *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1997): 70-77. The term 'mysticism in everyday life' can give the impression that the path is an easy one; it is not. Anyone desirous of being a mystic in the midst of ordinary life faces walking a 'narrow' path. Though the detail might differ, 'the path' leads to the same goal whether it be trod by those in 'everyday life' or those in monasteries.

⁸⁹ Rahner, 'Experiencing the Spirit', in *The Practice of Faith*, 73. 'Transcendental experience, even when and where it is mediated through an actual categorical object, is always divine experience in the midst of everyday life', 79.

In *every* human person (from the essence of spirit and from the always offered grace of God's self-communication to each person) there is something like an anonymous, unthematic, perhaps repressed, basic experience of being oriented to God, which is constitutive of the human person in his or her basic make-up (of nature and grace), which can be repressed but not destroyed, which is 'mystical' or (if you prefer a more cautious terminology) has its climax in what the classical masters called infused contemplation.⁹⁰

Many examples in Thérèse's life are so ordinary (for example, treating with special love the nuns who are disagreeable to her)⁹¹ that, according to a common and popular modern understanding of mysticism as something out of the ordinary, one could think that there is nothing mystical about Thérèse's life. But, according to Rahner's understanding of 'everyday mysticism', which he explicitly relates to the teaching of 'the fathers and the liturgy', and then in accordance with Bouyer's studies of those same Fathers, 'Thérèse's life was a compelling instance of Christian mysticism in its original sense'.⁹² As Bouyer writes: 'one of the primary tendencies of much modern thought is to assume that one can have "real experience" of God *only* when that takes the form of immediate and total awareness of God's presence'.⁹³

But, as Thérèse and all genuine Christian mystics have known, the truly important thing is 'to be fully convinced that Christ lives within us, and especially to act in accordance with that conviction', and not necessarily to experience more or less forcefully the feeling that that is indeed so.⁹⁴

And so, was Thérèse a *Mystic*?

Evelyn Underhill writes that 'sanctity' 'is the orientation of the spirit towards supreme Reality'. Writing just a few years prior to Thérèse's canonisation in 1925, Underhill states that in Thérèse of Lisieux 'we have a genuine renaissance of traditional Catholic mysticism where there is development of the interior life and first hand experience of forms of spiritual consciousness'. She writes: 'Thérèse had, in spite of

⁹⁰ Rahner, 'Teresa of Avila: Doctor of the Church', in *The Great Church Year*, 362. Cited in, Harvey D. Egan, *Karl Rahner: The Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), 73.

⁹¹ See SS Manuscript C, 249f where Thérèse tells of wheeling a disagreeable nun to the refectory and where, in the laundry, she (Thérèse) is splashed with dirty water.

⁹² 'Mysticism', in *NDCS*, 689.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Wiseman, 'Mysticism' in *NDCS*, citing Louis Bouyer, *Mysterion*, 348.

the great simplicity of her nature, a real genius for the spiritual life'.⁹⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar answers the question this way. He states that Thérèse never 'crossed the threshold into what is known as mysticism', and justifies his position by noting that her life was free of the presence of, or even longing for, extraordinary 'mystical phenomena'.⁹⁶ Here, Von Balthasar understands mysticism as 'a form of consciousness that transcends ordinary experience by reason of felt union with the Absolute (whether or not that Absolute be understood as the God whom Christians worship).⁹⁷ On the other hand, Louis Bouyer, also fully aware that such phenomena were absent from [Thérèse's] life, drew an altogether different conclusion, namely that Thérèse offers us

the most convincing testimony of the fact that genuine mysticism does not consist so much in the experience of ecstasies or 'visions' ... but quite simply in total self-abandonment in naked faith, through an efficacious love of the Cross that is one with the very love of the crucified God.⁹⁸

Ruth Burrows states that in contrast with Teresa of Avilia, Thérèse 'trod a path totally barren of "favours". She lived in a religious milieu that assumed beyond question that "favours" were the authenticating sign of great spirituality".

Yet, Thérèse, 'undismayed, perfectly content ... went her way. It wasn't a case of making the best of it. Rather, she grasped that her very darkness was Jesus' presence: that her experience was wholly authentic, a union with Jesus in his lowly manhood, *and that this is what union with God must mean in our mortal life.*'⁹⁹

Henri Ghéon states that Thérèse 'experienced no ecstasies, raptures, supernatural communications, or interior consolations, but most of the time even had no sense of God's presence'. Yet, God fed her from day to day "'with a new kind of food", the

⁹⁵ See Evelyn Underhill, 'Soeur Thérèse De L'Enfant-Jésus', in *The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays* (London: Dutton, 1920): 199-214.

⁹⁶ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Thérèse of Lisieux* (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1954), 252, 254. Cited in Wiseman, 'Mysticism', in *NDCS*, 682.

⁹⁷ See Wiseman, 'Mysticism', 682.

⁹⁸ See Wiseman, 'Mysticism', in *NDCS*, 682, citing Louis Bouyer, *Mysterion*, 322.

⁹⁹ Ruth Burrows, *Interior Castle Explored: St Teresa's Teaching on the Life of Deep Union with God* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1981), 53.

gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially wisdom and fortitude'.¹⁰⁰ During her last illness, Thérèse is reported as saying:

At the age of fourteen, I ... experienced transports of love. Ah! How I loved God! But it wasn't at all as it was after my Oblation to Love ... [when] I was on fire with love, and I felt that one minute more, one second more, and I wouldn't be able to sustain this ardour without dying.¹⁰¹

I consider Thérèse was a mystic in the sense of Paul's Letter to the Philippians: 'For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain' (Phil 1:21).¹⁰² To live in such a way is the goal of the Christian life; it is a living-out of the Paschal Mystery. Thérèse offers us a mode of mysticism most suitable to our modern age — one that is authentically yet unostentatiously spiritual and therefore one that is deeply incarnational.

D. Research Approach

This first section at hand [Research Approach (a)] deals with *Story of a Soul's* literary aspects. The topics discussed here have formed a necessary background to the writing of the thesis. A further section in this chapter [Research Approach (b)] outlines the dissertation's methodology, chapter divisions and their content.

Research Approach (a): Literary Considerations

This section highlights certain literary aspects of Thérèse's writing in general and her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, in particular.

Classifications of Literature

Of the four approaches to the study of literature, namely, (1) *mimetic* (literature as a mirror of life), (2) *expressive*, (3) *pragmatic*, (4) *objective* or *analytical*, it seems to me that, on the one hand, Thérèse principally uses what today we name the *expressive*

¹⁰⁰ See Ghéon, *The Secret of The Little Flower*, 180f.

¹⁰¹ *LC*, 77.

¹⁰² A psychological interpretation of these words could be: I die to my false self in order to live fully from my true self which, when transcended, can become the True Self [i.e., the 'God Self'].

approach. *Expressive* literary criticism looks at literature as an extension of the personality of the writer.¹⁰³ Thérèse's autobiographical style is certainly original and very expressive.

However, on the other hand, Thérèse's approach to her writing could be classified *mimetic* — the oldest of the literary approaches to literature. This literary style creatively re-presents 'reality', 'nature', or 'the way things are'.¹⁰⁴ Because Thérèse uses imagery, including archetypal imagery (for example, light and darkness), because she uses metaphor and symbol, and because she is concerned with issues relating to the meaning of life and death and other realities, her writing well fits this description also and therefore could be classified as *mimetic*. It would be appropriate, therefore, to classify *Story of a Soul* as a combination of *expressive* and *mimetic* approaches to literature.

Autobiography

Thérèse's *Story of a Soul* is strongly autobiographical. It appeals to the reader who values that which is most sensitively introspective and self-aware.¹⁰⁵ As a form of non-fiction, autobiography focuses on three major things: who one is in life, what life means to one and what one's outlook on the future is. Thérèse's autobiography, usually serious in tone, deals adequately with those issues. This is the case because, as Thérèse tells us at the beginning of the work when she defines *her* 'hermeneutic':

¹⁰³ Historically, the approach emerged around 1800 as part of the Romantic Movement which celebrated the importance of individual self-expression and originality, in contrast to the so-called classical principles of proportion and adherence to generally accepted standards of taste (cf. Lawrence Buell, *The Design of Literature*. Jeanne Bay, editorial consultant (West Haven CT: Pendulum Press, 1973), 27. It is also true, however, that Thérèse (or more correctly, Thérèse's sister, Pauline who 'corrected' Thérèse's writings before their publication and after Thérèse's death) was keen to apply to the writings 'accepted standards of taste' carried over from the Classical Period and which she judged not to be evident in the writings as they came from Thérèse's pen — things like good spelling, writing and punctuation, discreet references to family 'secrets', and within theological and ecclesial circles of the day, presentation of the image of God in terms of justice rather than of mercy.

¹⁰⁴ The thoughtful mimetic critic recognizes various kinds of literary expression as a way of expressing reality. However, 'his main question is not "How realistic is this work?" so much as "In what sense is it realistic?"' (cf. Buell, 24). Mary Frohlich writes that Thérèse's contribution to today is that 'her contribution functions as what David Tracy calls a "classic": "the disclosure of a reality we cannot but name as truth"' (see Mary Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: "Doctor for the Third Millennium?"', 36. [David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 108]. Thérèse, herself, wrote that Jesus said to her: 'I want to have you read in the book of life where is contained the Science of Love' (cf. *GC II*, 994).

¹⁰⁵ For information on 'autobiography' see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autobiography>. [Accessed 05/02/2008].

‘I’m going to be doing only one thing: I shall begin to sing what I must sing eternally: “The mercies of the Lord”’.¹⁰⁶ Thérèse’s relationship with God in holiness was her *raison d’être* in all things. Of course, ‘the mercies of the Lord’ need not necessarily be profound, intense or grim; Thérèse records them with genuine sincerity; as well, they reveal the person she is and where her priorities lie. However, the seriousness is interrupted at times by surprising glints of humour: ‘Had I been able to speak Italian I would have told him I was a future Carmelite, but because of the builders of the Tower of Babel it was impossible for me’.¹⁰⁷ Or another example: ‘If I had made the moon fall at her feet, she could not have looked at me with greater surprise’.¹⁰⁸

Structure

The overall design or organization of *Story of a Soul* is that it consists of three separate manuscripts artificially brought together to make a continuous autobiography.¹⁰⁹ This bringing-together works well as regards Manuscripts A and C. These are connected by the recurring motif / symbol of ‘little flower’. Firstly, in 1885 Thérèse writes, ‘It is for you alone [her sister, Pauline] I am writing the story of the *little flower* gathered by Jesus’;¹¹⁰ and two years later she says, ‘It was with her [Pauline] that I had to sing of the graces granted to the Blessed Virgin’s *little flower* when she was in the springtime of her life [spiritual immaturity perhaps]. And it is with you [the Prioress, Mother Gonzague] that I am to sing of the happiness of this little flower now that the timid glimmerings of the dawn have given way to the

¹⁰⁶ SS Manuscript A, 13.

¹⁰⁷ SS Manuscript A, 140.

¹⁰⁸ SS Manuscript C, 243.

¹⁰⁹ The French title, from which the English, *Story of A Soul: The Autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux* was translated, is *Histoire d’une âme: manuscrits autobiographiques* [The Story of a Soul: Autobiographical Manuscripts]. The individual manuscripts are certainly autobiographical with direct reference to Thérèse’s spiritual life. However, Thérèse did not conceive of the work as one continuous autobiography. In fact, the individual manuscripts were written at different times. It was Thérèse’s sister, Pauline [Mother Agnes] who, after Thérèse’s death sequenced the manuscripts in the order in which they are now published. The sequence is logical though the continuous text concentrates on telling ‘the story of Thérèse’s soul’ rather than on her life’s history and experiences from a natural point of view.

¹¹⁰ SS Manuscript A, 15. Because Thérèse is writing to cover events from her birth until the present (1873-1895, Manuscript A and 1896-1897, Manuscript C), the motif ‘little flower’ really covers all those years. As a symbol of her life, ‘little flower’ seems to have held ever progressively deeper and variant meaning for her.

burning heat of noon'[spiritual maturity maybe].¹¹¹ Manuscript B does not use this motif though it does use another image from the 'book of nature', 'the little bird'. Further to Thérèse's fondness from drawing imagery from the 'book of nature', there is the question of why does she do this. It is because this imagery allows her to describe her religious experience — from which we are privileged to follow her spiritual journey to holiness.¹¹² One could say, therefore, that the autobiography does present as a unified literary work mainly because of the close connection between the form of the work and its content (Thérèse's holiness of life through the interaction of *faith* and *sin* in her soul) that is frequently, though not exclusively, drawing on examples from the 'book of nature' to symbolise¹¹³ the various 'mercies of the Lord'. These references consistently break through into the entire text, originally three separate manuscripts.

Reader Response to the Text

Through reader-response critical approach, the primary focus falls on the reader and the process of reading rather than on the author or the text. It was noted earlier in speaking of *spirituality* as a discipline within the academy, that there are, perhaps, several possibilities of approaching the study of spirituality. One can do so through the lens of religious experience, philosophy, theology, and / or scripture. One can either use these approaches singularly or in combination. This seems to mean that the reader of any given text may choose how he or she proposes to approach the text; or, conversely, the reader might claim that a particular text elicits his or her particular response. Reader-response theory itself, states Walter Principe, stresses the existential response one makes to a text as it stands and as it is read by people today. He further

¹¹¹ SS Manuscript C, 205.

¹¹² For Thérèse, the word 'holiness', when it reflects the holiness of God, does not carry an 'unhealthy' weighting on the 'justice' of God. Rather, it balances God's justice and God's infinite mercy. The holiness of a creature imitates this kind of balanced holiness (cf. GC II, 1173 for reference). For Thérèse, holiness does not consist in adventurous achievements of virtue — as was the practice in Carmel, resulting from the influence of Jansenism — but in joining Jesus in loving. Thérèse walked a *new* way to holiness contrary to nineteenth century expectations.

¹¹³ The word *symbol* derives from the Greek verb *sumballein*, meaning 'to throw together compare.' Literary critics and commentators commonly employ the term to designate an object or a process that not only serves as an image itself but also refers to a concept or abstract idea that is important to the theme of the work (see Edwin J. Barton and Glenda A. Hudson, *A Contemporary Guide to Literary Terms with Strategies for Writing Essays About Literature*. 2nd rev. edn. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 214.

notes that ‘such a response is the correct ultimate goal of reading such texts unless, of course, one is merely a detached scholar studying spirituality without any commitment to personal spiritual development’.¹¹⁴

As examples of his critical approach, Principe cites aspects from the life of Thérèse of Lisieux to demonstrate his claim that a reader’s response to a text will be significantly improved if that reader supplements his or her reading by recourse to research, for example, into the historical origins of the work under scrutiny. How much deeper and inspiring and less likely to misinterpretation, he says, is Thérèse’s writing ‘when scholars discovered the following facts and made them available to interested audiences’:

(a) her sister edited and changed her text in order to have Thérèse look like her own idea of a nineteenth-century saint; (b) the details of her family in and outside the convent; (c) the intense rivalry between her sister, Mother Agnes, and the powerful and eccentric Mother Mary of Gonzaga; (d) her psychological problems in her early years as examined by Jean-François Six.¹¹⁵

Recent work on the exact nature of Thérèse’s relationship to her mother and her ‘conversion’ experience are other examples of the rewarding results to be had from this kind of research.¹¹⁶

In specific reference to Thérèse’s ‘conversion’ experience, we also enter the discussion of religious experience (spiritual life as experience) which Sandra

¹¹⁴ Walter H. Principe, ‘Broadening the Focus: Context as a Corrective Lens in Reading Historical Works in Spirituality’ in Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows, ed., *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*: 42-48, at 43. As a researcher into the meaning of Thérèse’s writings, one of my primary goals is not only to understand, for example, the kind of faith she exhibits and how that correlates with ‘faith’ today, but also to grow in that faith myself. As the reader of Thérèse’s texts, I consider my response to be a combination of religious experience, historical relevance, biblical studies, theology and ecclesiology.

¹¹⁵ See Principe, ‘Broadening the Focus’: 42-48, at 43. Principe cites the references for Jean-François Six: *La Véritable enfance de Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris: Seuil, 1972); *Thérèse de Lisieux au Carmel* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Mary Frolich, ‘Your Face is my only Homeland: a psychological perspective on Thérèse of Lisieux and Devotion to the Holy Face’, in David M. Hammond, ed., *Theology and Lived Christianity* (Mystic CT: Bayard / Twenty-Third Publications, 2000): 177-205; Tom Ryan, ‘Psychic Conversion and St Thérèse of Lisieux’, *ACR* 82/1 (January 2005): 3-18.

Schneiders proposes is 'the object of spirituality as an academic discipline'.¹¹⁷ Bernard McGinn notes just how difficult it is to describe 'religious experience',¹¹⁸ which, of course, cannot really be given general classification when 'experience' as such, is always shaped by a particular personal context. McGinn concludes that seeking to academically articulate it can 'serve to remind us that to speak of [one's] inner experience of God is just another example of the impossible but necessary task of all speaking about the unknowable God — an inherently contradictory activity'.¹¹⁹ Fortunately, Thérèse has left us written examples or descriptions of *her* religious inner experience which, in summary, was often 'dry' and very infrequently 'mystical'.¹²⁰

In her article, Schneiders argues, however, that while the historical / contextual approach offers important advantages (as supported by Principe), she claims that 'religious experience' in itself cannot be really 'looked at' through this approach. Instead, she writes that the most adequate approach is the hermeneutical. By this she intends that because 'the primary aim of the discipline of spirituality', as she understands it, 'is to *understand* the phenomena of the Christian spiritual life as experience, and since understanding of such phenomena is a function of *interpretation*, the presiding intellectual instrumentality is hermeneutics understood as an articulated and explicit interpretational strategy'.¹²¹ (The topic of 'hermeneutics' will be developed below).

¹¹⁷ Sandra M. Schneiders, 'A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality', in *Minding the Spirit*: 49-60. In an earlier article (see page 17 above) Schneiders claims that the material object of the study of Christian spirituality (what is studied) is 'lived Christian faith' and the formal object (the aspect under which it is studied) is 'religious experience'.

¹¹⁸ McGinn, in his article, sets out to 'investigate ... the modes of communication what the verbal marker 'inner experience' points to: a language fixed within modes of symbolic discourse ... and that fuses feeling and knowing often expressed through discourse on 'spiritual senses' (see Bernard McGinn, 'The Language of Inner Experience in Christian Mysticism', in *Minding the Spirit*: 135-151). The 'spiritual senses' are: the spiritual senses of smell — of 'delicious perfume' —, touch, taste and more importantly, the prayer of faith that frees one from any attachment to the unfolding spiritual senses (see Thomas Keating, 'The Spiritual Senses' in *Crisis of Faith / Crisis of Love* (New York: Continuum, 2005): 66-70. Keating notes, however, that he cannot give precise definition of the 'spiritual senses' because they are spiritual, and spiritual things can only be described negatively or by symbols that point to them without telling you what they are', 66.

¹¹⁹ See Bernard McGinn, 'The Language of Inner Experience in Christian Mysticism', in *Minding the Spirit*: 135-151.

¹²⁰ The word 'mystical' refers to one's relationship with God in prayer when that prayer is 'infused', that is, when one receives graces that come directly from God without human effort. See also the section on *mysticism* above.

¹²¹ Schneiders, 'A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality', 56.

Following through on the topic of experience, Mary Frohlich argues that, yes, on a practical level, what is studied [for example, *Story of a Soul*] is ‘lived, experiential spirituality’; but she also sounds a note of caution: ‘any disciplined study of spirituality will need to draw [also] on the resources and language of philosophy — despite the fact that, at times, these tools may seem alien to the life-concerns that are spirituality’s focus’. In other words, she argues that there needs also to be critical reflection on ‘experience’ and a grounding of this study ‘with a methodological principle specific to it, involving the reclaiming of insights — both medieval and contemporary — into “interiority”’.¹²² Regarding this latter point, Frohlich is influenced by the work of Bernard Lonergan who spoke of ‘interiority’ in terms of ‘knowing what you are doing when you are doing it’.¹²³

¹²² See Mary Frohlich, ‘Spiritual Discipline, Discipline of Spirituality: Revisiting Questions of Definition and Method’, in *Minding the Spirit*: 65-78. Here we see an example of the satisfactory combining of science and theology (cf. fn. 34 above). Building on Schneiders, Frohlich claims ‘the particular aspect under which the [formal] material object [of spirituality as an academic discipline] is studied is *the human spirit fully in act*. That expression means, according to Frohlich, ‘the core dimension of the human person radically engaged with reality (both contingent and transcendent). It refers to human persons being, living, acting according to their fullest intrinsic potential — thus, ultimately, in the fullness of interpersonal, communal, and mystical relationship’, 71, 73. A good example of a medieval text from which to gain insights into ‘interiority’ is Bonaventure, ‘The Soul’s Journey into God’, in *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St Francis*, translation and introduction by Ewert Cousins, preface by Ignatius Brady (New York: Paulist Press, 1978): 53-116. An example of a more contemporary text could well be St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, or *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, edited and with commentary by Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007). ‘Interiority’ might well be a synonym for my intended use of ‘sensitivity’ (discussed below under the heading ‘Hermeneutics’).

¹²³ See Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (Milwaukee WI: Marquette University Press, 2005), 62-63. Ormerod summarises Bernard F. J. Lonergan’s ‘Realms of Meaning’, in *Method in Theology*, 2nd rev. edn. (Great Britain: Darton Longman & Todd, 1972/3), 81-85. Lonergan identifies four distinct realms or worlds of meaning: common sense, theory, subjectivity [the realm of interiority] ‘and a transcendent realm corresponding to the human desire for complete intelligibility, unconditioned judgment and a good beyond all criticism, that is, ‘a realm of fulfilment, peace and joy in which God is known and loved’, 62f. These realms are addressed in relation to Thérèse in Chapter 6 of this present thesis. With regard to *interiority*, Lonergan says: ‘Only through the realm of interiority can differentiated consciousness understand itself and so explain the nature and the complementary purposes of different patterns of cognitional activity’ (see *Method in Theology*, 115). Lonergan distinguishes *interiority* from *introspection*. The former implies *self-awareness*, while the latter ‘may be understood to mean, not consciousness itself but the process of objectifying the contents of consciousness’. For a person who is awake and not asleep, ‘intentionality analysis distinguished four levels of conscious and intentional operations: the *empirical* level on which we sense, perceive, imagine, feel; the *intellectual* level on which we inquire, come to understand, express what we have understood, work out the presuppositions and implications of our expression; the *rational* level on which we reflect, marshal the evidence, pass judgment on the truth or falsity, certainty or probability, of a statement; and the *responsible* level on which we are concerned with ourselves, our own operations, our goals, and so deliberate about possible courses of action, evaluate them, decide, and carry out our decisions. On all four levels, we are aware of ourselves but, as we mount from level to level, it is a fuller self of which we are aware’ (see *Method in Theology*, 8f. 288). While Thérèse would

Yet another approach strongly encourages a return to consolidating the connection between theology ('the disciplined and self-critical attempt to construe all of reality ... in the light of the symbols and narratives of the Christian tradition, and in dialogue with other disciplines in the academy that attempt to understand and interpret reality') and the different approaches to spirituality found in, for example, the 'newer voices' of multicultural societies, a polycentric global church, environmental science, the comparative study of religions, and feminist criticism.¹²⁴ In support for this approach and as an example of her position on the issue, Elizabeth Dreyer cites Karl Rahner's claim that 'the reality of God's self-gift in grace is identical with its presence in our experience, our spirituality' — be it that of Tradition or of 'newer voices'. Given this, then, spirituality and theology are brought into an intimate relationship.¹²⁵ In the telling of her religious experience, Thérèse brings together theology, spirituality and 'the world' as she knew it.¹²⁶

In summary, the study of spirituality can be enriched by accessing the research of various other disciplines. Some of these have now been addressed in discussing Thérèse's writings. The goal, all the while, is to aid the reader in gaining a richer interpretation of the text.

Interpretative Inquiry

Exegesis / Criticism

Historically, *exegesis* refers to the literal meaning of the text, and as a branch of historical criticism would include textual criticism. Textual criticism concerns itself with authorship, composition, the identification and removal of errors from the texts

certainly not have explained her *awareness*, *interiority* or *subjectivity* in Lonergan's terms, she nevertheless presents as a person who was fully conscious. See also, fns. 136 and 137 below.

¹²⁴ See J. Matthew Ashley, 'The Turn to Spirituality? : The Relationship between Theology and Spirituality', in *Minding the Spirit*: 159-170.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth A. Dreyer, 'Spirituality as a Resource for Theology: The Holy Spirit in Augustine', in *Minding the Spirit*: 179-199. Catherine LaCugna brings together *oikonomia* [relationship, personhood, communion] and *theologia* when she *explains* theology (*theologia*) as 'God's mystery ... grasped as transcendent precisely in the economy of salvation ... The economic self-revelation of God in Christ is grasped, albeit obliquely, as the mystery of *theologia* itself'. See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 246, 322.

¹²⁶ For a description of Thérèse's 'world', see previous page 9f.

and manuscripts and textual transmission. In relation to Thérèse's writings, a series of quite significant steps to ensure the accuracy of the text was made ranging from the time immediately after Thérèse's death in 1897 to September 1974. (These steps are detailed In the Literature Review, Chapter 2).¹²⁷ Textual analysis also includes the verification of the accuracy of the translation. Again, in relation to Thérèse's writings, while the Introduction to *Story of a Soul* vouches for the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the intention of the original French language,¹²⁸ this claim for a faithful translation will be borne in mind throughout this thesis, especially in its intention to interpret Thérèse's writings on the subject of 'sin against faith' faithfully for a contemporary world. A brief sample can be given here:

<i>The Original French</i>	<i>English Translation of the Original French</i>	<i>A Possible Contemporary English Parallel Meaning</i>
<i>Je jouissais alors d'une foi si vive, si claire, que la pensée du Ciel faisait tout mon bonheur, je ne pouvais croire qu'il y eut des impies n'ayant pas la foi.</i> ¹²⁹	At this time I was enjoying such a living faith, such a clear <i>faith</i> , that the thought of heaven made up all my happiness, and I was unable to believe there were really impious people who had no faith.	Because I am so aware of God's presence, I find it hard to accept that there are some other people today who do not even believe in God at all .

The difficulty in this particular example, if there is one, centres not so much on the accuracy of the translation as on the exact meaning of the word *impies*. Thérèse uses the word 'impious' in the sense current in the nineteenth century to refer to those

¹²⁷ In brief, the text that came from Thérèse's hand was not according to the 'mind' of her sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus whom Thérèse had appointed *de facto* editor of the text and who sought to 'correct' it. For some years the reading public was unaware that some of the text was not Thérèse's original text. That, now, has been rectified absolutely.

¹²⁸ John Clarke writes: 'I would like to assure Thérèse's readers that I have tried to be absolutely faithful in translating into English what she beautifully expressed in French. After her friends have waited so long to read her in the original manuscripts, it would be a shame, I think, to give them an interpretation of her words rather than an exact rendition. Consequently, I have deliberately retained her own choice of words because this best expressed her feelings; I have retained her exclamation points, etc.'. See *Story of A Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*. Translated from the Original Manuscripts by John Clarke. 3rd rev. edn. (Washington: DC, 1996), xxii. [I have not retained all of Thérèse's original exclamation points, etc.].

¹²⁹ The definition of **impious** in *Le Grand Larousse du XIX siècle* (1873) is: 'Someone who has no religion, who is opposed to the ideas of religion ... **impious** is stronger than *irreligious* and that is stronger than *incredulous*. *Impious* is the height of unbelief, and there is a desire in it to combat God and religion. The *impious* takes pleasure in *attacking* religion and even blaspheming against God'. (cf. Six, *Light of the Night*, 26). Even the small *Collins' Gem Dictionary* captures something of this long explanation quite succinctly when it states that *impious* means irreverent, profane, or wicked. *Harrap's New Shorter French and English Dictionary* defines **impie** as 'impious, ungodly, blasphemous'.

persons most affected by the errors in Liberalism.¹³⁰ And, in the conferences, *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Future Life*, from which Thérèse might possibly have drawn her preference for the word *impies*, the word is used four times. Of course we know that today it is not politically correct — in First World countries at least — to pass public value judgments on the religious views held by another person, let alone to pass public *negative* value judgments. Still, throughout this dissertation particular attention will be paid to the meaning of *impies* and what application it holds for today.

Returning now to *exegesis*, literary *exegesis* or literary criticism is a description, analysis, evaluation, or interpretation of a particular literary work or an author's writings as a whole. In this thesis, literary criticism / exegesis / hermeneutics (see below) will be tools in understanding Thérèse's thought often expressed through the medium of symbol and image. *Hermeneutics* as a field of investigation is primarily concerned with the integral process of interpretation, terminating in understanding in the full sense of the word. Exegesis and criticism are moments in the explanatory phase of interpretation.¹³¹

¹³⁰ *Histoire d'une Âme de Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux selon la disposition originale des autographes nouvellement établie par Conrad De Meester*. Préface de Cardinal Godfried Dannells. Présentation du Père Camilo Maccise, Supérieur Général des Carmes déchaux (Moerzeke, Belgique: Carmel-ediT, 19992, 256). The footnote in the French edition notes that Thérèse was undoubtedly inspired in her choice of the word *impies* by the Conférences d'Arminjon. The footnote further explains that one finds the word *impies* in ARM [Arminjon]: **III, 94; IV, 106, 107; VIII, 247**. Thérèse read Arminjon's book of lectures in May 1887 before her entry to Carmel. The lectures were originally delivered by Abbé Arminjon at Chambury Cathedral, France, and edited in 1881 under the title *Fin du Monde présent et Mystères de la vie future*. These lectures made a lasting impression upon Thérèse: 'This reading was one of the greatest graces in my life. I read it by the window of my study, and the impressions I received are too deep to express in human words' (SS Manuscript 1, 102)). Albert Hutting states: 'A major factor in determining [Thérèse's] future career was the reading of Abbe Arminjon's Conférences on the End of the World and the Mysteries of the Future Life. That book seemed to add the "Amen" to the conclusions which she had carefully, though painfully, reached without the help of any human advice. She would enter Carmel and there labor for souls' (Albert H. Hutting, *The Life of the Little Flower* (Detroit USA: League of the Little Flower, 1942, IV, 60. www.jesus-passion.com/Little Flower4/htm). [Accessed 25/10/07].

¹³¹ See Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd. rev. edn. (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 127.

Hermeneutics¹³²

Generally speaking, hermeneutics is interpretative inquiry and can cover the whole range of literary criticism. Yet it is also a study that focuses specifically on interpretation, and in particular, on the moment of understanding. Here, we find that:

It is characteristic of contemporary hermeneutical inquiry that it is concerned with the mediated quality of human understanding. This has led to extensive work on language in general and on symbol, metaphor, myth, and all those forms of polyvalent mediation that both extend understanding and communicate meaning.¹³³

‘Hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts.’¹³⁴ A particular hermeneutic (as opposed to hermeneutics as the overall dynamic between understanding and interpretation) is a creative interpretative lens onto the meaning contained in the text. David Tracy explains:

The meaning of the text does not lie ‘behind’ it (in the mind of the author, the original social setting, the original audience), nor even ‘in’ the text itself. Rather, the meaning of the text lies in front of the text — in the now common question, the now common subject-matter of both text and interpreter [cf. Walter Principe's analysis stated above]. We do not seek simply to repeat, to reproduce the original meaning of the text in order to understand its (and now our) question. Rather, creativity must be involved as we seek to mediate,

¹³² The etymology of the term *hermeneutics* carries an obvious relation to Hermes, the messenger god of the Greeks, and suggests a multiplicity of meanings. In order to deliver the message of the gods, Hermes had to be conversant in their idiom as well as in that of the mortals for whom the message was destined. He had to understand and interpret for himself what the gods wanted to convey before he could proceed to translate, articulate, and explicate their intention to mortals (see Kurt Mueller-Vollmen, ‘Introduction’ in Kurt Mueller-Vollmen, ed., into., notes, *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1994): 1-53. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, a modern exponent of the art of understanding along with Paul Ricoeur, ‘the interpreter is always guided in his understanding of the past by his own particular sets of prejudices ... (and according to Gadamer), ‘prejudice is a necessary condition of all historical (and other) understanding. Acts of understanding or interpretation— both are essentially the same for Gadamer — always involve two different aspects: namely, the overcoming of the strangeness of the phenomenon to be understood, and its transformation into an object of familiarity in which the horizon of the historical phenomenon and that of the interpreter become united’ (*The Hermeneutics Reader*, 38).

¹³³ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 20.

¹³⁴ Paul Ricoeur, ‘The Task of Hermeneutics’, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, II, trans. John B. Thompson (London: The Athlone Press, 1991): 53-74.

translate, interpret its meaning — the meaning in front to the text — into our own horizon. We seek, in sum, to interpret in order to understand.¹³⁵

I consider that a reading of Thérèse's text through the lens of *holiness* will facilitate not only an understanding of her creative writings but also provide a way of access into today's understanding of *faith* — our horizon [in this dissertation]. For me, underlying the word *holiness* is another one, *sensitivity* — sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. *Sensitivity* suggests not just a general awareness but an *acute* awareness.¹³⁶ Buttressing the meaning of *holiness* are yet two other words, *interiority* and *subjectivity*. The former calls one to evaluate critically: What am I doing when I am ... (praying, working, etc); the latter leads to conversion — the true knowledge of oneself.¹³⁷ The latter, the opposite of objectivity, recalls her great ability to 'go into herself' and discern the workings of her soul. In Thérèse's writings, therefore, the lens of holiness can provide a ready access to understanding the text of *Story of a Soul*.

Language

Paul Ricour distinguishes between language and discourse, and claims that language is realized as discourse. *Language* relates to phonological and lexical signs and *discourse* to the 'sentence' — the sentence being the basic unit of discourse. It is in discourse — not in language as a set of codes — that, according to Ricoeur, all messages are exchanged. In a further step, he speaks of discourse as *event* and *meaning*. Ricoeur states that if discourse is *realized* as an event (something realized in the present, linked to a particular person), all discourse is *understood* as meaning, that is, 'what we wish to understand is not the fleeting event but rather the meaning that

¹³⁵ See David Tracy, 'Hermeneutical Reflections in the New Paradigm', in Hans Küng and David Tracy, ed., *Paradigm Changes in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1989): 34-62.

¹³⁶ Perhaps one can describe this kind of sensitivity by means of the following metaphor: 'Aspen leaves are extremely sensitive to the slightest breeze. Even when the air is still, a few leaves will always be stirring'. (Example taken from Thomas Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit* (New York NY: Lantern Books, 2000), 60). Thérèse, it seems, was attuned to God's voice even spoken so very softly.

¹³⁷ It can be argued that Lonergan's 'critical interiority' is not Thérèse's sense of 'interiority'. Certainly, I contend that Thérèse is *aware* of her interior states. But perhaps she did not analyse them critically in a Lonerganian sense but in terms more analogically through and within her prayer, and in accordance with those of John of the Cross. See fn. 123 above.

endures'.¹³⁸ Within this analysis, Thérèse's *Story of a Soul* would be classified as written discourse in which there is the dialectic of realizing the event and understanding its meaning — Thérèse's view that her life is filled with the 'mercies of the Lord'.

In the description of Sandra Schneiders, a language is a system of symbols and the rules used to manipulate them. Language can also refer to the use of such systems as a general phenomenon. Though commonly used as a means of communication among people, human language is only one instance of this phenomenon. Non-verbal communication is a very subtle form of human communication. Linguistic expressions are traditionally divided into classes: literal and figurative. In speaking of the general characteristics of language, Schneiders notes that the first characteristic is that language, what is said, stands always against the background of the vast unsaid. Secondly, language is essentially symbolic. It is, as Heidegger said, 'the house of being' in the sense that the capacity to speak distinguishes the human being as a human being.¹³⁹ Such a distinguishing mark bears in itself the very design of the human essence.¹⁴⁰ Language is the primary symbolic activity of human persons.

Thirdly, language is essentially metaphoric. 'Contrary to common assumption', writes Schneiders, 'that language is usually literal and univocal and only becomes metaphoric in poetic or dramatic contexts, ordinary language is naturally metaphoric and polyvalent'. Metaphoric language is innovative, challenging the mind to exceed the bounds of the expressed and conceive what cannot be grasped in clear and distinct ideas.¹⁴¹ As a general characteristic, metaphoric language includes all non-literal human communication — for example, metaphor, symbol, image, myth, and simile.

¹³⁸ See Paul Ricoeur, 'The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation', in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, II, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London: The Athlone Press, 1991): 75-88.

¹³⁹ 'Inasmuch as language grants this very thing [*It is*], the essence of man consists in language. Thus we are within language, at home in language, prior to everything else'. See Martin Heidegger, 'The Way to Language', in David Farrell Krell, rev., expanded, ed., intros., *Basic Writings from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, (New York NY: 1977, 1993): 397-426, at 398.

¹⁴⁰ See Martin Heidegger, 'The Way to Language', in David Farrell Krell, 2nd. Rev. ed., with introduction(s), *Basic Writings from 'Being and Time' (1927) to 'The Task of Thinking' (1964)* (New York NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977, 1993), 397.

¹⁴¹ See Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*: 138-140.

(In relation to speaking of *metaphoric* language, Lawrence Buell explains that the term can be used ambiguously. ‘One can think of *metaphor* in general terms’, he says, ‘as a sign of the fondness of writers for drawing analogies between one thing and another ... the term *metaphor* is often ... broadly used to refer to all figurative language (also called *imagery*)’¹⁴². Specifically, ‘*religious* language follows the logic of metaphor.’¹⁴³ Further, Beranrd Lonergan states that there is a great diversity in religious expression for it uses the language of the speaker, be that common sense, theory, interiority and / or transcendence.¹⁴⁴

Schneiders' three characteristics of language are evident in Thérèse's writings. For example, in relation to the penumbra of the ‘unsaid’, Thérèse states on more than one occasion her inability to capture in words her deep feelings of the moment: ‘Ah! that day, I didn’t say I was able to suffer more! Words cannot express our anguish, and I’m not going to attempt to describe it’.¹⁴⁵ David Krell recalls Heidegger’s assertion of the importance of not only listening to and heeding speech, but also the importance of the silence that enables us to listen more significantly.¹⁴⁶ As far as Thérèse is concerned, she, being a member of a contemplative order, would have developed a highly skilled listening capacity — especially listening to God in silence. In relation to the second point that language is naturally symbolic, the text of *Story of a Soul* is, as would be expected in an autobiographical and non-fiction work, the work of a real person who lived in the late nineteenth century in Normandy, France. Thérèse’s language is also distinctively her own; it is an expression of her *being* (language being a symbol of being a human person) and is also ‘essentially metaphoric’¹⁴⁷ (third characteristic), in the sense of the liberal use she makes of figures of speech.¹⁴⁸ An

¹⁴² See Buell, *The Design of Literature*, 43.

¹⁴³ Pat Henking, ‘David Tracy: Exploration of Themes Appearing in Larger Works’, *Talking About God*. The Tuohy Lectures 1976-1977.
http://people.bu.edu/wildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes. [Accessed 29/10/2007].

¹⁴⁴ See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 114; also see Chapter 6 below.

¹⁴⁵ See SS Manuscript A, 157.

¹⁴⁶ See Heidegger, 395.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Metaphoric’ is used here as co-determinous with ‘figurative’ rather than meaning that the text uses metaphors (a figures of speech) only.

¹⁴⁸ With specific reference to Thérèse’s figurative language in SS Manuscript C, Conrad de Meester’s citation is worthy of note: ‘*On pourrait dire que ... l’expression littéraire de Thérèse est comme une coupe dont le fond est une mosaïque de nombreuses petites pierres réunies. A côté de toutes les*

example can capture both these characteristics: 'In the morning of September 8, I felt [*being*] as though I were flooded with a river of peace ... My union with Jesus was effected not in the midst of thunder and lightening, that is, in extraordinary graces, but in the bosom of a light breeze'[metaphoric language].¹⁴⁹

Ida Görres notes that 'the entire sensibility of the period stretching from Rococo to Late Romanticism has been preserved in [Thérèse's] language', that is, 'the language is replete with lilies and dewdrops, flowers and birds, the flush of dawn and the twinkle of stars, doves and palms'.¹⁵⁰ Jean Guitton notes: Thérèse's language is imperfect, infected with romanticism. There is also an error of taste in the 'abuse of diminutives, for example, the constant use of 'little'. However, he adds that 'the diminutive suits her message, on condition that we understand the growing power of this diminishing'.¹⁵¹ He continues:

The word 'little' that she uses so much, both of her 'way' and herself, is not an affectation or a literary trick; it expresses exactly the hardest and most heroic resolution that so forcefully spirited a being could ever conceive and carry through.¹⁵²

formulas personnelles de Thérèse, la critique littéraire dira: voici quelques pierres qui proviennent d'Arminjon, en voilà d'autres de Jean de la Croix, et encore de Thérèse d'Avila. Mais le contenu de la coupe, l'expérience que Thérèse expose, est bien la sienne, très originale et très riche' (see *Histoire d'une Âme de Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux* selon la disposition originale des autographes nouvellement établie par Conrad De Meester. Préface du Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Présentation du Père Camilo Maccise (Moerzeke Belgique: Carmel-ediT, 1999), 243. The title henceforth abbreviated to *Histoire d'une Âme*. ['One could say that ... Thérèse's literary expression is like a *goblet* whose base is a mosaic of numerous small stones joined together. In comparing all the personal formulae used by Thérèse, literary criticism will say: there are some stones coming from Abbé Arminjon, and there are others from John of the Cross, and again from Teresa of Avila. But the *content* of the cup — Thérèse's experience — is definitely hers, very original and very rich' (my translation). The following is a good example of Thérèse's ability to use imaginative language: 'There are so many different horizons, so many infinitely varied nuances, that the palette of the heavenly Painter alone will be able, after the night of this life, to furnish me with colours capable of painting the marvels that He reveals to the eyes of my soul' (cf. *GC* II, 995).

¹⁴⁹ See *SS* Manuscript A, 166f.

¹⁵⁰ See Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 27.

¹⁵¹ See Jean Guitton, *The Spiritual Genius of St Thérèse*, trans. A religious of the Retreat of the Sacred Heart (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1958): 13-16.

¹⁵² Ghéon, *The Secret of the Little Flower*, 140f.

He also notes that when Thérèse's 'prose is stripped of its pious rhetoric and deliberate childishness, the wreaths and cascades of flowers, it is found to be strong, clear, straightforward, and to the point'.¹⁵³

Metaphor, Symbol and Image

It is appropriate at this point to say more of the specific meanings of metaphor, symbol and image because these figure of speech are significant in Thérèse's writings. In a skeleton definition of metaphor (*metaphor* from the Greek verb *metapherein*, meaning 'to transfer'¹⁵⁴), 'metaphor is that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another'.¹⁵⁵ Its basic structure is very simple. There are always two terms present: the thing we are talking about and that to which we are comparing it.¹⁵⁶ To say that metaphor is a kind of language use is to say that metaphor should not be classed amongst such grammatical categories as noun, verb, or adjective. *Metaphor* is a non-literal figure of speech. At the literal level, a metaphor is meaningless. 'Genuine metaphor is not transferable into literal meaning.' Metaphors are tensive language; the metaphor contains an 'is' and an 'is not', held in irresolvable tension.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps this text from Thérèse is a metaphor: 'I look upon myself as a weak little bird, with only a light down as covering. I am not an eagle, but I have only an eagle's eyes and heart'.¹⁵⁸ Thérèse is not saying that she *is* a weak little bird [symbol?] but that she feels it appropriate to describe her efforts at prayer in terms of the efforts of a weak little bird trying to fly. It can do no more than flutter its wings and remain on the ground.¹⁵⁹ Another example is: 'Ask Jesus to make me generous during my retreat. He is riddling me with *pinpricks*; the poor little ball is exhausted'.¹⁶⁰ Here, Thérèse is speaking of her experience of God in terms of a little ball riddled with pinpricks. But are these examples really metaphors, or are they symbols (of her feelings relating to God and prayer)? Perhaps it is the latter.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 173.

¹⁵⁴ See Edwin J. Barton and Glenda A. Hudson, *A Contemporary Guide to Literary Terms with Strategies for Writing Essays About Literature*, 111.

¹⁵⁵ See Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 15.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 20.

¹⁵⁷ See Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 9.

¹⁵⁸ SS Manuscript B, 198.

¹⁵⁹ See SS Manuscript B, 198.

¹⁶⁰ GC I, 499.

A *simile* as a figure of speech is usually regarded as the trope of comparison and is identifiable within speech by the presence of a ‘like’, or an ‘as’. The *simile* can be the ‘greatest rival of metaphor’; for a metaphor can be judged to be a simile but without the ‘like’.¹⁶¹ Explaining, again, her relationship with God — this time through simile — Thérèse writes: ‘I told Him to use me *like* a little ball of no value’.¹⁶² Thérèse did not say: ‘I am a little ball’ [symbol?], rather, ‘use me like a little ball’. Another example is: ‘And now, like a flower strengthened by the storm ...’¹⁶³

Symbol (from the Greek verb, *symbolon*, ‘to throw together’) can be distinguished from metaphor as a category and is, again, non-literal, but also includes the non-linguistic. A *symbol* is an object, animate or inanimate that stands for or points to a reality beyond itself. It could be argued that this definition ‘fits’ that of a *metaphor* not a *symbol*, but the content level of meaning of a symbol suggests *participative* knowledge pointing to a reality beyond itself.¹⁶⁴ In her poem, *An Unpetalled Rose*, written the year of her death, 1897,¹⁶⁵ Thérèse writes:

This unpetalled rose is the faithful image,
 Divine Child,
 Of the heart that wants to sacrifice itself for you unreservedly
 At each moment.
 Lord, on your altars more than one new rose
 Likes to shine.
 It gives itself to you ... but I dream of something else:
 To be unpetalled!...

Thérèse is saying that the *unpetalled* rose is a symbol of her complete self-giving. Nothing remains for her to give. She has given even to the last petal. And maybe it also expresses her participation in the *kenosis* of Jesus (his total self-giving).

¹⁶¹ See Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 58. Also see the example of metaphor, above. It was introduced by ‘as’. This shows the overlap that there can be in the meanings of simile and metaphor.

¹⁶² See SS Manuscript A, 136.

¹⁶³ SS Manuscript A, 15.

¹⁶⁴ ‘What is Symbolism?’ Literature: www.aspirennies.com/private/SiteBorJ/Romance/Poetry Styles [Accessed October 2007].

¹⁶⁵ See Appendix D.

‘The symbol is the mode of presence of something that cannot be encountered in any other way.’¹⁶⁶ ‘Symbols draw life from a multiplicity of associations, subtly and for the most part subconsciously interrelated and which thereby derive the power to tap a vast potential of semantic energy.’¹⁶⁷ Therefore a symbol is a sign pregnant with a depth of meaning which is evoked rather than explicitly stated. Symbolism gives not speculative but participatory knowledge — knowledge, that is to say, of a self-involving type. By engaging in symbols, by inhabiting their environment, people discover new horizons for life, new values and motivation.¹⁶⁸ Several other qualities of symbolic knowledge are: their powerful influence on commitments and behaviour; their capacity to introduce us into realms of knowledge that are inaccessible to discursive thought and their multivalent quality which can be closely connected with healing (as in psychotherapy).

From Thérèse’s autobiography we have an example of this kind of writing. She uses the expression, the ‘book of nature’, and in particular, ‘Jesus’ garden’ from that ‘book’. This, for Thérèse, points to ‘the world of souls’. Yes, one could argue that Thérèse is implying that the souls of people are *like* flowers all different from one another and that, therefore, she is using a *metaphor*. However, as a *symbol*, ‘Jesus’ garden’ is a sign pregnant with a plenitude of meaning which is evoked rather than explicitly stated. One could easily include oneself in this symbolism of ‘Jesus’ garden’ where not all flowers are the same.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, another example, taken from Manuscript C, is in the text where Thérèse expresses her desire not to ‘rise up from [the] table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating until the day set by [God]’.¹⁷⁰ This ‘image’ creates a symbol of one’s friendship with sinners — a compassionate presence. The mental image conveys a solidarity with sinners, as does a similar ‘image’ from the gospels where Jesus dines with ‘sinners’ (Cf. Mt 9:10-13). Similarly, a recent publication by J. Arivazagan which carries the title *Mother Teresa: A Symbol of Compassion* can readily evoke / create an ‘image’ of participative human

¹⁶⁶ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 35.

¹⁶⁷ See Avery Dulles, ‘The Symbolic Structure of Revelation’. *TS* 41/1 1980): 51-73, at 56, citing, in part, P. H. Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1962), 94.

¹⁶⁸ See Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 136.

¹⁶⁹ See SS Manuscript A, 14.

¹⁷⁰ See SS Manuscript C, 212.

compassion. Media coverage of Mother Teresa of Calcutta have left clear images of a holy nun holding in her arms a dying man found abandoned on the streets.

Image, along with being a generic term for figures of speech, is used to designate mental events and visual representations.¹⁷¹ Thérèse writes: 'First, there was Switzerland with its mountains whose summits were lost in the clouds, its graceful waterfalls gushing forth in a thousand different ways, its deep valleys literally covered with gigantic ferns and scarlet heather'.¹⁷²

Analogy

The above sections have concentrated mainly on Thérèse's use of figures of speech to describe her relationship with God. Human language is limited to speak about God and so most of our language about God is metaphorical (for example 'God is a fortress and a rock'). However, philosophers and theologians also resort to *analogy* to describe God's essential attributes (for example, being, grace, love, truth, forgiveness, peace, and mercy), and in theology this mode and manner of speaking appropriately about God is analogical. Terms, such as grace, truth, etc., can be attributed properly [not metaphorically], though in differing existential modes [analogically], both to God and to human persons. When this thesis uses such terms, it does so mindful of the difference in degree between their meanings when referred to God and when referencing a creature's understanding of these same terms [for example, Thérèse and this writer]. The church's official teaching on analogy is: 'No similarity between Creator and creature can be asserted without its implying a greater dissimilarity between the two' (The Fourth Lateran Council [DS 860]).¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Dulles, 'The Symbolic Structure of Revelation', 55.

¹⁷² See SS Manuscript A, 124f. See also fn.149 above.

¹⁷³ 'The analogical use of language in relation to God contrasts with metaphorical use on the one hand and with univocal [meaning exactly the same] and equivocal [meaning something totally different] predication on the other. It is rather "analogical". The understanding of analogy developed from the application of a threefold way of talking about God that had been received from later Greek philosophy but that was also supported by Scripture. This threefold way works as follows. Because God is the cause of all that is, things must legitimately be said of God from our experience of the world, for example that God is powerful. The second step is based on the belief that God is the transcendent cause of the world, in other words God is the source of everything while not himself being a part or element within the world. God is then said to be "more that powerful" or "super-powerful" to indicate that the quality we feel obliged to attribute to God is attributed in a way that is beyond its use in our creaturely

Possible Images of God

In her desire for holiness, Thérèse knows ‘that everything, literally everything in our life, depends upon what we know and think of God’.¹⁷⁴ Patrick O’Sullivan develops this notion of ‘one’s image of God’ in his book¹⁷⁵ and his insights are used in this dissertation. Sullivan makes the point that ‘we can have an idea of God in our heads, notional images’. But the more important image of God that ‘we actually live out of and allow to operate in our lives’ is the ‘operational’ image of God in our hearts. Sullivan gives three basic operational images based on expectations: (1) If I am good God will love me; if I am bad, he will punish me.¹⁷⁶ This operational image of God is played out in relationships, for the person of faith would regard relationship with God and relationship with others as inseparable. Does Thérèse, for example, think she only has a good relationship with family members if and when she meets their expectations and is good? (2) If God loves me so much, why does he treat me like this? There is no evidence of this image — the opposite of the first one — operating in Thérèse’s life.¹⁷⁷ (3) God loves me unconditionally and all of us with a non-comparing love. Operational Image 3 developed later in Thérèse and in two stages: Phase 1, God’s love as gift and Phase 2, God’s love as *unconditional* gift.¹⁷⁸ Thérèse found these qualities of God’s nature (associated with Operational Image 3) realised most especially in the Suffering Christ. It was this mystery of Crucified Love that revealed to her the overwhelmingly true and absolute nature of God as Love.¹⁷⁹

level. The third step is based on the need to negate what is affirmed of God in order to discount the claim that human thinking and speaking can catch or hold the divine nature. This *via negativa* is an essential aspect of human discourse about God and there may be times when this is the aspect of theological language which needs most emphasis’ (see Vivian Boland, ‘Analogy’ in *NWDCS*, 106).

¹⁷⁴ Giovanni Gennari & a Discalced Carmelite nun, *An Echo of the Heart of God & Studies of the Self-Offering of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 32.

¹⁷⁵ See Patrick O’Sullivan, *Sure beats selling cardigans! Fostering Our Relationship with God* (Richmond Vic: Aurora Books, 1995), 5f.

¹⁷⁶ This is the image of a reward and punishing God. In Thérèse’s case, this operational image would have rather read something like: ‘God loves me but if I make lots of acts God will reward me by giving me a higher place in heaven’. Thérèse never considered God as a punishing God.

¹⁷⁷ See Christopher O’Mahoney, ed., and trans., *St Thérèse of Lisieux by those who knew her: Testimonies from the Process of Beatification*: ‘I have never refused God anything since I was three’, 115.

¹⁷⁸ Tom Ryan, Private Notes, 26/09/06.

¹⁷⁹ See *An Echo of the Heart of God*, 33, fn. 16.

Research Approach (b): Outline of the Chapters

The overall methodology of the thesis engages the hermeneutical triad of understanding, interpreting and application, with *application* reserved in a particular sense for the final chapter. All is preceded by an initial phase of reception of the material.¹⁸⁰

In the words of Bernard Lonergan, a *method* is ‘a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results’.¹⁸¹ However, Lonergan knew that *method*, though necessary, is not an end in itself. (I find evidence for this in his Chapter 4 of *Method in Theology*).¹⁸² Furthermore, because we are (*being*) more than we know — even know by method — then, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, method necessarily gives way to a search for *truth*. The central thesis of his *Truth and Method* demonstrates that ‘truth cannot be limited to what is confirmable by method’.¹⁸³ The truth claims of any classic text — and Thérèse’s autobiography is one such¹⁸⁴ — must be respectfully engaged and accepted, unless proven to be false by the misleading logic of the claim, not by the accuracy of and fidelity to the method of analysing the text.¹⁸⁵ This principle affirms that there is always more to *being* than what can be established by language, history and tradition in the human sciences and or by the findings of natural science. (Jean Grondin

¹⁸⁰ I am indebted to an outline of method in Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: some hermeneutical principles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), x. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*: 307-11; 383-389 on the hermeneutical triad of understanding, interpretation, and application.

¹⁸¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 5.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 104-109.

¹⁸³ See Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: A Reading of ‘Truth and Method’* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 41. ‘However, Gadamer’s corrective truth (here against methodologism) is in danger of exaggeration and polemic (here against all method). Insofar as we recognize that the text produces its claim to attention by structuring and forming the subject-matter into a work, an ordered whole, *a text*, we must also recognize the legitimacy, even necessity of the use of some explanatory methods in the process of interpretation. As Paul Ricoeur insists, along with Gadamer, “understating” “envelops” the entire process of interpretation. Yet, as Ricoeur correctly insists against Gadamer, explanatory methods can “develop” our understanding of how the meaning is produced through the very form and structure of the text’ (cf. David Tracy, ‘Hermeneutical Reflections in the New Paradigm’, in *Paradigm Changes in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, 46).

¹⁸⁴ See Michelle Jones, ‘From Mother to Sister: The Development in the Understanding of Mission in the Life and Writings of St Thérèse of Lisieux and its Contemporary Relevance’. (MTheol. Dissertation. University of Notre Dame, Australia, 2006?), Introduction.

¹⁸⁵ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. edn., trans. revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989): 362-379.

suggests that Gadamer consigns the truth of *beings* to natural science while preserving the truth of *being* for hermeneutics).¹⁸⁶ In the human sciences, then, hermeneutics is a way of understanding the truth of *being*, which is unrestricted. This, for Gadamer, highlights the importance of the 'hermeneutic circle' in the reception of truth. However:

The hermeneutic circle, in which truth is understood as the conclusive reconciliation of whole and part, might better be conceived as a hermeneutic spiral, in which truth keeps expanding. That is, the whole truth never *is* but always *to be* achieved.¹⁸⁷

In the theology / spirituality area, for example, one's understanding of faith, sin, and truth can 'keep expanding' as author, text, and receiver of the text continually circle or preferably, in this dissertation, spiral in understanding of the text and of themselves, the readers.

This developing understanding of *truth* can be traced in Thérèse as she shares her depth experiences with the readers. Hans Urs von Balthasar writes that the 'search for truth had been [Thérèse's] lot from the beginning. Even as a child she could not bear to be in a false situation':

For anyone to base his [sic] whole attitude to life so firmly upon the concept of truth is itself sufficiently striking. That a young girl should do so is quite amazing and cannot be explained without some fundamental inner experience — or, better still, some gift of understanding which can have no other source than an unique, personal mission.¹⁸⁸

Throughout the chapters, *holiness* is used as the methodological tool through which to analyse and interpret texts and experiences of Thérèse as she searches for 'the truth' — the God of love and all that that search involves. Attention to her use of metaphor and symbol will be important as we follow her search.

¹⁸⁶ Jean Grondin, *Hermeneutische Wahrheit? Zum Wahrheitsbegriff Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Königstein/Ts.: Forum Academicum, 1982. Cited in Weinsheimer, 8, fn. 13.

¹⁸⁷ Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 40.

¹⁸⁸ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, 'Truth', in *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*, trans. Donald Nicholl (London: Sheed & Ward, 1053), 11.

Bearing in mind the above point relating to *truth* and the 'circular' and 'spiral' approaches to reading the text as mentioned earlier, the thesis arranges its material thus: Chapter 1 deals with context, purpose, aim, spirituality and research approach. Chapter 2 consists of the literature review and incorporates meanings of theological and related terms. As far as Thérèse's writings are concerned — this dissertation's Chapters 3, 4 and 5 — there is, first of all, their reception and understanding as they present themselves to the reader. While this occurs, in the first instance, before the writing phase of the dissertation, it occurs again during serious study of the text that aims at a theological interpretation of her symbolic writing.

This research centres on an understanding of Thérèse's attitude to *faith* and *sin* with a view to interpreting and applying the dynamic relationship between these two realities in the light of today's culture. We shall surely see that Thérèse's faith grows stronger and brighter as she directs all her powers of life away from herself and towards God and her neighbour. In the process she will 'die to self-love' and seek to avoid the smallest sin. Here we shall be privileged to witness the interior movements in her soul (her religious experience).

To aid the purpose of this thesis — Thérèse's life of faith and her understanding of sin and the applied relevance of their meaning for today — I address her autobiography in three sections: (1) from her birth in 1873 to her 'conversion' experience in 1886; (2) from 1886 to April 1896, and (3) from April 1896 to the time of her death in September 1897. These divisions are different from the ones Thérèse, herself, provides. In Manuscript A of her autobiography Thérèse says:

In the story of my soul, up until my entrance into Carmel, I distinguish three separate periods. The first ... extends from the dawn of my reason till our dear Mother's departure for Heaven ... It's from the end of this phase in my life that I entered the second period of my existence, the most painful of the three. This period extends from the age of four and a half to that of fourteen, the time when I found once again my *childhood* character, and entered more and more into the serious side of life.' [Thérèse's 'conversion' experience of Christmas night 1886 marked the beginning of the third period of her life]. 'On that *night*

of light began the third period of my life, the most beautiful and the most filled with graces from heaven.¹⁸⁹

Yet, because Thérèse wrote Manuscript A of her autobiography where she states these periods *before* living the vital last eighteen months of her life, her divisions differ from the ones I am proposing which mark the years 1896 - 1897 specifically — the years which hold particular significance for this thesis.

The penultimate chapter of the thesis, Chapter 6, takes two significant points from the content of the preceding chapters, namely, *truth* and *grace*, and seeks to use these terms to suggest that one can be 'faithful' and avoid 'sin' by seeking the *truth*. Because God's presence is ever with us — *grace* is given to all people whatever their religious affiliation — this is entirely possible. This chapter also introduces 'other voices' into the conversation in order to give the work a contemporary flavour. These are 'desolation' — sometimes used to describe aspects of today's culture — and spiritual discernment with its specific terminology of 'consolation' and 'desolation'. These voices, though, 'speak' mainly through Theresian references which, in turn, can be applied analogically to today.

The Conclusion lists twelve points. It also provides a post-nineteenth century description of Atheism, thereby providing a basis for one of the dissertation's major conclusions and justification for a contemporary reading of 'the sin against faith'.

Academic Contribution of the Thesis

The thesis makes a specific contribution to Theresian studies by highlighting the 'sin against faith' to which Thérèse, herself, paid attention. The dissertation aims to interpret, transplant, modify where necessary, and apply Thérèse's words to our twenty-first century of 'unbelief'. The current literature does not treat the topic in the way approached here. In today's crisis of faith and loss of a sense of sin, this thesis is a highly relevant study. Further, this topic makes a specific contribution to Theresian

¹⁸⁹ See SS Manuscript A, 16, 34, 98.

studies in the area of discussion that reflects upon the importance of her doctorate for today. The thesis also contributes to ecclesiology in that it points to a renewed appreciation of the mystical dimension of the church. Lastly, Thérèse's experience and understanding of *faith* holds possibilities for dialogue with other Christian and non-Christian religions.

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF RELATED DISCOURSE

This chapter is in three sections. First, there is a short commentary on the dissertation's primary sources; second, recalling that the dissertation is concerned with *faith* and *sin* in the life and writings of Thérèse of Lisieux, there is detailing of these and other significant and related terms. Finally, there is discussion of the material that relates specifically to Thérèse's life. All of the above is necessary background material to facilitate a clear understanding of the argument in the chapters to follow.

A. Primary Sources and Comment

***Story of a Soul*¹**

Thérèse produced a considerable amount of literature in her very short life. Much of it was concentrated into the period from January 1894 to July 1897: eight plays, all but

¹ *Story of a Soul*, the autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux, a new translation from the original manuscripts by John Clarke, O.C.D., ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, D.C., 1976; translation of *Histoire d'une Âme* (Editions due Cerf — Desclée de Brouwer, 1972). Manuscript A of the autobiography, dedicated to Mother Agnès of Jesus (1895), in *Story of a Soul*, pp. 13-182.

Manuscript B of the autobiography is a Letter to Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart (September 1896), now in *Story of a Soul*, pp 187-200.

Manuscript C of the autobiography, dedicated to Mother Marie de Gonzague (June-July 1897), in *Story of a Soul*, pp. 205-259.

one of her fifty-four poems, and her autobiography. The autobiography is her major work. Written ‘under obedience’, it really is a compilation of three distinct documents: Document A written for her sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus in 1895; Document B written for her sister Marie, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (1896); and Document C written for Mother Marie de Gonzague (1987). After Thérèse’s death, these three documents were published, together with a selection of Thérèse’s letters and poems, as well as ‘Counsels and Recollections’ — composed by Thérèse’s sister Céline — on 30 September 1898 under the one title *Histoire d’une Âme*. Before the book was published, all three main documents were ‘rearranged in such a way as to seem to be addressed to Mother Marie de Gonzague’.² The autobiography was immediately popular. The history surrounding its publication, however, was not without problems. First of all, it was really Mother Agnes of Jesus (Pauline) who requested that Thérèse write Manuscripts A and C. Pauline had diplomatically approached Mother Gonzague (Prioress) to request that she, the Prioress, ask Thérèse to write a continuation of her life (Manuscript A) that would specifically reflect her time in Carmel (Manuscript C). Thérèse’s previous document (Manuscript A) had been composed mainly as a family souvenir. Manuscript B, written for Marie, was also originally a souvenir of Thérèse’s last retreat.

When Thérèse was dying she began to realize that her manuscripts (A, B, C) could have potential spiritual value for a greater number of people beyond the Carmelite family. Mother Gonzague had already been persuaded by Pauline that Manuscript C, particularly, would provide suitable material for the customary Circular Letter sent to all Carmels upon the death of one of their nuns. In view of this realization on Thérèse’s part that her writings might have an appeal wider than that of the Carmelite world, she appointed her sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus, as future editor of the text.³

After my death, you must speak to no one about my manuscript before it is published; you must speak only to Mother Prioress about it. If you act

² See John Clarke, ‘Introduction’, *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, xix.

³ See O’Mahoney, ed. and trans., *St Thérèse of Lisieux: by those who knew her: Testimonies from the process of beatification*, 34; Christopher O’Donnell, *Love in the Heart of the Church* (Dublin: Veritas, 1997), 10.

otherwise, the devil will lay more than one trap to hinder God's work, a very important work!"⁴

Answering questions at the Diocesan Inquiry into the Life and Virtues of Sister Thérèse held in Lisieux in 1910 and 1911, Mother Agnes stated that Thérèse had 'appointed' her, Mother Agnes, editor of Thérèse's autobiographical documents in readiness for publication. She reported that Thérèse had said this to her two months before she died:

I am writing about charity, but I have not been able to do it as well as I would have liked to; in fact, I couldn't have done it worse if I'd tried. Still I have said what I think. But you must touch it up, for I assure you it is quite a jumble ... Mother, whatever you see fit to delete or add to the copybook of my life, it is I who have added or deleted it. Remember this later on, and have no scruples about it.⁵

Thus we see the reason for Mother Agnes' involvement in procuring the publication of Thérèse's manuscripts.⁶

After Thérèse's death, Mother Agnes therefore took it upon herself to carry out her sister's wishes. She did so but, possibly with the best of intentions, made many 'cuts, stylistic corrections and insertions'⁷ — 'seven thousand'⁸ of them, according to Ida Görres. Mother Agnes changed Thérèse's thought in those places where it differed from her own. Agnes' thought was 'formed by 'a French bourgeois spirituality, provincial in attitude, focused on retreat from the world, couched in sentimental, sometimes precious language, with a fearful spirit intent on placating a fearful God through sacrifice'.⁹ Thérèse's spirituality, on the other hand, is without fear; it is confident; it is more mystical than ascetical.¹⁰ However, Görres is also of the opinion

⁴ See Clarke, *Introduction*, *Story of a Soul*, xix.

⁵ See O'Mahoney, ed., and trans., *St Thérèse of Lisieux by those who knew her: Testimonies from the process of beatification*, 34.

⁶ See LC, 126 and the relative footnote on that page.

⁷ Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹ See Tom Ryan, 'The Thérèse "Phenomenon": Reflections on a Pilgrimage', in *AEJT*, Issue 2, 2002. See also, Jean-François Six, *Light of Night: The Last Eighteen Months in the Life of Thérèse of Lisieux*, 7. See also Mary Frohlich's, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: "Doctor for the Third Millennium?"' (discussed above, Chapter 1).

¹⁰ For a more detailed comparison between Thérèse's spirituality and that of Mother Agnes see Jean-François Six, *The Light of Night*: 5-8; Mary Frohlich notes that 'Six has been consistently ostracized by

— the 'seven thousand' insertions and corrections notwithstanding — that the release of the facsimile manuscripts in 1957 'afforded no sensational revelations, no fundamental transformations in our picture of the saint.'¹¹ In other words, all the alterations did not compromise Thérèse's original thought. Under oath at the Diocesan Inquiry, and in reply and to the judge's question of whether the published edition corresponded entirely to the original manuscript so that one could take the former for the latter with complete security, Mother Agnes replied:

There are some changes, but they are unimportant and do not affect the substance or general meaning of the account. These changes are (a) the suppression of some very short passages which relate intimate details about our family life during her childhood; (b) the suppression of one or two pages that I thought would be of little interest to readers outside of Carmel; (c) some little changes requested by Mother Marie Gonzague.¹²

The original documents were released after Mother Agnes' death (1951). It took Father Françoise de Sainte Marie, O. C. D., four long years to make all the necessary preparations for the photostatic publication of Thérèse's three original manuscripts.¹³ This publication was printed in 1957 but with a certain starkness making it unattractive to the ordinary reader who had come to love Thérèse through the earlier reading edited by Mother Agnes in 1898. Nevertheless, prior to 1957, in 1950, André Combes — 'a pioneer in real research into Thérèse and a great theorist on the spiritual life',¹⁴ — who, though denied access to the entire original documents during the life time of Mother Agnes, did, nevertheless, manage to procure several fragments of the writings. From an analysis of these, he proposed the hypothesis that 'there are two texts, that of Thérèse and that of Pauline'.¹⁵ Louis Bouyer states:

Lisieux "insiders" because of his very negative attitude toward Mother Agnes ... His scholarship and his interpretations are generally worthy of attention but the vitriol that repeatedly surfaces must be taken with many grains of salt' (see Mary Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine In Thérèse of Lisieux', in *TS* 61/2 (2000), 270, fn. 42); Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 25-28.

¹¹ See Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 27.

¹² See O'Mahoney, ed. and trans., *St Thérèse of Lisieux: by those who knew her: Testimonies from the process of beatification*, 36f.

¹³ See Clarke, 'Introduction', *Story of a Soul*, xx.

¹⁴ See Six, *Light of the Night*, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The worst thing for which one can reproach this [Martin] family milieu is for having nourished so much sentimentality, so great a lack of taste that it gave rise to the idea of presenting, through insane alterations, like that of a sickeningly sweet, insipid doll, a face of Thérèse that would seem almost vulgar, by sheer force of its stubborn will, if it were not saved by the splendour of its gaze.¹⁶

This comment implicitly refers not only to Pauline's alterations to the written texts but also to Céline's *painting* of Thérèse — that is, the painting famously circulated on holy cards and copied in church statues before the more recent circulation of Céline's bona fide photographs of Thérèse.

Finally, in 1973 for the occasion of the centenary of Thérèse's birth, a new edition of the Autobiographical Manuscripts was published. It claimed (1) fidelity to the authentic text as it came from Thérèse's pen and (2) fidelity to the first edition of *Histoire d'une Ame* (1898), which Mother Agnes had conceived as a complete biography of Thérèse for the ordinary reader.¹⁷ The John Clarke English translation of this *Histoire d'une âme: manuscripts autobiographiques* was published in 1975 from this critical edition. It is this English translation of the critical edition, together with the critical editing of all Thérèse's other works that are used in this dissertation.

Thérèse's autobiography has had a troubled publication history. However, that situation was in the main overshadowed by enthusiasm for the 'shower of roses' that Thérèse very soon after her death send down to earth from heaven — as she promised she would — in the form of graces, miracles, and answers to prayers to those who requested her help.

¹⁶ Louis Bouyer, *Women Mystics: Hadewijch of Antwerp, Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Edith Stein*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 135. 'Splendour of its gaze' — this phrase has significance in the context of this dissertation when reference is made to a certain motif of 'face' that can be traced throughout Thérèse's autobiography. Also noted is that Bouyer's citation refers to both the 'touching up' by Céline of the painting she made of her sister, Thérèse, and to Pauline's 'corrections' made to Thérèse's writings in order to present them in the best possible light to the public. Today, the critical edition of Thérèse's works and the publication of original photographs of the saint have completely replaced any previously modified works. Bouyer continues to observe: 'But what compels more reflection is, not that one finally manages to rediscover the true Thérèse and extract her from all this sugar, but that so many of the simplest, honest people so quickly scented the truth, the reality, beneath these dubiously celestial perfumes', 135f.

¹⁷ See Clark, *Story of a Soul*, xxi.

St Thérèse of Lisieux, Her Last Conversations¹⁸

When it became obvious that Thérèse's illness was terminal, her blood sisters recorded many of the conversations they had with her in the convent infirmary; that is, they took notes of some of her sayings. These are published in English under the title of *St Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Last Conversations* — a critical summation of a much longer work, *Derniers Entretiens*. However, one might legitimately query the authenticity of some of the texts in *Last Conversations* given that they were recorded by hand and perhaps, sometimes, from memory.

Letters of St Thérèse of Lisieux, General Correspondence, 2 volumes¹⁹

Thérèse also wrote letters, poems and plays. With regard to the letters published in a critical edition of two volumes under the title *General Correspondence*, a 'letter' is any text in prose (letter, note, inscription on a holy picture, etc.) directed to some person.²⁰ The editor has arranged those under three categories. There are 266 letters written by Thérèse between 4 April 1877 and 24 August 1897. (She surely was aware of the long established French tradition in letter-writing, even evident in the letters her mother wrote). In her letter-writing, Thérèse sometimes sought Pauline's help in constructing them. Then there are Letters from Thérèse's correspondents. There are 200 of these letters spread between 8 January 1880 and 4 October 1897. A further division concerns a number of diverse letters that refer to Thérèse in some way or present relevant information concerning her.

The letters Thérèse wrote to her 'spiritual brothers' give us lovely insights into the richness of her spirituality. Further, and of special interest are some eighty-five fragments of correspondence in an additional section of *General Correspondence II*

¹⁸ *St Thérèse of Lisieux, Her Last Conversations*, translated from the original manuscripts by John Clarke, O.C.D., ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, DC., 1977; a translation of *J'entre dans la Vie, Derniers Entretiens* (Editions du Cerf — Desclée de Brouwer, 1973).

¹⁹ *Letters of St Thérèse of Lisieux, General Correspondence, 2 volumes*, translated from the original manuscripts by John Clarke, O.C.D., ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, DC., 1982 and 1988; a translation of *Correspondence Generale, I et II* (Editions du Cerf — Desclée de Brouwer, 1972 and 1974).

²⁰ See GC I, 61.

entitled Complementary Documents. These extracts are taken from Mme. Martin's letters to Pauline, her daughter away at boarding school, and to her sister-in-law, Mme. Guérin, and they are particularly revealing of Thérèse's developing personality.

The Poetry of St. Thérèse of Lisieux²¹

Concerning Thérèse's poetry, the critical edition numbers them 1 – 54. There are also supplementary poems in the volume numbered 1 – 8. Perhaps the best known of Thérèse's poems are *Living on Love* (PN 17),²² *An Unpetalled Rose* (PN 51),²³ *Why I Love You, O Mary* (PN 54) and *My Heaven on Earth* (PN 20). Henri Ghéon states that, given better education and opportunity, Thérèse's poetry might have 'have excelled some of the acknowledged poets in the France of her day'.²⁴ Unfortunately, that was not the case and her poetry shows a 'disproportion between her songs and their poetic substance'.²⁵ The poems lose something of their lyric meter in English translation. This edition retains the poems in both French and English.

Plays: Pious Recreations Pieces

Thérèse was often called upon to use her literary talent in writing poems or short plays to enhance a celebration, like a jubilee, a profession or community recreation. She wrote eight little plays or dramatic pieces, two of which were major productions and based on the life of Joan of Arc. These *Pious Recreations Pieces* are presently being translated into English.²⁶

²¹ *The Poetry of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, translated from the original manuscripts by Donald Kinney, O.C.D., ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, DC., 1996; a translation of Volume I of *Poésies*, with selected passages from volume II (Editions du Cerf — Desclée de Brouwer, 1979). This edition was prepared by Sister Cécile of the Carmel of Lisieux and Jacques Lonchamp, with the assistance of Sister Geneviève, O.P., of the Clairfontaine Monastery, Jeanne Lonchamp, Fr. Bernard Bro, O.P., and Fr. Guy Gaucher, O.C.D.

²² See Appendix A.

²³ See Appendix D.

²⁴ Ghéon, *The Secret of The Little Flower*, 176.

²⁵ Ibid., 175.

²⁶ The French edition is entitled '*Récréations pieuses*' de saint Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus. The recreational skits [*saynètes*, 'playlets'] were always performed by the novices and by Thérèse who played the principal role in five of them: *The Mission of Joan of Arc* or the *Shepherd of Domremy* (*Listening to Voices* (RP 1); *The Angels at the Manger* (RP 2); *The Mission of Joan of Arc* (RP 3); *Jesus at Bethany* (RP 4); *The Small Divine Beggar at Christmas* (RP 5); *The Flight into Egypt* (RP 6); *The*

The Prayers of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: The Act of Oblation²⁷

There is another publication, *The Prayers of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*. Again, it is the critical edition and it numbers the prayers 1 – 21. Thérèse's *Act of Oblation to Merciful Love* (*Pri* 6)²⁸ is the one whose sentiments are important to this thesis's emphasis on the Mercy of God — that is, God's grace / love is given freely. Our innate tendency to want to merit it prevents us from accepting it freely. This dissertation argues that the refusal is sin. Thérèse worked over this prayer to *Merciful Love* several times and each word is exactly her choice. There are three drafts of the prayer; the definitive version is on Sheet C. At the time of writing, the prayer was submitted to a theologian, P. Lemonnier, for approval of its content. He recommended only one change. Thérèse had spoken of the 'infinite' desires she felt; she thence changed the wording to 'I feel within me *immense* desires and it is with confidence I ask you to come and take possession of my soul'.²⁹ *My Heaven on Earth* (Cantic to the Holy Face, *PN* 20), 1895, *Consecration to the Holy Face*, 1896, and *To the Holy Face*, 1896 — all these are to be read in the light of John of the Cross's understanding of *pure* love.³⁰

Triumph of Humility (*RP* 7); *Stanislaus Kostka* (*RP* 8). John Russell writes: 'In diverse ways St Thérèse broke through the spiritual culture of her own time to offer a fresh understanding of the relationship between God and us. Since the plays of St Thérèse were written in her latter years they convey many of the mature convictions of her faith life.' (cf. John Russell, 'The Religious Plays of St Thérèse of Lisieux', in John Sullivan, ed., *Carmelite Studies: Experiencing St Thérèse Today* Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1990): 41-58). *The Triumph of Humility*, trans. John Russell and Helen Bailey, is available in English. It was first published in *The Downside Review* (Downside Abbey, Bath: Catholic Records Press, Exeter). [Accessed on line 23/03/05 at <http://carmelnet.org/Russell/htm/triumph3htm>]. (See Chapter 5, fn. 33 for further discussion of this particular play).

²⁷ *The Prayers of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: The Act of Oblation*, translated from the original manuscripts by Aletheia Kane, O.C.D., ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, DC., 1997; a translation of *Prières: l'offrande à l'Amour Miséricordieux* (Paris: Editions du Cerf — Desclée de Brouwer, 1988). This edition was prepared by Sister Cécile of the Carmel of Lisieux and Mgr Guy Gaucher, O.C.D., auxiliary bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, with the assistance of Père Bernard Bro, O.P., and Jeanne and Jacques Lonchamp.

²⁸ See Appendix B.

²⁹ See *Pri*, 58f.

³⁰ See *Pri*, 94.

Summary

In contrast to some of her carefully written compositions, Thérèse wrote her autobiography and most letters without revision.³¹ The autobiography's content was intimately her own and she gave expression to it instinctively.³² That was not always the case with some of her poems and prayers which she carefully considered and perhaps re-worked, sometimes receiving help from Pauline (Mother Agnes), as in Poem 54 and *Act of Self-Oblation to Merciful Love*. The Plays provide another source of information regarding Thérèse's spirituality.

Jean Guitton names seven key terms that he finds summarise the thematic material in Thérèse's writings. I have added the parenthesis in each case: the love of the human condition (and desiring to remain on earth for as long as it was God's good pleasure); a sense of reality (and her love of truth);³³ God's dislike of human suffering (in spite of her own intense physical ordeals); the work of the world continued in heaven ('I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth');³⁴ Purgatory, a realm of love; effortless effort (not in a Quietist sense, where one does nothing yet expects to be saved, nor in a Pelagian / Jansenian sense of human effort earning a heavenly reward, but in the sense of following an easy path with great care); and unreal time and the everlasting moment (with the good advice of living in the present moment³⁵).³⁶

In drawing upon these works, it is my intention to present for consideration that Thérèse's pilgrimage to holiness was through the dynamic interaction of *faith* and *sin*, and that this interaction affects our lives today.

³¹ This fact has to be taken into consideration when discussing Mother Agnes' 'editing' of Thérèse's autobiography; the autobiography *needed* editing. For example, the autobiography was hastily written with many grammatical errors and it made reference to private incidents that concerned the Martin family only. See Ida Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 27 for a more detailed analysis of Thérèse's literary style.

³² It is to be noted that Thérèse's sole purpose in writing, other than obeying the order given her to write her memories, is to sing the mercies of the Lord.

³³ SS Manuscript B, 197; LC 205.

³⁴ LC, 102.

³⁵ See SS Manuscript A, 165.

³⁶ See Guitton, *The Spiritual Genius of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 27-58.

B. Literature Relating to Faith, Sin, and other Significant Terms

Introduction

While the focus of this thesis is the understanding of sin and faith in the life and complete writings of Thérèse of Lisieux, the *specific motivation* for writing comes from three texts that relate in some way to the 'sin against faith'. We find these texts in the longer document written by Thérèse sometime between the beginning of June and 25 August 1897, that is, in a period of about two months, and one month before she died. Her words (cited below) are, therefore, not hastily put together; instead they hold deep meaning. In studying these texts one necessarily refers not only to faith and sin but also to other related topics.³⁷

In order to facilitate discussion, the following schema has been applied to the **texts** to indicate the specific issues the words raise:

The number **(1)** refers to theological and related terms evoked by the **text**. The number **(2)** refers to religious experience and its relevance. Each line of the text can suggest consideration from either one or two aspects.

Texts:

- (2) 'At this time I was enjoying
- (1) such a living faith [prior to Easter 1896], such a clear faith,
- (1/2) that the thought of heaven made up all my happiness,
- (1/2) and I was unable to believe (*je ne pouvais croire*)³⁸ there were really impious (*des impies*)³⁹ people who had no faith (*n'ayant pas la foi*).

³⁷ 'Analogy of faith' is a term that means 'the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation' (cf. CCC, # 114).

³⁸ 'I was not able to understand'.

³⁹ 'Le mot allemande pour impie: *gottlos* laisses sous-entendre la situation 'sans Dieu' ['without God']. (See Eva M. Faber, 'Thérèse et la non-croyance' in *L'apport théologique de Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus docteur de l'Église* (2000): 41-68). According to the French / English Dictionary, *impie* means: impious, ungodly, blasphemous (see J. E. Mansion, *Harrap's New Shorter French and English*

- (1/2) I believed [I used to believe] (*je croyais*)⁴⁰ they were actually speaking against their own inner convictions when they denied the existence of heaven ...
- (2) [But] during those very joyful days of the Easter season,
- (2) Jesus made me feel [realise] (*sentir*) that
- (1) there were really souls who have no faith (*qui n'ont pas la foi*), and who, through the abuse of grace lost this precious treasure,
- (1/2) the source of the only real and pure joys ... I would like to be able to express what I feel (*je sens*), but alas! I believe (*je crois*)⁴¹ this is impossible'.⁴²
- (1/2) 'Your child, however, O Lord, has understood Your divine light, and she begs pardon for her brothers [and sisters]. She is resigned to eat the bread of sorrow as long as You desire it; she does not wish to rise up from this table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating until the day set by You.
- (1) Can she not say in her name and in the name of her brothers [and sisters], 'Have pity on us, O Lord, for we are poor sinners!' Oh! Lord, send us away justified.
- (1/2) May all those who were not enlightened by the bright flame of faith one day see it shine.
- (1/2) O Jesus! if it is needful that the table soiled by them be purified by a soul who loves You, then I desire to eat this bread of trial at this table until it pleases You to bring me into Your bright Kingdom. The only grace I ask of You is that I never offend You!'⁴³

Dictionary, new rev. edn., M. Ferlin, ed., D. M. Ledésert and R. P. L. Ledésert (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1967), I: 4.

⁴⁰ 'I thought / felt / believed that ...'

⁴¹ 'I feel'.

⁴² SS Manuscript C, 211f.

⁴³ SS Manuscript C, 212.

For is there a joy greater than that of suffering out of love for You? The more interior the suffering is and the less apparent to the eyes of creatures, the more it rejoices You, O my God!

(1/2) But if my suffering was really unknown to You, which is impossible, I would still be happy to have it,

(1/) if through it I could prevent or make reparation for one single sin against faith (*contra la Foi*).⁴⁴

It is obvious from this arrangement that the themes do indeed relate both to theological and related topics and to religious experience. These will be discussed below, necessarily briefly. But first we refer to the necessity of understanding the meaning of words in the original French language.

The Necessity of Consulting the Original French

It is recognised that one needs to study texts in their contexts and in their original language to determine the precise meaning of words, in Thérèse's case, French. Some examples of this necessity are given throughout the dissertation. Here, for example, we note that Thérèse uses the French *croire* (to believe) 312 times, but it is only the context that shows the precise meaning she intends to give this word. Besides indicating belief in tenets of the Christian faith, *croire* and its derivatives can also occur in phrases like: 'I believe you will not be able to read this ... I had only a few minutes';⁴⁵ 'O brother I beg you to believe me';⁴⁶ 'but to tell the truth, Brother, I rather believe Jesus will treat me like a little lazy thing';⁴⁷ 'I assure you God is much better than you believe';⁴⁸ 'if I had not experienced it, I could not believe it'.⁴⁹ It can also be seen that the word 'to feel' (*sentir*) can overlap with 'to believe' (*croire*) — 'Jesus made me feel' (cited in the text above). In these matters it has been helpful to consult

⁴⁴ SS Manuscript C, 214.

⁴⁵ GC II, 1121 (letter to Sister Marie of the Trinity, 6 June, 1897).

⁴⁶ GC II, 1085 (letter to l'abbé Bellière, 25 April 1897).

⁴⁷ GC II, 1072 (letter to P. Roulland, 19 March 1897).

⁴⁸ GC II, 965 (letter to Léonie, 12 July, 1896).

⁴⁹ SS Manuscript C, 244 (describing how humiliations bring her joy).

the *Les Mots de Sainte Thérèse de L'Enfant-Jésus: concordance general* for cross referencing.⁵⁰

Religious Experience⁵¹

Thérèse uses the French *sentir* (to feel) and its derivatives 333 times. Certainly, there are statements that describe her normal physical experience: '*je sentis mon Coeur batter avec une telle violence*' [on the day of entering Carmel and leaving her father];⁵² '*C'est vrai, je l'ai senti bien souvent*' [the joy of being in a community].⁵³ But we are in a different area with statements such as: '*je sentais combien j'étais faible et imparfait*' [expressing her gratitude to God for preserving her from sin even though she is weak and imperfect];⁵⁴ '*je me suis sentie remplie d'une joie et d'une ferveur*' [at the moment of Mother Geneviève's death]⁵⁵ And what does she actually mean when she makes statements like: '*je croyais, je sentais qu'il y a un Ciel*';⁵⁶ '*Jésus m'a fait sentir qu'il y a véritablement des âmes qui n'ont pas la foi*';⁵⁷ '*jamais je n'ai si bien senti combien le Seigneur est doux*' [for He did not send me this trial until the moment I was capable of bearing it].⁵⁸ Certainly, the statement, 'Jesus made me feel that there were really souls who have no faith' is intriguing. What was this 'feeling'? It reads like a conviction in her spirit rather than an intellectual insight. In these statements there is a mixture of cerebral understanding of the faith and religious experience.

⁵⁰ See *Les Mots de Sainte Thérèse de L'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face*. Concordance générale établie par Soeur Geneviève et al (Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 219-222. This has been used in conjunction with *Histoire D'Une Âme de Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux selon la disposition originale des autographes nouvellement établie par Conrad De Meester*. Préface du Cardinal Godfried Danneels (Moerzeke (Belgique): Carmel-Edit, 1999).

⁵¹ Much documentation exists that discusses 'religious experience'. For summaries, see Tad Dunne, 'Experience', *NDCS* : 365-377; David Hay, 'Experience, religious', *NWDCS* : 295-298; see also, Merton, 'The Inner Experience', William James, 'The value of Saintliness', in *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*: 358-412.

⁵² SS Manuscript A, 147.

⁵³ SS Manuscript C, 215.

⁵⁴ See SS Manuscript A, 149.

⁵⁵ See SS Manuscript A, 170.

⁵⁶ SS Manuscript B, 191.

⁵⁷ SS Manuscript C, 211.

⁵⁸ SS Manuscript C, 214.

Regarding experience, Dermot Lane states that one can begin to talk about religious experience from within the realm of a depth experience.⁵⁹ 'To this extent', he says, 'every religious experience is always a depth experience, though not every depth-experience is necessarily a religious experience'.⁶⁰ It seems that for Thérèse, theological insight is wedded to religious experience. In fact, most of her autobiography is one long exposition of various experiences, some of greater depth than others and many of which are also religious experiences. And according to Lane, a religious experience is one in which 'God is co-experienced and co-known through the different experiences and knowledge of the human subject'.⁶¹ Dealing with her depth / religious experiences under various kinds of images and with seeming ease, Thérèse allows us to read her theological perspective on faith, sin and grace. This statement, for example, reveals the *depth* of her faith: 'Jesus was sleeping as usual in my little boat ... Jesus is so fatigued with always having to take the initiative and to attend to others that He hastens to take advantage of the repose I offer to Him'.⁶² This one shows her confidence in the power of prayer to 'save souls': 'The Almighty has given [us] as *fulcrum*: Himself alone: as *lever*: Prayer which burns with a fire of love. And it is in this way that they have *lifted the world*'.⁶³

⁵⁹ Depth experiences are those that speak to us of realities such as meaning, value, goodness, beauty, and truth. 'The discovery of these realities is made through the mediation of an ordinary human experience' (cf. Dermot A. Lane, *The Experience of God: an invitation to do theology*, 2nd rev. edn. (Dublin: Veritas, 2003), 24.

⁶⁰ Lane, 24f.

⁶¹ Lane, 28.

⁶² SS Manuscript A, 165.

⁶³ See SS Manuscript A, 258. See also: Sandra M. Schneiders, 'The Object of the Study of Spirituality' in *Minding the Spirit*: 50-54; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; Michael J. Buckley, 'The Concept of Experience; Christian Religious Experience: The Categorical Dimension, Christian Religious Experience: The Transcendental' in *The Rise of Modern Atheism and the Religious Epoché*. Presidential Address, *CTSA Proceedings* 47 (1992): 73-83. This article traces the historical development of 'experience' through Aristotle, Kant, James and John Dewey. From the latter, Buckley summarises that there is a close connection between doing and suffering or undergoing forms that we call experience; and perhaps the failure to appreciate the interaction that there is in experience has permitted the bracketing of those very events that in the actual history of belief have proved most cogent' (see p. 75). In claiming that religious experience is often more explanatory of the existence of God than theological explanation, Buckley cites Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, intro. Leslie Fiedler (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 74. From the fourth letter of Simone Weil to Henri Perrin in that book, we read: 'The greatest blessing you have brought me is of another order. In gaining my friendship by your charity (which I have never met anything to equal), you have provided me with a source of the most compelling and pure inspiration that is to be found among human things. For *nothing among human things* has such power to keep our gaze fixed ever more intensely upon God, than friendship for the friends of God' [Buckley's emphasis], (that is, the *experience* of friendship).

Denis Edwards also deals comprehensively with 'the experience of God'. Speaking of the mystery dimension of our lives, he states that in the human experience 'there are three experiences which always and necessarily occur together — our experience of another, our experience of ourselves and our experience of infinite mystery. All are present within consciousness.'⁶⁴ That description also well fits Thérèse who, regarding the experience of infinite mystery, tells us that she lived daily in the presence of God and at night dreamt of nature's birds and flowers.

Faith (Grk. *pistis*)⁶⁵

Faith is a complex act. St Thomas Aquinas identified three elements in the act of faith, each associated with a Latin title: faith is *believing truths* revealed by God (*credere Deum*), it is *relying on God* as the One who reveals truly (*credere Deo*), and faith is *clinging to God* with one's whole being (*credere in Deum*).⁶⁶ With regard to Thérèse and these elements in the act of faith, she eagerly sought to learn about God in order to know and love God more. For example, at the time of preparing for her First Communion she 'listened with great attention' to the instructions of Father Domin, 'even writing up a summary of them'.⁶⁷ Father Domin was very pleased with Thérèse's answers and he called her his *little doctor*.⁶⁸ The 'articles of faith' stated in a simple catechetical format became her anchor.

⁶⁴ Denis Edwards, *Human Experience of God* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1983), 25.

⁶⁵ 1. conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man's [sic] relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervour born of faith and joined with it.

a. relating to God

1. the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ

b. relating to Christ

1. a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of

c. the religious beliefs of Christians

d. belief with the predominant idea of trust (or confidence) whether in God or in Christ, springing from faith in the same

2. fidelity, faithfulness

a. the character of one who can be relied on (see New Testament Greek Lexicon):

<http://www.searchgodsword.org/lex/grk> [Accessed 21/01/08]

⁶⁶ ST II-II, 2.2. Cited in Gerald Gleeson, 'Crisis and Opportunity in Faith', *Compass Theology Review* 34/2 (Winter 2002): 17-22.

⁶⁷ SS Manuscript A, 75.

⁶⁸ SS Manuscript A, 81.

From childhood, Thérèse experienced a special and, perhaps, unusual longing for the Homeland of heaven. She seemed to naturally grasp, in faith, continuity between earth and heaven. 'The experiences of God makes us taste in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of our journey here below [when] we shall see God "face to face" (cf. Ex. 33:11), as he is'.⁶⁹ It was, therefore, particularly distressing for her, years later in her 'trial of faith', to be tempted to doubt the existence of life after death. This, a Christian professes to believe in giving assent to Article XII of the Creed: I believe in life everlasting.

As for *credere in Deum*, Thérèse believed in the God of Jesus Christ. In her childhood years she came to know that God through the love of her family; in her 'trial of faith', when faced with a terrible darkness of unbelief, she believed even when she felt she was facing the abyss.

Thérèse's catechetical education would have been compiled from the teachings of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which found their way into the likes of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Priests*, *The Catechism of the Council of Trent (Roman Catechism)*, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*. Her faith education was also richly enlightened in conversation with her parents and siblings. Her father, Louis Martin, was a keen student of sacred literature and shared his interests with his family. Though not versed in Latin, he would have had some knowledge of the reasons for the convening of Vatican Council I (1869-1870) — Thérèse was born in 1873 — and of the contents of the *Documents* from that Council.⁷⁰ I argue that the current thought in the Catholic Church at the time,

⁶⁹ See CCC # 1023.

⁷⁰ *Documents of Vatican Council I*. Selected and translated by John F. Broderick (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1971). Although the Vatican Council was convoked (by Pius IX in 1869) to deal with issues of widest import, the errors and calamities of the times, the matter with which in fact it principally dealt was the Papacy; and the outcome of the Council was the settlement of long-standing controversies concerning the position and authority of the Pope in the Church. The Vatican Council I decreed the infallibility of the pope when speaking *ex cathedra*, that is, when as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church. This had relevance for Catholicism in France. France found itself divided between Gallicanism and the New Ultramontanism. Gallicanism was of two kinds: political and theological. Its intent was to modify and control the power of the pope both politically and in matters theological and to grant to the State succeeded power. On the other hand, the New Ultramontanism, primarily in France and as a reaction to Gallicanism, favoured a more moderate response to any of extreme proposals of Gallicanism [see Dom Cuthbert Butler, *The Vatican Council 1869-1870* (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1930), especially

regarding rationalism and liberalism, influenced Thérèse's view to a large extent. It was a deep concern to her later that those who once had the faith (Catholic faith) could lose it through being beguiled by false / extreme teachings, and it seems very likely that she viewed the 'sin against faith' in the light of these then current movements (cf. Manuscript C).⁷¹ A catechetical formula of faith across all ages is that 'Faith is a supernatural theological virtue by which we believe in God and in the truths that God proposes to us, on the authority of God who reveals them'.⁷² Marie-Eugène comments:

pages 11-62 which details these movements]. In November 1887, Thérèse accompanied her father and her sister, Céline, on a pilgrimage to Rome. One of the reasons for the pilgrimage was for the Ultramontanists to show their support for the Papacy. It was on this occasion that Thérèse sought permission from Pius IX's successor, Leo XIII, to enter Carmel at fifteen. (see also, Frederick L. Miller, *The Trial of Faith of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux* (New York: Alba House, 1998): 132-134) for Miller's summary of the 'exceptionally complete catechesis Thérèse had received as a child').

Thérèse would, therefore, have developed a personal experiential response to Vatican Council I through her close association with the culture of Catholicism in France in the nineteenth century, through her father's interest in matters political and theological, and by her pilgrimage to Rome in 1887. Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical, *Aeterni Patris* (1879) describes in trenchant tone the possible meaning of the French '**impies**': 'Everyone knows with certitude that a fearful tempest now torments the Church, and that evils afflict society ... Hence, to our great sorrow and that of all good persons, and to such injury of souls as can never be sufficiently deplored, we see everywhere the propagation of **impiety**, corruption of morals, unbridled license, contagion of perverse opinions of every kind and of all types of vices and enormities, and violation of divine and human laws; and this to an extent that not only our holy religion but also human society is disturbed and rent asunder in the most lamentable way [my emphasis in order to highlight the interest of this thesis in Thérèse's use of the French *impies*] (*Aeterni Patris* 13,14). Jean-François Six notes that Thérèse — [before Jesus convinced her otherwise] — 'shared in the generally accepted view of the First Vatican Council that it was difficult, if not impossible, for a human being to be "impious"; that the only explanations for this position were a lack of reason or immorality [Thérèse died 1897. *Aeterni Patris* is dated 1879] (cf. Six, *Light of the Night: Last Eighteen Months in the Life of Thérèse of Lisieux*, 27). Six's opinion seems to be at odds with that of *Aeterni Patris*. Was Vatican Council I (or Six's reading of it), therefore, 'out of touch' with the religious temperature of nineteenth century France where new anti-religious movements often associated with nationalism, liberalism and the like were beginning to take hold ?

Pascendi Dominicii Gregis (1907) Papal Encyclical Pius X, On the Doctrine of the Modernists, was also consulted in the hope that it, too, would shed light on the precise meaning of Thérèse's nineteenth century '**des impies**' [Thérèse died 1897]. Speaking of the 'modernists' and their 'skilful' and 'astute 'noxious devices', Pius X writes: 'they lay the axe not to the branches and shoots, but to the very roots, that is, to the faith and its deepest fibres', # 3. It is uncertain from Thérèse's text (SS Manuscript C, 214) whether she is referring to the 'modernists' specifically. Christopher O'Donnell's assessment is the one that most likely states the reasoning behind Thérèse's '**des impies**': 'From the time of the Enlightenment there was a rationalistic rejection of faith in the name of science and reason; there was also a defensive retreat into pietism ... The society of her time was marked by a militant anti-clericalism and atheism' (cf. O'Donnell, 'Living by Faith', in *Love in the Heart of the Church*: 166-185, at 166.

⁷¹ See SS Manuscript C, 214.

⁷² See CCC, 1814; Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, 'Faith and Supernatural Contemplation', in *I Want to See God: A Practical Synthesis of Carmelite Spirituality*, Vol. I, trans. M. Verda Clare, CSC (Notre Dame IN: Fides Publishers, 1953): 518-549, at 523f.

The word 'virtue', here, signifies not a facility acquired by the repetition of acts, but a power that makes one capable of performing an act; in the present case, 'that makes one capable of believing in God. This virtue is 'supernatural'. It is given by God; hence it is superadded to our natural faculties and forms part of the supernatural organism received at baptism. Faith is a 'theological' virtue. It makes us adhere 'to God' who is the material object of faith; and, since we believe 'on the authority of God who is Truth', God becomes also the motive, the formal object of faith.⁷³

Other classical explanations of faith were found in: *The Documents of Vatican II*, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *The Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (2000), a book by Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why it Matters*,⁷⁴ the Papal Encyclicals of John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and *Fides et Ratio* (1998) and Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) and *Spe Salvi* (2007).

Also consulted was Karl Rahner (1904-1984) and his summaries of the Theological Creed, the Anthropological Creed, Future-Oriented Creed,⁷⁵ and his summary of the

⁷³ Ibid., 524. 'The theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, are 'infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his [sic] children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being' (CCC # 1813). Karl Rahner's understanding of the 'supernatural existential' as 'a permanent modification of the human spirit which transforms its natural dynamism into an ontological drive to the God of grace and glory' suggests that the 'soul' is humanly oriented to grace — (which a person may either accept or reject). (see Gerard A. McCool, 'Relationship Between Nature and Grace: The Supernatural Existential', in Gerald A. McCool, ed., *A Rahner Reader* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), 185. Rahner writes: 'One can never be simply a 'natural' man [sic] and a sinner' (ibid., 220). We can raise a question at this point: The CCC does not state — as does the Marie-Eugène's quotation above — that the theological virtues are 'infused at Baptism'. In not doing so, does the CCC implicitly suggest that these virtues are offered to the non-baptised as well, for example, 'anonymous Christians'? McCool writes: 'Rahner's theology of the anonymous Christian is an extension of his theology of the supernatural existential. Through implicit faith, men [sic] who have never accepted or even encountered Christian Revelation become, not just anonymous theists, but anonymous Christians. In other words, they place an act of conscious, though implicit, faith in the Triune God of Christian Revelation' (ibid., 211). Rahner states: 'Anonymous Christians ... are enlightened by the light of God's grace which God denies to no man' [sic] (Ibid., 78). Again we cite Rahner: 'In the acceptance of himself man [sic] is accepting Christ as the absolute perfection and guarantee of his own anonymous movement towards God by grace, and the acceptance of this belief is again not an act of man alone but the work of God's grace which is the grace of Christ, and this means in its turn the grace of his Church which is only the continuation of the mystery of Christ, his permanent visible presence in our history' (ibid., 213). From this argument we conclude that Rahner would not agree with Marie-Eugène that the virtue of faith is 'superadded' to one's natural faculties — infused, yes, but not 'superadded'.

⁷⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christian Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

⁷⁵ See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978), 454, 456, 457.

Christian faith.⁷⁶ Another source was Rahner's essay on the person of Jesus Christ and on the self-bestowal of God in Jesus Christ: 'It is an act whereby Jesus is seen as the Christ', he writes.⁷⁷ This article emphasises the relational aspect of the faith. This faith, Rahner says, has a content, 'not constructed merely from one's personal subjectivity, but taken from the faith of the church ... The man Jesus commits himself to human beings in the faith of the church and with the church ... To which to find this faith by relying solely on oneself would be a fatal individualism';⁷⁸ This faith requires commitment; it 'occurs as a result of an absolute trust, by which one commits *oneself* to the other person and thereby embraces the rights and privileges of such a total self-abandonment with a hope without reservations'.⁷⁹ Without a doubt, there was personal commitment to Christ from Thérèse.

Rahner is fully aware that 'contemporary human beings will admit that the doctrine of God's incarnation seems at first sight like pure mythology which can no longer be "realized"'.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, he argues, one needs only to understand the doctrine correctly to realize that it is completely orthodox and worthy of belief. He then proceeds to explain the doctrine so that it can be correctly understood. He begins by this statement: 'God remains God and does not change, and Jesus is a real, genuine, and finite man with his own [human] experiences, in adoration before the incomprehensibility of God, a free and obedient man, like us in all things'.⁸¹ This, he notes, is the fundamental affirmation of the Christian faith.

Rahner's complete article — only briefly noted here — allows for certain comparisons to be made with the content of Thérèse's writings: a respect for the church and her long tradition;⁸² faith-in-action when it combines self-surrender to Jesus Christ with

⁷⁶ See Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt, ed., *The Content of the Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writings*, trans.ed. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 45.

⁷⁷ All quotations that follow in this segment are from Rahner, 'I Believe in Jesus Christ', in *The Content of Faith*: 283-286.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See SS Manuscript B, 194.

absolute trust;⁸³ all human beings are spiritual creatures ‘and the more radically this is realized ... the freer the person is’;⁸⁴ great appreciation of both the gift of Godself and one’s own humanity;⁸⁵ and as Jesus surrendered himself to the Father, so does Thérèse.⁸⁶ One’s *understanding* of the meaning of the word ‘God’, says Rahner, is not the central issue, rather it is the experience of ‘the unconfused and inseparable unity of God and humankind, in which God remains totally God, the human is radically human, and both are one, uncompounded and inseparable, in this Jesus who is the Christ of faith’.⁸⁷ Reverence for this mystery would have come for Thérèse through her many hours of contemplative prayer.

In Rahner's concluding remarks we see the theologian who ‘gives the people of God experiential union with the faith by leading them into their own deepest mystery’, and one who, therefore, places wisdom above knowledge for its own sake.⁸⁸

If we entrust ourselves to [Jesus] in a radical way, and exist in attendance on him alone, we experience directly *who* he is, and this trust of ours is *founded* on who he is. This circle cannot be broken. Whether one knows it explicitly or not, one is always seeing God and man in one. The Christian believes that in Jesus of Nazareth he finds both as one.⁸⁹

‘The church is right to value highly its ancient Christological formulas, the product of a long and troubled history of the faith’, states Rahner. ‘Every other formula’, he teaches, ‘must be tested to see whether it clearly maintains that faith in Jesus does not

⁸³ See *Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love*, SS Appendices, 276f and *PN An Unpetalled Rose*, PN; 51. See also this dissertation's *Appendices B* and *D*.

⁸⁴ I take this to mean that a truly spiritual person has largely overcome the impediments in his or her life that arise from the *ego*, or from the ‘false self’. When one is not thus impeded, one is freer. See *LC*, 102 for an example of Thérèse's interior freedom: ‘If my God were to say to me: “If you die right now, you will have very great glory; if you die at eighty, your glory will not be as great, but it will please Me much more”. I wouldn't hesitate to answer: “My God, I want to die at eighty, for I'm not seeking my own glory but simply Your pleasure.”’

⁸⁵ This appreciation of her humanity was veiled in Thérèse's writings. She did not undervalue herself, but frequent reference to her ‘littleness’ might lead one to think that this was so. Further, she did not have the psychological language by which to explain her humanness. But there can be no doubt that Thérèse considered her personhood as gifted by God: ‘I shall begin to sing what I must sing eternally: *‘The Mercies of the Lord’*’ (see *SS Manuscript A*, 13).

⁸⁶ Again, see *Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love*. This prayer is primarily addressed to the Trinity.

⁸⁷ Thérèse died with the words ‘Oh! I love Him! ... My God, I love You!’ on her lips (see *SS Epilogue*, 271).

⁸⁸ See Harvey D. Egan, ‘Translation Editor's Preface’, in *The Content of Faith*, xi.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 286.

acknowledge merely a religious genius or the prophet of a passing phase in the history of religions, but the absolute mediator of salvation now and always'. And he concludes with the words: 'But wherever and in whatever way a person accepts this in faith and trust, he enacts in such faith what Christianity confesses concerning Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen'.⁹⁰

Along similar lines, Jean Lafrance writes: 'Nowadays, we speak of an adult faith, of a living and committed faith, but it is important to understand ... these expressions.'⁹¹ 'A true Christian', he writes, 'is one who has encountered the face of Jesus Christ and whose encounter has not left him unchanged'.⁹² This is a particularly significant reference when we consider Thérèse's devotion to the Holy Face that led to her contemplative gaze on the person of the Crucified Christ.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Cardinal Ratzinger also raises the issue of an 'adult faith'. He claims our age is sorely in need of genuine, deep, adult faith. On the eve of his election to the Papacy, Cardinal Ratzinger said: 'To have a clear faith according to the church's creed is today often labelled fundamentalism, while relativism, letting ourselves be carried away by any wind of doctrine, appears as the only appropriate attitude to today's times. A dictatorship of relativism is established that recognizes nothing definite and leaves only one's own ego and one's own desires as the final measure ... An adult faith does not follow the waves of fashion and the latest novelty (see Jim Bittermann, *CNN*, reporting on 'What contributed to Benedict XVI's rise?' [Accessed 22/05/05]. Bernard Bro gives an alternative reading of 'adult', that of conscious self-surrender. Speaking of Thérèse, he writes: 'She transfigured all fear into an opportunity to hand oneself over. Gone was the myth of the Christian "adult". Long live the children of God!' (see Bernard Bro, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 244. These views are not opposing, rather the second one completes the first.

⁹² Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, 143. It is of value to cite the passage leading up to this quotation. Lafrance writes: 'Nowadays, we speak of an adult faith, of a living and committed faith, but it is important to understand each other well about these expressions. It is not enough to have faith, that is, to believe in Christ and to be adults in the human sense of the word. It is not enough either to pray, to attend Mass or even to commit ourselves in the name of our faith. We may also have an enlightened faith, teach theology, proclaim the Word of God, be devoted to others and lead a very worthy moral life without being a Christian in the true sense of the word ... We may then wonder: what makes a person a true believer? To answer this question, we must simply examine the testimony of the Gospel and of the lives of saints. A true Christian is someone who has encountered the face of Jesus Christ and whose encounter has not left him [sic] unchanged'. Thérèse is an example. In actual fact her devotion was focused on the 'face' of Jesus Christ.

Extension to the Act of Faith

The technical terms *orthodoxy*, *orthopoiesis* and *orthopraxis* sum up the content of the act of faith, more commonly referred to as creed, code and cult.⁹³ The term *orthodoxy* relates to the *content* of the faith found in the Creed, the Our Father and the Beatitudes. *Orthopoiesis* concerns the moral implications of the act of faith and is usually summed up in terms of the commandments. *Orthopraxis* is ‘the critical correlation of theory and practice whereby each influences and transforms the other’⁹⁴ — faith-in-action. Action for justice, good liturgy and fervent prayer are examples of orthopraxis. Though not educated to critical analysis, Thérèse as a contemplative nun would have had her own ‘slant’ on these. For example, she shows her understanding of orthopraxis by her life and great desire to ‘save souls’ — which she expressed in prayer, penance, and in writing letters where appropriate. In summary: *orthodoxy* is about knowing the t/Truth; *orthopoiesis* is about living according to the truth in a way that changes the subject and the recipient; and *orthopraxis* is the application of the truth in practice.⁹⁵ Faith (or the search for ‘truth’) is a mix of theology, experience and a ministry of service.

Different Classes of Faith – But Still the One Faith

One might ask what is to be gained today by studying the faith / sin vision of the nineteenth century Thérèse? A simple answer might be that human nature does not change. As far as nineteenth century or twenty-first human desiring is concerned, there is always the desire in the human heart for happiness — be that understood in terms of God, or in terms of some other ultimate value to which one holds, for example, love, truth, beauty, goodness [Schneiders]. This human desire for happiness can be named the spiritual dimension in all human lives — the transcendent orientation to ‘ineffable Mystery’. It is a desire to reach an ideal outside of oneself through acts of self-transcendence. In purely down-to-earth terms, faith is ‘that basic faith in the worthwhileness of existence and in the final graciousness of our lives even

⁹³ See Lane, *The Experience of God*, 85.

⁹⁴ Lane, 86.

⁹⁵ See Lane, 86.

in the midst of absurdity'.⁹⁶ Happiness can thus be found in adhering to this basic faith stance (primal faith, primordial faith or radical faith (*radix*: root)); and, indeed, there are many people, it seems, who live by this ideal alone. It is the invitation to accept and to give 'root' to one's humanity and to live contentedly in this world. It could also be called 'the faith of secularity'.⁹⁷

Again, different 'stages' of faith can be named and these can be variously expressed — for example, primordial faith and religious faith.⁹⁸ These particular two have many points in common. But there is a fundamental difference. 'A difference in faith exists at least at the level of consciousness, in virtue of the fact that in one case faith [religious] is normally referred to a transcendent reality whereas in the other case faith [primordial] is centred exclusively on reality as confined to this world. Religious faith deepens, extends, and transforms primordial faith. There is a degree of continuity as well as discontinuity between primordial faith and religious faith'.⁹⁹ *Christian* religious faith invites one to find that 'final graciousness' (referred to above) in a personal God made present in Jesus Christ and experienced through the action of the Holy Spirit. For a catholic, this is full *religious* faith. Faith is the response of a human being to God as truth and goodness and as the one source of salvation. In Carmel,

⁹⁶ Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 119.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁸ Lane summaries James Fowler's listing: (a) the imitative faith of the pre-school child; (b) the literal phase of faith found in early adolescence; (c) the synthetic stage of conventional faith in the young adult; (d) the phase of critical appropriation of faith; (e) the phase of reworking one's faith before midlife; (f) the phase of universal faith which is marked by inclusiveness (see Dermot Lane, *The Experience of God*, 97). James Fowler's original work can be found in: James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (Blackburn VIC: Collins Dove, 1987), 133, 149, 172, 182, 198, 200). Laurence Freeman also names 'levels' of faith development but his levels apply more to stages *within* faith, that is, the stages a praying person could expect to pass through as a result of persevering prayer: (1) a hesitant beginning with distractions; (2) one is confronted by one's 'false-self'; (3) seeing oneself as one really is — the experience of incompleteness — but persevering just the same; (4) one moves to the 'true self'; (5) one experiences the God self; (6) one moves into the boundlessness of God in a journey of infinite expansion (cited by Laurence Freeman, 'Christian Meditation', in Laurence Freeman and Richard Rohr, *Seeking Peace: A Dialogue on Jesus* (Houston: Medio Media, 2004), CDs 6/6). Jean Lafrance, speaking of the 'curve of confrontation between God and the sinful person that comes up in various forms in the writings of St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross', names the stages as follows: (1) The combat with God, a combat that is activated in a conversion or a desire to give oneself to God; (2) Letting God have God's way with us and surrendering ourselves to him; (3) The death of the Old Self; (4) The life hidden in God with Christ or the transforming union (see Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, 160). Bernard Lonergan names stages of conversion: intellectual, moral, and religious (see *Method in Theology*, 1973).

⁹⁹ Lane, *The Experience of God*, 77.

Thérèse's great spiritual mentor was St John of the Cross who writes: 'faith alone is the proximate and proportionate means whereby the soul is united with God'.¹⁰⁰

The Obedience of Faith

The phrase 'the obedience of faith' appears in the letters of St Paul (see Rm 1:5; 16:26) and in the Vatican Council document, *Dei Verbum*.¹⁰¹ Daniel Gallagher discusses this in some detail.¹⁰² Gallagher claims that the bishops at Vatican Council II, and the Catholic theologians upon whom they relied, were familiar with the contribution to biblical research made by protestant theologians (such as Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann) in placing emphasis 'on the total human response required by authentic Christian faith'.¹⁰³ *Dei Verbum* states:

'The obedience of faith' (Rm 16:26; cf. 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) must be our response to God who reveals. By faith one freely commits oneself entirely to God, making 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals', and willingly assenting to the revelation given by God.¹⁰⁴

Yet, this quotation from *DV* (and indeed, that from Romans) can still leave one with the impression that the emphasis is on only one aspect of the meaning of the word 'obedience' — 'conforming to some command or authority'; whereas 'Barth's greatest contribution to the theological development of obedience', states Gallagher, 'lies in his extensive treatment of the obedience of the Son of God'.¹⁰⁵ Gallagher concludes that:

¹⁰⁰ See Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *I Want to See God: A Practical Synthesis of Carmelite Spirituality* citing St John of the Cross, *Ascent*, Bk. II, ix; Peers, I, 98. Marie-Eugène's text continues: 'The faith of which Saint John of the Cross speaks is a living and active faith; that is, it is animated by charity. Uninformed, imperfect faith (i.e. without charity), although still a virtue, is an imperfect and dead virtue: "rightly is that faith without works called dead, lazy", says the Council of Trent' (cf. Session VI, Ch. Vii), see *I Want to See God*, 519, fn. 2.

¹⁰¹ See *DV*, # 5.

¹⁰² See Daniel Gallagher, 'The Obedience of Faith: Barth, Bultmann, and *Dei Verbum*', *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 10 (2006): 39-63. Adrian Walker writes: 'True obedience proceeds from a filial attitude that rests assured in the intimate awareness that I belong to my father's house, that I do not have to justify myself, as if I were only conditionally a member of the family' (see Adrian J. Walker, 'The Gift of Simplicity: Reflections of Obedience in the Work of Adrienne von Speyr', *Communio*, 34 (Winter 2007): 576-584.

¹⁰³ Gallagher, 40. This emphasis owes much to existentialism — a philosophy particularly associated with the names of Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger and that stresses the importance of passionate individual action in deciding questions of both morality and truth.

¹⁰⁴ *DV*, #5.

¹⁰⁵ Gallagher, 47.

In the works of Rudolf Bultmann we find the most radical identification of obedience and faith in twentieth-century theology, to the extent that obedience becomes the operative criterion for determining the presence of faith.¹⁰⁶

Jesus' obedience is a response made in love. The obedience of faith is an important issue in this dissertation which bases its thought upon 'sin being the refusal to obey the call to faith offered through grace' — that is, upon the possibility of 'disobedience of faith'. Thérèse made determined efforts, especially after her 'conversion', to 'break her bonds' so that her will might become free from any 'false self' 'voice' in order to follow the will of God more unswervingly. By her fidelity in thus discerning the interior movements of the Spirit in her soul she became lovingly obedient to God's 'voice'.

The Act of Believing (The Act of 'Faithing')

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, with recourse to Thomas Aquinas' *De Veritate*, explains in an interesting way the actual act of believing (what actually is occurring when one says 'I believe'). He writes: 'Belief is not at all mere opinion, as we express it in the sentence, "I believe the weather will be fine tomorrow". 'We live faith, not as a hypothesis, but as a certainty on which our life is based.' 'It is not opinion that leaves room for doubt; rather it is certainty that God has shown Godself and has opened up for us the view of truth itself.' 'Thomas Aquinas defines believing as "thinking with assent".¹⁰⁷ In summary, Ratzinger says:

¹⁰⁶ Gallagher, 55. Bultmann understands faith as obedience 'in a radical identification': 'Faith is obedience, because in it man's [sic] pride is broken. What is actually a forgone conclusion becomes for man in his pride what is most difficult. He thinks he will be lost if he surrenders himself —if he surrenders himself as the man he has made of himself ... Obedience is faith because it is the abandonment of pride, and man's tearing himself free from himself' (see Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964), II, 154, cited in Gallagher, 57). In reference to Rom 1:5, Brendan Byrne states that 'While obedience and faith are closely related concepts in Paul's understanding (cf. 10:16a and 10:16b), it is unhelpful to regard them as virtually interchangeable ... "Obedience" indicates response in a general kind of way; "faith" defines what precisely that response should be' (see Brendan Byrne, *Romans, Sacra Pagina Series* Vol. 6, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 45f. With regard to Rom 16:26, Byrne says that the phrase 'obedience of faith' in this context can be taken to mean not the recipients of what is 'made known' but the context [the command of the eternal God] of the 'obedience of faith' required by God (see Byrne, 464). The subject 'the obedience of Jesus Christ' is worthy of long contemplation which this thesis cannot attempt. Thérèse, however, understood its meaning. It was in imitation of Jesus Christ's obedience that she made her *Self-Offering to Merciful Love*.

¹⁰⁷ The explanation continues: 'This coexistence of thinking and assent is something faith has in common with science. It is characteristic of science for thinking to result in assent. Now faith is like

Faith is an anticipation that is made possible by the will through the heart being touched by God. It grasps in advance what we cannot yet see and cannot yet have. This anticipation sets us in motion. We have to follow that motion. Because assent has been anticipated, thought has to try to catch up with that and is also constantly having to overcome the contrary movement [to doubt and uncertainty]. This is the situation of believing so long as man [sic] stands within this history.¹⁰⁸

John Reid, along with Cardinal Ratzinger, also clearly distinguishes between faith and belief. Reid then continues along these lines: 'Every secular faith or belief is recognizable by its many potential contraries; divine faith has only one real alternative: unbelief in the sense of non-faith or anti-faith'.¹⁰⁹ 'Faith necessarily appears as one belief among others', Reid writes, 'but it alone is a grace, one which is converted into and remains a free act and which must mature as we ourselves progress (Rom 1:17)'.¹¹⁰ Reid then refers to the amazement that Jesus expresses when he 'finds a flawless faith' (cf. Mt 8:10; 9:2; 15:28). Jesus found faith an uncommon virtue. For us today, even if we 'have faith', 'no one can be sure of holding on to his or her

science in that regard. Faith is a decision, a certainty. Faith is, therefore, not a matter of keeping oneself open in all directions. Yet the relationship between thought and assent is different in faith from what it is in science, in knowledge in general. In the case of scientific demonstration, the data before one's eyes compels one's assent whereas the structure of the act of faith is quite different. In faith, the thought process and the assent balance each other. This means that in the act of believing, the assent comes about in a different way from the way it does in the act of knowing. The assent comes not through the degree of evidence bringing the process of thought to its conclusion, but by an act of will, in connection with which the thought process remains open and still under way. Here, the degree of evidence does not turn the thought into assent; rather, the will commands assent, even though the thought process is still under way. (According to Ratzinger), Thomas Aquinas explains that because the process of thought has not attained to assent in its own way, but on the basis of the will, it has not yet found its rest; it is still reflecting and is still in a state of seeking. It has not yet reached satisfaction. That is also why it is that within faith, however firm the assent, a contrary motion can arise: Struggling and questioning thought remains present which ever and again has to seek its light from that essential light which shines into the heart from the Word of God. The human person, in and of one's self alone, cannot bring about believing: it has of its nature the character of a dialogue ... a dialogue between the lover and the beloved. It is only because the depth of the soul — the heart — has been touched by God's Word that the whole structure of spiritual powers is sent in motion and unites in the Yes of believing. Responding to this is faith. (Taken from Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Faith and Theology*: Address on the occasion of the conferring of an honorary doctorate in theology by the Theological Faculty of Wrocław / Breslau, in Stephan Otto Horn and Vinzenz Pfnür, eds., *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*. Presented by the Association of the former Students of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005):17-28).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. See also, Marie-Eugène de la Child Jesus, 'Faith', in *I Want to See God*: 524-528.

¹⁰⁹ John P. Reid, *Man Without God*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1971), 7. In aiming to speak on many different levels, this dissertation does not consistently use Reid's fine distinction. It certainly treats 'divine faith' but it also holds a wide range of possibilities for the word 'belief' including 'divine faith'. Hopefully, this will be clear within context.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

faith'.¹¹¹ This is so because 'faith is subject to a degree of tension which is intrinsic to the human condition, and as such inescapable, and emerges with apparently paradoxical qualities'.¹¹² He continues: 'These, if nothing else, disclose the difficulty and precariousness of believing, the pressures and temptations to which the believer is exposed, all of which contribute to the sources of strength available to unbelief.'¹¹³ The supreme trial, Reid notes, is questioning whether one *really* believes. But 'if faith were not so hard or so rare it would be worth that much less and could not achieve so much'.¹¹⁴ 'From this point of view, the Christian acquires a new awareness of faith when he or she takes a close look at unbelief in the sense of non-faith or anti-faith'.¹¹⁵ Reid's view dates from Vatican Council II. Thérèse would not have thought along these lines — in these categories — still her close union with God allows her to somehow 'see' that God's loving mercy is all-inclusive. This experience leads to her interest in those 'outside the faith'. Perhaps it is because faith is so precious a gift that its careless total or partial loss is so serious a fault. It is like returning the gift to the Giver.¹¹⁶ Thérèse *really* believes even when she feels most acutely that she does not.

¹¹¹ John Reid, *Man Without God*, 6. In his book, Reid also treats the topic of 'The Unbelief of Believers'. This he does in three stages: the theological status of this question; three degrees of belief-unbelief; and, thirdly, what unbelief, properly understood, can reveal of the nature and function of faith (see 110-131). With regard to the *first*, Reid says: 'When unbelief is viewed as an integral part of the question of faith itself, it assumes at last its proper theological identity and its importance for the spiritual life of all people, believer and unbeliever alike. (111). It is a grave mistake to approach unbelief either as a particular vice or as the status exclusively of those visibly and voluntarily separated from religion (113). Theological concern is focusing more and more on that mysterious point of conjunction of faith and unbelief, bringing both into a single complex perspective and refusing to analyse either apart from the other' (112). Unbelief, as a theological problem, will be situated in both a dogmatic and an apologetic framework, speaking appropriately to the witness of Scripture and understandably to the people of today' (131). Concerning the *second* Reid writes: 'Faith embraces no metaphysical world-view (as in Gnosticism) arrived at independently of God's revelation and the history of salvation. Faith can never be reduced to a view of the world because it relates primarily to a historical experience which carried its own distinctive understanding of God and man, one inspired by God Himself' (129). Concerning the *third* Reid writes: 'It is a great mistake to circumscribe faith, essentially and pre-eminently historical and transcendent as it is, by a moralistic demand ... For Biblical faith the overriding truth is that man's moral integrity has no control over the mercy of God; indeed, the will of man, which is to say, man himself [sic], is redeemed by that mercy while yet remaining subject to the grip of evil. It is not a straightforward movement of good will leading to moral betterment but deliverance through God's forgiveness. The free decision of faith is always a response to the call to accept the forgiving and liberating word of God — a free response, yet set free by God's grace' (130).

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Reid, *Man Without God*, 7.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ It maybe takes a long time before one really appreciates that faith is a *gift*.

Sin (Grk. *Hamartia*)¹¹⁷

At the beginning of this section it is important that attention be drawn to the phrase ‘prevent or make reparation for one single sin against *faith*’ used by Thérèse in Manuscript C.¹¹⁸

La faute and *le péché* — Different Meanings?

In Thérèse’s original French, we note ‘*empêcher ou réparer une seule faute commise contre la Foi*’¹¹⁹ Here she uses the word for fault, *la faute*, and not the word for ‘sin’ we might expect: *le péché*. However, I consider the words, *la faute* and *le péché* — given the context where Thérèse uses the phrase ‘sin against faith’ — to be equivalent in meaning.¹²⁰ Analysis of the words, *le péché* and *la faute*, has led me to conclude

¹¹⁷ 1. equivalent to *hamartano*

- a. to be without a share in
- b. to miss the mark
- c. to err, be mistaken
- d. to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honour, to do or go wrong
- e. to wander from the law of God, violate God’s law, sin

2. that which is done wrong, sin, an offence, a violation of the divine law in thought or in act

3. collectively, the complex or aggregate of sins committed either by a single person or by many (cf. New Testament Greek Lexicon): <http://www.searchgodsword.org/lex/grk> [Accessed 21/01/08]. ‘Sin is an offence against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbour caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man [sic] and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law” (cf. CCC, # 1849).

¹¹⁸ SS Manuscript C, 214.

¹¹⁹ See Manuscrit G(onzague), in *Histoire D’une Âme de Sainte Thérèse De Lisieux selon la disposition originale des autographes nouvellement établie par Conrad De Meester*, 260.

¹²⁰ There are 19 references to *sin* in Thérèse’s writings: *pécher* (v. to sin) or its variants; *péche(s)* (n. sin, sins) or past participle (to have sinned); or *le/les pécheur(s)* (n. m. sinner(s)). SS Manuscript A: 16v, line 11, page 40 ‘Oh! Dear Mother, with what care you prepared me for my first confession, telling me it was not to a man but to God I was about to tell my **sins**’; 41v, 13, 88 ‘I told him just the number of **sins** Marie permitted me to confess, not one more’; 42r, 4, 89 ‘I was still very much a child in spite of my twelve and a half years, and I remember the joy I had putting on some pretty sky-blue ribbons Aunt had given me for my hair; I also recall having confessed at Trouville even this childish pleasure which seemed to be a **sin** to me’; 70, 14, 149 ‘In the presence of God, the Blessed Virgin, and all the Saints, I declare that you have never committed a mortal **sin**’; 84r, 26, 181 ‘at each moment this *Merciful Love* renews me, purifying my soul and leaving no trace of **sin** within it’; Manuscript C: 15v, 1, 224 ‘Charity covers a multitude of **sins**’; 36v, 19, 259 ‘Even though I had on my conscience all the **sins** that can be committed, I would go, my heart broken with sorrow, and throw myself into Jesus’ arms’; 36v, 34, 259 ‘for I know how much He loves the prodigal child who returns to Him. It is not because God, in His anticipating Mercy, has preserved my soul from mortal **sin** that I go to Him with confidence and love’; GC I: Letter No. 92, line 54, page, 568 ‘She, too, has passed through the *martyrdom* of scruples, but Jesus has given her the grace to receive Communion just the same, even when she believed that she had committed *great sins*’; GC II: 130, 60, 732 ‘If Jesus said of Magdalene that “one loves more to whom more has been forgiven,” we can say it with more reason when Jesus has

forgiven **sins in advance!**'; 147, 20, 813 'For every **sin**, mercy, and God is powerful enough to give *stability* even to people who have none'; 161, 15, 850 'He is the one who removes from you the occasions of **sin**'; 201, 81, 1016 'I confess that I committed a **sin** of envy [a 'tongue in cheek' comment] when reading that your hair was going to be cut and replaced by a Chinese braid'; 247, 35, 1133 'You love St Augustine, Saint Magdalene, these souls to whom "many **sins** were forgiven because they loved much"'; 247, 59, 1134 'I know there are some saints who spent their life in the practice of astonishing mortifications to expiate their **sins**, but what of it: "There are many mansions in the house of my heavenly Father", Jesus has said, and it is because of this that I follow the way He is tracing out for me'; *PN*: 17, 6, 3 'Living on Love is banishing every fear, / Every memory of past faults. / I see no imprint of my **sins**'; *RP*: 8, 3v, 28 'If you would consent to confess your **sins** to me in order to humble yourself'. There are 48 references to *faute* (n. f. fault): See *SS* Manuscript A: 11r, 28, 28: 'Céline never commits the smallest deliberate **fault**'; 15v, 4, 38 'However, one evening in the beautiful month of May I committed a **fault** that merits the penalty of being confessed. It gave me good reason to humble myself and I believe I had perfect contrition for it'; 15v, 38, 39 'One day, she [Victoire, the maid] drew me out of a *great peril* [a bucket] into which I had tumbled through my own **fault**'; 16r, 39, 81 'And rising with great assurance I said everything that was asked of me', 'with great assurance' = 'without a mistake / **fault**'; 44v, 14, 97 'All arguments were useless; I was quite unable to correct this terrible **fault** [frequent crying]; 74v, 5, 159 'Here was my first victory, not too great but it cost me a whole lot. A little vase set behind a window was broken, and our Mistress, thinking it was my **fault**, showed it to me and told me to be more careful in the future'; 80v, 11, 173f 'He told me that *my faults caused God no pain*'; 80v, 15, 174 'Never had I heard that our **faults could not cause God any pain, and this assurance filled me with joy'; 84r, 1, 180 'Ah! Must not the infinitely just God, who deigns to pardon the **faults** of the prodigal son with so much kindness, be just also toward me'; Manuscript C: 1v, 5, 206 'But, dear Mother, I make bold to say it, this is your own **fault**'; 7r, 23, 214 'If I could prevent or make reparation for one single [*faute* in the original French] sin against *faith*'; 13r, 2, 221 'Even what appears to me as a **fault** can very easily be an act of virtue because of her intention'; 13v, 12, 222 'I don't mean by this that I no longer have any **faults**; ah! I am too imperfect for that. But I mean that I don't have any trouble in rising when I have fallen'; 21v, 6, 236 'Asking me as a favour always to let her know her **faults**'; 23r, 2, 239 'What cost me more than anything else was to observe the **faults** and *lightest imperfections*' [my emphasis to note the distinction]; 23r, 13, 239 'When we act according to nature, it is impossible for the soul being corrected to understand her **faults**'; 23v, 16, 240 'My little Sisters in their turn admit their faults and rejoice because I understand them *through experience*'; *GC* I: 6, 3, 140 'I am making many mistakes [*fautes*] [in spelling]; 36, 87, 354 'It [the letter] is certainly filled with mistakes' [*fautes*]; 72, 32, 493 'If she is not a Saint, it will really be her own **fault**'; 114, 35, 662 'But, it seems to me, that Jesus can give me the grace of no longer offending Him or committing **faults** that DON'T OFFEND Him but serve only to humble and to make love stronger' [my emphasis (underlining) to note the distinction; Thérèse's capitals]; 178, 110, 910 'If you cannot read me, it is Marie's **fault** ['tongue in cheek', Marie is to blame]; 191, 9, 965 'I saw your letter only on Friday, and so, dear little sister, I am not late through my own **fault**'; 191, 19, 966 'If he hides away in a corner in a sulky mood and if he cries in fear of being punished, his mamma will not pardon him, certainly, not his **fault**'; 226, 53, 1093 'It is true that no human life is exempt from **faults**'; 247, 51, 1133f 'The remembrance of my **faults** humbles me ... When we cast out **faults** with entire filial confidence into the devouring fire of love ... I have not chosen an austere life to expiate my **faults** but those of others ... Do not think that I condemn the repentance you have for your **faults** and your desire to expiate them ... I hope that one day Jesus will make you walk by the same way as myself' [the way of love, not of fear]; 251, 18, 1138 'Dear little Sister, do not say that this is difficult; if I speak in this way, it is your **fault**, for you told me that you loved Jesus *very much*'; 258, 74, 1153 'He realizes that more than once his son will fall into the same **faults**, but he is prepared to pardon him always, if his son always takes him by his heart'; 261, 39, 1164 'You must know me only imperfectly to fear that a detailed account of your **faults** may diminish the tenderness I have for your soul! ... 261, 50, 1164 'The divine Heart is more saddened by the thousand little indelicacies of His friends than by even the *grave sins* [*fautes*] that persons of the world commit' [my underlining to note that the word '*fautes* in the French is translated 'grave sins' in the English]; 263, 17, 1173 'It seems to you that sharing in the justice, in the holiness of God, I would be unable as on earth to excuse your **faults**. Are you forgetting, then, that I shall be sharing also in the *infinite mercy* of the Lord? I believe the Blessed have great compassion on our miseries, they remember, being weak and mortal like us, they committed the same **faults**'; *PN* 17, 6, 2, 90 'Living on Love is banishing every fear, / Every memory of past**

that *le péché* is mainly reserved for speaking of serious sins external to the person committing them, for example, killing someone. *La faute* is mainly reserved to address transgressions internal to the person, for example, jealousy, pride, unbelief (loss of faith). However, *la faute* can also cover a wide range of transgressions from serious sins through to the lightest imperfections whether interior or exterior. Interiorly, for example, one could ‘lose the faith’ through deliberate negligence; then, again, one might not exactly ‘lose the faith’, but weaken its life through lesser, though still conscious, carelessness. In Thérèse’s life, this loss, ‘loss of faith’, is played out in her own person quite dramatically. She is coming towards the end of her life, aged twenty-four and suffering terribly from tuberculosis. The intensity of her physical suffering is great. Yet she is also experiencing a dreadful night of faith which, I suggest, mirrors the ‘sin against faith’ [*la faute commise contre la Foi*].

This latter point will be discussed fully in Chapter 5. Suffice it to say here that, according to Teresa of Avila, ‘for a soul in mortal sin [*la faute?*], no thicker darkness exists, and there is nothing dark and black which is not much less so than this’.¹²¹ Mortal sin, according to the *CCT* (Thérèse’s Catechism), are the serious sins against the First Commandment — ‘I am the Lord thy God’:

Against this Commandment all those sin who have not faith, hope and charity. Such sinners are very numerous, for they include all who fall into heresy, who reject what holy mother the Church proposed for our belief, who give credit to dreams, fortune telling, and such illusions; those who, despairing of salvation, trust not in the goodness of God; and those who rely solely on wealth, or health and strength of body.¹²²

As we shall see later, this description needs a nuanced recasting for it to ‘fit’ today.

faults. / I see no imprint of my sins; *RP* 7, 1v, 18: *que c’est une faute vénielle de demander les extases* (It is a venial sin to ask for ecstasies); *Pri* 2, 3, 38 ‘Take me before I commit the slightest voluntary **fault**’; 20, 41, 116 ‘Every morning I make a resolution to practice humility and in the evening I recognize that I have committed again many **faults** of pride’ (see Soeur Geneviève, o.p., de Clairefontaine and Soeur Cécile, o.c.d., du Carmel de Lisieux, Jacques Lonchamp (Eds.), *Les Mots de Sainte Thérèse de L’Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face* (Les Éditions du Cerf et Desc’ée De Brouwer, 1996), 608, 358f from which I have taken all references except the number of the page on which the reference occurs in English translation).

¹²¹ See St Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, from the Critical Edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, trans., and ed. E. Allison Peers (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 33.

¹²² *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. See www.cin.org. [Accessed 1/02/08].

Drawing this particular section to a close, the point here is that this thesis treats of the word '*la faute*' as 'sin' rather than as 'fault'. In either case, the meaning I intend from the phrase 'sin against faith' is that there exists the possibility for the human person to act contrary to faith — (or one's ultimate value) — committing a mortal sin or as a lesser one.¹²³

Original Sin

From a theological point of view, Original Sin is the origin of ill choices.

Original sin, in which all human beings are born, is the state of deprivation of original holiness and justice. It is a sin 'contracted' by us not 'committed'; it is a state of birth and not a personal act. Because of the original unity of all human beings, it is transmitted to the descendants of Adam 'not by imitation, but by propagation'. This inclination is called *concupiscence*.¹²⁴

Christian teaching holds that the creation has been damaged and that human existence is no longer what God originally intended it to be. It is burdened with another element that produces, besides the innate tendency *toward God*, the opposite tendency *away from God*. These tendencies recall the 'true / false' self tension spoken of earlier. That this tension exists is due, according to the tradition, to Original Sin. The biblical tradition expresses it this way:

When tempted by the devil, the first man and woman allowed trust in their Creator to die in their hearts. In their disobedience they wished to become 'like God' but without God and not in accordance with God (*Genesis* 3:5). Thus, Adam and Eve immediately lost for themselves and for all their descendants the original grace of holiness and justice.¹²⁵

There is a range of discussion on the topic of Original Sin among scripture scholars and theologians, for example, Sebastian Moore,¹²⁶ John Grabowski,¹²⁷ James

¹²³ While Thérèse can cite the Catechism word perfect, one senses through her use of particular images that she feels a need to own a more inclusive approach to faith than that stated in her Catechism (see footnote 122 above for example).

¹²⁴ CCCC, # 76.

¹²⁵ CCCC, # 75.

¹²⁶ Sebastian Moore, *Jesus the Liberator of Desire* (Crossroad: New York, 1989).

Alison¹²⁸, Laurence Freeman¹²⁹ and John Thornhill.¹³⁰ 'It is our very nature which is sinful ... corruption is not merely in this act or that, but in our *nature*', writes John Henry Newman.¹³¹

Original Sin is explained from a psychological point of view in Sebastian Moore's *Jesus the Liberator of Desire*.¹³² Moore writes: 'Christian tradition has a name for the spiritual inertia that is woven into the human condition over and above personal sin: *original sin* ... what this theory is describing is a systemic societal repression in people of the 'true self'".¹³³

While Cynthia Bourgeault does not explicitly deal with Original Sin in her book,¹³⁴ the woundedness in human nature about which she speaks so clearly is attributed by Christians to this original sin. In chapters dealing with 'The Divine Therapy' and 'From Healing to Wholeness', she writes that the traditional stages in the spiritual journey — purgative, illuminative, unitative¹³⁵ — can find a parallel in her so-called

¹²⁷ See John S. Grabowski, 'Foreword' to John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Daughters of St Paul, 1997): 15-21.

¹²⁸ James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*, foreword Sebastian Moore (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998).

¹²⁹ Laurence Freeman and Richard Horn, *Seeking Peace: A Dialogue on Jesus*. [Medio Media CDs], Houston, 2004: 6/6.

¹³⁰ John Thornhill, 'Unravelling the Complexities of the "Original Sin" Tradition', *ACR* 83 / 1 (Jan 2006): 25-37. This January 2006 edition of *ACR*, 'In the Beginning', is entirely given over to topics like Original Sin and Evolution

¹³¹ John Henry Newman, *Sermon VII*, 'Sins of Ignorance and weakness', in Ian Ker, ed. and intro., *John Henry Newman Selected Sermons*, preface Henry Chadwick (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1994): 97.

¹³² See Sebastian Moore, *Jesus the Liberator of Desire* (Crossroad: New York, 1989). See also James Alison for an understanding of the Cain and Abel story as providing the basis of Original Sin (James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*, foreword Sebastian Moore (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998).

¹³³ Ibid., 25f. See also: John Thornhill, 'Unravelling the Complexities of the "Original Sin" Tradition': 25-37; James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*; John S. Grabowski, 'Foreword' to John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Daughters of St Paul, 1997): 15-21.

¹³⁴ See Cynthia Bourgeault, 'The Divine Therapy', 'From Healing to Holiness', in *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, Foreword Thomas Keating (Plymouth UK: Cowley Productions, 2004): 91-110..

¹³⁵ Purgative Way is the way of beginners [in the spiritual life]; Illuminative Way is the way of 'the advancing'; Unitive Way is the way of those 'who are spiritually rather far developed, advanced, or matured and union with God and love of God dominates their actions' (see 'The Terms "Spirituality" and "Mysticism"' in George E. Ganss and Parmananda R. Divarkar et al., ed., *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, preface John W. Padberg (New York / Mahway: Paulist Press, 1991): 60-63). Again speaking of 'stages', this dissertation has resourced the following: Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959, 1980); [Jean] Piaget, *Piaget's Developmental Theory: An Overview* (San Francisco, Calif?: Davidson Films, c. 1989); James Fowler,

stages of 'woundedness, recovery, wellness'.¹³⁶ It is perhaps the journey of a lifetime to move from spiritual and psychological woundedness to union with God in psychospiritual wellness. With regard to Thérèse, Thérèse reaches the unitative stage sometime in 1895 and the 'wellness' stage consolidates from the time of her 'conversion' in 1886 onwards.

Laurence Freeman locates the meaning of Original Sin, not so much in the Adam and Eve story (Gen 3: 1-24), but rather in the mythical account of Cain and Abel (Gen 4: 1-16). This interpretation is based on the mimetic theory of René Girard.¹³⁷ Freeman notes firstly that Cain and Abel were brothers; secondly, that although it seemed unfair to Cain that the Lord favoured Abel, Cain's reaction of sadness and anger was a legitimate and natural reaction. There are two lessons here. The incident can be taken as an example of things that happen to one in life that seem unfair but for which, often, there is no answer, for example, an accident or a change in the weather. Secondly, when such happenings occur and one feels deprived of something, one is well counselled to pause a moment before converting one's feelings of sadness and anger into an act of violence.

The third point Freeman makes highlights this moment of pause. He draws attention to the response the Lord gives to Cain at this juncture: 'Why are you angry and why

Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), James W. Fowler; *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1996), and Bernard J. F. Lonergan's stages of conversion: intellectual, moral, religious (and psychic (in post-Lonergan discourse)). No one of these 'stages' theories has been systematically followed through in this dissertation because the task would have been too difficult, because they tend to overlap and because cases in real life are not steady in their development 'but indefinitely variant, unpredictable, and overlapping' (cf. 'The Terms "Spirituality" and "Mysticism"' in *Ignatius of Loyola*, 63).

¹³⁶ See Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, 93.

¹³⁷ 'René Girard's understanding of desire is known by the name *mimetic* [imitative] *theory*. It is the coherent theorization of what seemed like a small insight but turned out to be an objective discovery about human relations ... We desire *according* to the desire of the other ...' See James Alison, 'René Girard's Mimetic Theory', in *The Joy of Being Wrong*: 7-15. 'Mimetic desire' in the negative sense means the desire that generates mimetic rivalry and, in turn, is generated by it ... That doesn't mean evil is the whole of life ... Nothing is more mimetic than the desire of a child, and yet it is good. Jesus himself says it is good. Mimetic desire is also the desire for God... Whenever you have that desire, I would say, that is really active, positive desire for the other, there is some kind of divine grace present. This is what Christianity unquestionably tells us. If we deny this we move into some form of optimistic humanism' (see René Girard and RA, 'Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard', in *RL* 25/2 (1993), 23-25. See also: Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), 5.

has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?’ Freeman’s interpretation of this is that the Lord is giving Cain an opportunity to deal with his sadness and anger, in other words, to control those emotions. For at this moment, the Lord warns him, ‘Sin is knocking at the door’; [but there is still time to master it] (Gen 4: 7). Cain does not take this opportunity to wait and to control his emotions. He lures Abel out to the field and murders him.¹³⁸ Here, Original Sin can be seen as refusing to heed the call to faith (to one’s better self). It is also the on-going consequent experiencing of guilt and a deeply felt sense of shame over one’s action. This perpetuates itself as it is passed on from generation to generation. One senses a need to deal with this in-built sense of guilt and shame. This can be done in a therapeutic way, or it can be dealt with in a destructive way by an inward punishing of oneself or by projecting the feeling outwards in the rupture of loving relationships. When this latter is the preferred option, then again, there is refusal to heed the voice of the good spirit to move away from the path of self-destruction.

John Thornhill writes on the subject of Original Sin¹³⁹ against the backdrop of evangelisation and in light of a ‘tradition of rhetoric — originating in Augustine — that has associated the evils in the world with the corruption brought to our common nature by the Fall’. Thornhill claims that the Catholic spirit finds this approach unattractive and lacking in authenticity as an expression of Christian evangelisation’. He names three basic assumptions of the Original Sin tradition that, he claims, can be contested. Firstly, he questions ‘the assumption that Original Sin is an element of the *deposit of faith*’. Secondly, he suggests ‘that the Original Sin tradition may be judged to be a *theological construct*’ — used initially in an effective defense of a central truth of the deposit, namely humanity’s condition in the saving ‘grace’ of Christ’. And thirdly, he posits that *Genesis* 3, ‘in adopting a mythological style, is open to being interpreted as referring, not to a past event, but to an ultimate goal, thwarted by the story of humanity’s sinfulness, and only attainable through the salvation brought by Christ’. Thornhill concludes that ‘a more adequate understanding of the human

¹³⁸ Laurence Freeman and Richard Rohr, *Seeking Peace: A Dialogue on Jesus*. [Medio Media CDs] Houston, 2004: 6/6.

¹³⁹ The January 2006 edition of *ACR* is devoted to ‘In the Beginning’ and discusses topic like Original Sin and Evolution.

condition and the nature of the evils that confront humanity ... will locate the real challenge of evangelisation, not "out there" in a sinful world, but in the hearts of believers'.¹⁴⁰ Thornhill's conclusion resonates with this dissertation's contention that sin is connected to personal *faith* or to the lack thereof, and that Original Sin is possibly the root cause.

Perhaps Thornhill's use of 'heart' is best understood, not in a modern sense as the centre of the emotions, but in the Biblical sense as the centre of the whole person, the source of thinking, feeling, willing and acting.¹⁴¹ Hence the 'divided self' is not just in the psychological area but permeates the whole person who is both *psyche* and *sōma*, and influences the *pneuma* (spirit) where we have our relationship with God. The divided self is well described by Paul in his letter to the Romans 7: 14-25:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate ... I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (Rm 7: 15, 22-24).

Here, in the divided self, is the source of sin. It is our original sin.

Sin other than Original Sin

This section aims at describing sin other than original sin. This kind of sin is able to be committed because of the weakening of the human will in the original sin.

Sin is 'a word', an act, or a desire contrary to the eternal Law (Saint Augustine). It is an offence against God in disobedience to his love. It wounds human nature and injures human solidarity. Christ in his passion fully revealed the seriousness of sin and overcame it with his mercy.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ See John Thornhill, 'Unravelling the Complexities of the 'Original Sin' Tradition', *ACR* 83 / 1 (Jan 2006): 25-37.

¹⁴¹ A position (seemingly) confirmed by Joseph Chilton Pearce analysis. See his *The Biology of Transcendence: A Blueprint of the Human Spirit*. I have not read the book but, nevertheless, listened to a comprehensive summary of it.

¹⁴² CCCC, # 392.

Sin is present in human history. This reality of sin can be understood clearly only in the light of divine revelation and above all in the light of Christ the Savior of all. Where sin abounded, he made grace to abound all the more.¹⁴³

Commenting on Jn 16:9, Michael Fallon writes: 'Jesus has shown, and his Spirit present in the disciples will continue to show, that sin consists primarily in refusing to believe in him [Jesus]'.¹⁴⁴ Gerald Gleeson writes: 'Sin is the *absence of being* that our disordered choices introduce into the world, an absence that at times has terrible consequences'.¹⁴⁵ 'Instead of using all one's powers of life to direct oneself to God and one's neighbour, one uses them for oneself and that is the sin', writes Jean Lafrance.¹⁴⁶ 'Sin is understood by the Fathers [of the Church]', states Benedict XVI, 'as the destruction of the unity of the human race, as fragmentation and division. Babel, the place where languages were confused, the place of separation, is seen to be an expression of what sin fundamentally is'.¹⁴⁷ Here sin is the fragmenting of communion or community. Sin is 'disobedience toward God and lack of trust in God's goodness'.¹⁴⁸ Sinful actions (either of omission or commission) are secondary to this original act in the will of disobedience and lack of trust in God's saving help. The Catechism cites this definition of sin:

Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbour caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man [sic] and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as 'an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law'.¹⁴⁹

Objective and Subjective Sin / Vincible and Invincible Ignorance

The above discussion leads appropriately into noting the distinction that is made these days between objective and subjective sin and between vincible and invincible

¹⁴³ CCCC, # 73.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Fallon, *The Gospel according to Saint John: An Introductory Commentary* (Kensington NSW: Chevalier Press, 1998), 282.

¹⁴⁵ Gerald Gleeson [prepared by], *Being Human: A Reflection Paper commissioned by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Committee for Doctrine and Morals* (Catholic Institute of Sydney: Catholic communications, c. 2001), 30.

¹⁴⁶ See Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, 137.

¹⁴⁷ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* Encyclical Letter (2007), # 14.

¹⁴⁸ CCC, # 397.

¹⁴⁹ CCC, # 1849.

ignorance. In the former instance, while in the past Catholic usage used the one word 'sin' to describe *both* one's sinful act *and* the person's state of conscience, these days Church statements tend to separate the (objective) *act* from the (subjective / intentional) state. Sin resides in the subjective state, that is, in one's disordered relationship with God. The (human) legal system is capable of judging the objective act if required to do so.

Vincible and invincible ignorance is also about the person's intentional state. For example, the knowledge that informs one's conscience can be misguided and incorrect thereby abrogating the guilt that otherwise could be personally incurred. *VS* following *GS* states:

Not infrequently conscience can be mistaken as a result of invincible ignorance, although it does not on that account forfeit its dignity; but this cannot be said when a man [sic] shows little concern for seeking what is true and good, and conscience gradually becomes almost blind from being accustomed to sin.¹⁵⁰

Invincible ignorance is when a person is unable to be rid of the ignorance even when the circumstance presents as possible and obligatory — and therefore not guilty (sinful).¹⁵¹ When one follows, in good faith, the dictates of one's conscience, there is no guilt (sin), though, of course, one is always obliged to seek the truth.

The church is at pains to uphold the *dignity* of the human conscience. Speaking of that dignity, *GS* states: 'Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey ... Through loyalty to conscience, Christians are joined to others in the search for truth'.¹⁵² *VS* states that conscience does not lose its dignity:

¹⁵⁰ *VS*, # 62.

¹⁵¹ A person can be invincibly ignorant through, for example, inadvertence, duress, fear, forgetfulness or frail mental health.

¹⁵² *GS*, # 16.

because even when it directs us to act in a way not in conformity with the objective moral order, it continues to speak in the name of that truth about the good which the subject is called to seek sincerely.¹⁵³

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In other words, 'my head may have it wrong but my heart and will is pointed the right way'; or as Lonergan says, 'In religious matters love [heart and will] precedes knowledge [head] and, as that love is God's gift, the very beginning of faith is due to God's grace'.¹⁵⁴

Within the parameters of this dissertation, it is important the distinction be acknowledged between culpable and invincible (unintentional) ignorance and between subjective and objective sin; for while Thérèse¹⁵⁵ and commentators speak of the 'sin against faith' they can do so only in the objective sense and not in the subjective sense of knowing the guilt of another person. Personal guilt has to do with one's intention and one's intention can be grounded in unintentional ignorance. If the latter is the case, then one may well continue to pursue a life of holiness.

Unbelief as in Thérèse's Reference

[A]'anguish and doubt are the price one pays for identifying deeply with nonbelievers', writes Thomas King.¹⁵⁶ In Thérèse, anguish and doubt seem to have preceded this identification. The 'sin' of unbelievers to which Thérèse refers in Manuscript C, is, I am persuaded, the 'loss of faith' as in chosen atheism. For Thérèse, the 'impious' were not those who represented 'the supreme degree of the refusal of God', but still retained a faith in their innermost depths. But the 'impious' were — 'as Jesus made her feel' — 'souls who have no faith'.¹⁵⁷ Inez Storck writes that Thérèse, 'in offering her trials to Our Lord ... had perfect consciousness that her suffering was intended to rescue souls from the agony of atheism ... she was willing to eat this

¹⁵³ VS, # 62.

¹⁵⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 123. God's grace, therefore, is at work at all levels of faith-ing.

¹⁵⁵ In Thérèse's case, however, Thérèse states that 'Jesus made her feel' that the *sin* against faith did exist (cf. SS Manuscript C, 211, 214).

¹⁵⁶ Thomas M. King, 'Endmatter: Believers and Their Disbelief', *Zygon*: 42 (2007): 779-791.

¹⁵⁷ See Six, *Light of the Night*, 169f.

bread of interior darkness until her death in order to win heaven for unbelievers'.¹⁵⁸ John Hardon writes: '[Thérèse] saw the sufferings that God sent her as a providential means of obtaining and restoring faith for unbelievers'.¹⁵⁹ Kate Cleary writes: '[Thérèse] 'participates in all the horror of the infidel without compromising herself ... Though Professor Dawkins is the scientist, it is she who is able to deduce, both intellectually and experientially ... that it is precisely the recognised littleness in us that makes us great'.¹⁶⁰ From a twentieth-first century perspective, *impies* [impious] does not carry the connotation of blasphemous militancy as it might have done in nineteenth-century Catholic France; rather it infers a casual indifference to the existence of God and the Church. Mary Frohlich writes: 'For millions today, questions of belief, truth, or goodness are not even on the horizon'.¹⁶¹ Can this be what is meant by the 'new atheism'? It would seem so. Yet, there is a little atheism in all of us! 'The believer can perfect one's faith only on an ocean of nihilism, temptation, and doubt ... the believer does not live immune to doubt but is always threatened by the plunge into the void', writes the then Cardinal Ratzinger.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ See Inez Fitzgerald Storck, 'St Thérèse on Sin and Suffering', *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* (April 2004): 26-31.

¹⁵⁹ John A. Hardon, 'St Thérèse of Lisieux': <http://www.catholic.net/RCC/Periodicals/Faith/Sept-Oct97/therese> [Accessed: 7/04/2008].

¹⁶⁰ Kate Cleary, 'Thérèse versus the Atheists', *The Tablet* 255 (24 Nov. 2001): 1665-1666. Cleary says that, though Thérèse's descriptions of her experience 'of night' might read like passages from Dawkins' book, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, Thérèse acknowledges her own distance from God [which Dawkins cannot do]: 'But instead of despairing at the magnitude of her neediness, she rejoices in it ... the sinner is far from love, but so is she', 1666. Paul Davies, another scientist, is, according to Dawkins, sympathetic to religion's reliance on faith. [Perhaps Dawkins considers this is stepping outside scientific boundaries and is unacceptable.] For example, Davies says in his non-fiction 1992 *The Mind of God*: 'the search for a closed logical scheme that provides a complete and self-consistent explanation is doomed to failure ... the existence of mind in some organism on some planet in the universe is surely a fact of fundamental significance. Through conscious beings the universe has generated self-awareness. This can be no trivial detail, no minor by-product of mindless, purposeless forces. We are truly meant to be here' (see Paul C. W. Davies, *The Mind of God*: <http://en.wikipedia.org>). [Accessed 12 September 2008]. The dialogue between religion and science is an on-going conversation today.

¹⁶¹ Mary Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux', *TS* 61/2 (2000): 261-279, at 264.

¹⁶² Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster, with a New Preface, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1969, 1990, 2004), 44f.

Jesus, Sin and Sinners

Pages might be written on this topic. What I want to highlight here is that Jesus, the sinless one, took upon himself the sins of the world. Jesus identified with sinners. Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15 state it clearly. See also CCC # 601.

Jesus has to enter into the drama of human existence, for that belongs to the core of his mission; he has to penetrate it completely, down to its uttermost depths, in order to find the 'lost sheep', to bear it on his shoulders, and to bring it home.¹⁶³

In this context, one can ask: What do people without faith today do with their sin, and with their grief? Without faith, sin and suffering can become intolerably heavy, perhaps leading to drastic consequences like drugs and suicide. I will argue later that, like Jesus, Thérèse also 'carried' the sin of others as she sits 'at the table of bitterness at which poor sinners are sitting'. But Thérèse's great contribution here, and elsewhere, is her 'depth' [Lane] realization of the merciful love of God towards all, whatever the circumstances of their lives. We are reminded also, that Marie-Eugène described Thérèse's trial of faith as allowing Thérèse a share in 'the drama of human existence'. The trial was a 'share in the drama of divine Love here below, in its grievous struggle against sin. It was the interior drama of Gethsemane and Calvary, a fight to the death between Love and sin's hatred.'¹⁶⁴

Sin and Culture¹⁶⁵

The previous chapter has already noted the cultural context of the twenty-first century — its virtues and its vices. What follows here is more shaded towards 'sin', inferring that the climate of indifference towards sin is, in part, the result of the culture of the

¹⁶³ See Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 26.

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter 1, fn. 20.

¹⁶⁵ See Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, where, citing the Willowbank Report, he defines culture: Culture is an integrated system of beliefs (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, etc, etc ...) and of institutions which express those beliefs, values and customs ... which bind a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity (From the Willowbank Report, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978 in *Clashing Symbols*, 174).

day. However, we also note the enduring influence of Original Sin in the lives of all of us. The combination of these two influences contributes to the threat of secularism's 'cultural, spiritual and moral collapse' [Rahner 1904 -1984].¹⁶⁶ 'Let us freely admit to ourselves the crisis of faith', he writes.¹⁶⁷

In dealing with the area of 'culture', more recent recourse has been primarily to Michael Paul Gallagher¹⁶⁸ Richard Lennan¹⁶⁹ and James Hanvey.¹⁷⁰ 'Hard secularism is not only antipathetic to religion but programmatic in trying to eliminate it or at least marginalise it,' Hanvey states. He distinguishes between 'hard' or ideological secularism —Thérèse's 'sin against faith' fits well here — and 'soft secularisation' which 'exhibits a secularist *habitus*', that is, a tendency towards a hard secularism. 'Sin against faith' today can also be located here. In his article, Gallagher uses the term 'cultural desolation' — the term taken up by Mary Frohlich in 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux'.¹⁷¹ Gallagher states that 'the more radical crisis ... is one of sensibility rather than of behaviour, of un-hope rather than un-faith'. And he asks: 'Could it be that a certain 'cultural desolation' is the greatest damage caused by a secular culture to the potentials for faith today?'¹⁷² 'Today, God is missing but not missed'.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁶ See Karl Rahner, *Nature and Grace and Other Essays*, trans. Dinah Wharton (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 110.

¹⁶⁷ Karl Rahner, 'Troubled Atheism?' in Harvey D. Egan, ed., and trans. ed. *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 214.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Paul Gallagher, 'From Social to Cultural Secularization', *Louvain Studies* 24 (1999): 103-118.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Lennan, 'Looking into the Sun: Faith, Culture and the Task of Theology in the Contemporary Church'. *ACR* (October 2007): 459-471. Lennan highlights the fact that today we live among the ruins of '-isms' one of which is 'the tendency towards secularism — a worldview closed to the possibility of God's presence in history'. Further, there is little sympathy for metanarratives — the worldviews that allege an all-inclusive account of reality. This leads to 'selectivity' which, in its turn, as far as Catholicism is concerned, might not include 'an embrace of the institutional Church and its structures of authority'. Benedict XVI, writing that 'redemption' is no longer expected from faith in Jesus Christ but from 'the newly discovered link between science and praxis' continues: 'It is not that faith is simply denied; rather it is displaced onto another level — that of purely private and other-worldly affairs — and at the same time it becomes somehow irrelevant for the world. This programmatic vision has determined the trajectory of modern times and it also shapes the present-day crisis of faith which is essentially a crisis of Christian hope' (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, # 17).

¹⁷⁰ See James Hanvey, 'Making the Invisible Visible: the challenge to the Church in a secular culture', *The Pastoral Review* 3/4 (July/August 2007): 8-13.

¹⁷¹ See Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux': 261-279.

¹⁷² Gallagher, 'From Social to Cultural Secularization', 117. With reference to 'hope', Anthony Kelly writes: 'The last thing determining the fate of the sinner is neither the balance of a system of justice nor, for that matter, the impenetrable and terminal possibility of the sinner refusing salvation and being

In a later article, 'From Social to Cultural Secularization', Gallagher writes that the deeper secularization lies 'on the level of communal imagination' rather than being the result of 'empirical trends'.¹⁷⁴ Gerald Gleeson, in referring to Gallagher's article, takes the conversation further and notes the absence in today's culture of three necessary antecedents to faith.¹⁷⁵ He then states that these antecedents can be summed up in 'the secularising of the imagination', the loss of the 'religious picture' of human life as a pilgrimage through this world to the next world, and of human beings as fallen sinners in need of redemption.

Thérèse's era was also one of unsettled faith. One of the big questions for this dissertation is to note the Theresian response to this issue in her time, and see whether that response can hold equally true for today.

Mission

On 14 December 1927 Pope Pius XI proclaimed St Thérèse of the Child Jesus as principal patroness, equal to St Francis Xavier, of all missions and missionaries in the whole world. 'Among the numerous titles that the Church has granted to St Thérèse, the one for the Missions is the most attractive, more so than her recent ecclesiastical doctorate (1997)', one author writes.¹⁷⁶ It is therefore appropriate to say something about Thérèse's understanding of 'missionary'. Perhaps the easiest approach is to state that the understanding of missionary endeavour that was appropriate in Thérèse's day,

fixed in evil. The first and last thing is the limitless saving creativity of God. Hope must take its stand on the fact that God alone is God ... And this God desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4)' (Anthony Kelly, 'Hope Against Hope', in *Eschatology and Hope* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006): 154- 155.

¹⁷³ Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine', 263.

¹⁷⁴ See Gallagher, 'From Social to Cultural Secularization': 103-118.

¹⁷⁵ Gerald Gleeson, 'Crisis and Opportunity in Faith', *Compass Theology Review* 34/2 (Winter 2000): 17-22. Gleeson's three cultural antecedents for faith are: the modern scientific world-view which undermines the plausibility of many traditional expressions of the *truths* of faith; the contemporary suspicion of authority in all its forms that undermines a confident *reliance* on God revealing; and the breakdown of relationships and communion which undermines the freedom for personal *surrender* to another and to God. Gleeson writes that today's cultural antecedents of faith 'tend to work against, if not to undermine, all three elements' of Aquinas' *credere Deum, credere Deo* and *credere in Deum* (see Gerald Gleeson, 'Crisis and Opportunity in Faith'), 20.

¹⁷⁶ Dámaso Zuazua, 'Eightieth Anniversary of St Thérèse as Patroness of the Missions: December 14, 1927-2007', *Vie Thérésienne* 39 (1999): 7-21.

and one that continued until Vatican Council II, is undergoing revision today.¹⁷⁷ That does not alter Thérèse's effectiveness in this area. It merely gives background to the movement within the Lisieux Carmel to send sisters to Saigon. Thérèse, herself, was one of those considered for this mission and at different times, so were her sisters Agnes and Céline.

Thérèse's great desire to 'save souls' continues today in her continuing mission directed from life beyond the grave as she promised it would do when she said:

I feel that I'm about to enter into my rest. But I feel especially that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making God loved as I love Him, of giving my little way to souls. I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth.¹⁷⁸

In whatever way one defines mission and missionary today, Thérèse's interest in 'souls' continues. Somehow, through the Communion of Saints in heaven — of which she is a member — and members of the Body of Christ on earth, all — not only Thérèse — participate in the one saving mission of Christ: 'The most important member [of the Communion of Saints] is Christ, since he is the head'.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷The following text clearly explains the Church's approach to missionary endeavour before and after Vatican Council II: 'It can be said that, prior to Vatican II, the Church's missionary activity was for the salvation of souls; it was carried out for the benefit of the pagans abroad and mainly by priests, religious, and specially-commissioned lay folk; it was supported, financially and spiritually, by parishes at home; and its goal was, possibly, to implant the Christian religion of the missionaries. In this model of 'being on the missions', the 'Church' was seen as having prior importance over other realities: proclamation of the Word, the sense of being on mission and the reign of God. Today, Post Vatican II, there are many factors that cause a re-evaluation of that model. There is post-modernity — 'an umbrella label to describe sundry and diverse movements in contemporary thought that deconstruct and reject the claim to universal validity of any historical, philosophical and theological system such as Christianity'. There is also the resurgence of the so-called non-Christian religions, in particular Hinduism and Islam and the phenomenon of religious pluralism 'which advocates several distinct, independent, and equally valid ways to reach the Divine and therefore makes conversion from one religion to another unnecessary'. If the old theology of 'going on the missions' prioritized its values in descending order from 'Church' at the top, the new theology does just the opposite. Here, the order of priority is: the reign of God, mission, proclamation, and church. With that shift, there has been another: in a kingdom-centred missiology, it is mission that defines the church and not the church that defines the mission. Jesus came to proclaim the reign of God' (see Peter Phan, 'Proclamation of the Reign of God as Mission of the Church: What For, To Whom, By Whom, With Whom, and How', *Theology @ McAuley* (AEJT 2)).

¹⁷⁸ LC, 102.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. CCC, # 947. See also: 'Jesus' saving action has its origin in the communion of the Godhead, and opens the way for all who believe in him to enter into intimate communion with the Trinity and with one another in the Trinity' (John Paul II, *EA*, # 12).

Grace (Grk. *Charis*)¹⁸⁰

In relation to Thérèse and the subject of 'grace', we note the early reference in her autobiography to the 'mercies of the Lord' and to her question why some 'souls' seem to receive more grace than others. The subject of 'grace' exercised her mind considerably. One of her statements that still receives attention is 'everything is grace'.¹⁸¹ The statement speaks to me of Thérèse's unitive consciousness in which she saw everything — herself and her world, the Catholic world and the worldwide community of humanity — within the embrace of God's free, forgiving and saving love. In this, Thérèse was predating the thought of theologians like Karl Rahner and the views expressed in the documents of Vatican Council II.

In an *older* theology, 'the relationship between nature and grace is conceived in such a way that they appear as two layers so carefully placed that they penetrate each other as little as possible';¹⁸² 'Grace is a superstructure above man's [sic] conscious spiritual

¹⁸⁰ 1. grace

- a. that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech
- 2. good will, loving-kindness, favour
 - a. of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues
- 3. what is due to grace
 - a. the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace
 - b. the token or proof of grace, benefit
 - 1. a gift of grace
 - 2. benefit, bounty

4. thanks, (for benefits, services, favours), recompense, reward (New Testament Greek Lexicon): <http://www.searchgodsword.org/lex/grk> [Accessed 21/01/08].

¹⁸¹ LC, 57. Also see, Joseph F. Schmidt, *Everything Is Grace: The Life and Way of Thérèse of Lisieux* (Ijamsville Md.: The Word Among Us Press, 2007).

¹⁸² Karl Rahner, *Nature and Grace and Other Essays*, 5; See also Karl Rahner, 'Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace', *TI* I: 297-317. Here Rahner argues against a distinction between 'pure nature' and 'dynamic grace'. Grace is not 'merely a superstructure imposed from without upon a nature in itself indifferent with regard to it ... God wishes to communicate himself. That is the first and the last of his real plans and hence of his real world too. Everything else exists so that this one thing might be: the eternal miracle of infinite Love. And so God makes a creature whom he can love: he creates man [sic]. He creates him in such a way that he *can* receive this Love which is God himself, and that he can and must and the same time accept it for what it is: the ever astounding wonder, the unexpected, unexacted [*ungeschuldet* from *schulden* 'to owe'] gift. And let us not forget here that ultimately we only know what "unexacted" means when we know what personal love is, not *vice versa*: we don't understand what love is by knowing the meaning of 'unexacted'. Thus in this second respect God must so create man that love does not only pour forth free and unexacted, but also so that man as real partner, as one who can accept or reject it, can experience and accept it *as* the unexacted event and wonder not owed to *him*, the real man. As unexacted, not only because he does not deserve it as *sinner*, but further because he can also embrace it as unexacted when, already blessed in this love, he is

and moral life'.¹⁸³ In a *newer* expression of the theology of grace, Rahner states: 'God wishes to communicate himself, to pour forth the love which he himself is. That is the first and the last of his real plans and hence of his real world too. Everything else exists so that this one thing might be: the eternal miracle of infinite Love'.¹⁸⁴ He also writes: 'it is only a short step from Paul's "Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" (Rm 6:1), 'to teach ... a doctrine of universal salvation, which holds that each and all are in fact saved, and a short step to thinking that the most sublime and "supernatural" kind of cooperation in Christ's redemption is to share in the world's guilt by humbly becoming guilty with it'.¹⁸⁵

This particular citation can hold particular relevance when applied to Thérèse's writings. She intuitively understands its significance and importance, though she expresses it differently, often through employing the use of imagery. Firstly, Thérèse claims that 'everything is a grace'¹⁸⁶ [universal], and secondly she writes that she 'is resigned to eat the bread of sorrow as long as You desire it; she does not wish to rise up from this table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating until the day set by You. Can she not say in her name and in the name of her brothers, "*Have pity on us, O Lord, for we are poor sinners!*"' [sharing in the world's guilt by becoming guilty with it].¹⁸⁷ For Thérèse, there are two constants: grace abounds and so does sin. (I think the human mind has great difficulty in holding together both these statements as equally true. It is also difficult to hold them together in a thesis such as the present one. Thérèse manages to do it: her very weakness (sinfulness) calls forth God's mercy). Rahner writes: 'There is a danger that the commission of sins will come to be thought of as a necessary stage in the Christian life, without which the grace of God,

allowed to forget that he was a sinner once': 299-301; 310f. Generally, Rahner's exposition on grace is much easier to follow (except, for example, when he discusses 'unexacted' !) than the technicalities of language used in the classical description. See also Anne Hunt, 'The Classical Approach to a Theology of Grace', in *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005): 166-175. Hunt clearly explains the 'older' and very complex classical understanding of grace in understandable terms.

¹⁸³ Karl Rahner, 'Grace', in Gerald A. McCool, ed., *A Rahner Reader*, 176. See also Anne Hunt, 'The Classical Approach to a Theology of Grace', in *Trinity*: 166-175.

¹⁸⁴ Karl Rahner, 'Concerning the Relationship between nature and Grace', *TI* 1, 310.

¹⁸⁵ See Karl Rahner, 'The Appeal to Conscience', in *Nature and Grace and Other Essays*, 94.

¹⁸⁶ *LC*, 57.

¹⁸⁷ *SS* Manuscript C, 212.

which alone makes him [sic] a Christian and redeemed, could not exist at all'.¹⁸⁸ Grace is an unsurpassed gift of God. Nevertheless, in spite of the independent gift of God's grace, one cannot claim the right to do as one pleases. 'That God writes straight on crooked lines gives the creature no right to draw crooked lines in his [sic] book of life'.¹⁸⁹

Vatican Council II affirmed Rahner's thinking when it officially argued for the universality of God's grace.¹⁹⁰ (Rahner was a *peritus* at the Council). Anne Hunt writes, interpreting Rahner's thought further, that grace 'works' 'in and through expressions of human self-transcendence, and concomitantly, that transcendence is always graced'.¹⁹¹ That is, all human aspirations to truth, love, beauty and freedom are graced [ultimate values / Schneiders; depth experiences / Lane]. Thérèse based her great appreciation of the 'mercies of the Lord' — that is, her appreciation of grace — on knowing that grace is, in itself, a free gift of God not dependent on human goodness.

C. Literature Relating to Thérèse's Life

This section which has a triple foci, records some significant Theresian secondary source material. Perhaps a trend can be noted in some more recent literature concerning Thérèse to focus on (1) psychological theories that can explain her infancy and childhood years and their influence on her subsequent development and (2) the trial of faith (see the texts cited above) in the last eighteen months of her life, rather than to dwell upon her spirituality and its expression in her *petite voie*.¹⁹² The

¹⁸⁸ Rahner, 'The Appeal to Conscience', in *Nature and Grace*, 94.

¹⁸⁹ Rahner, 'The Mystique of Sin', in *Nature and Grace*, 108.

¹⁹⁰ See *GS*, # 22; *LG*, # 16; *AG* 7. (See Rahner, in McCool, 221).

¹⁹¹ See Anne Hunt, 'Karl Rahner: Grace as the Divine Self-Communication' and 'The Psychological Analogy and the Dynamics of Grace', in *Trinity*: 170-175, at 171. See also 'Atheism and Implicit Christianity' taken from *TI IX*, 146-47, 151-52, 155-56 and cited in Gerald A. McCool, ed., *A Rahner Reader*: 220-224

¹⁹² See, for example: Conrad De Meester, *The Power of Confidence: Genesis and structure of the 'way of spiritual childhood' of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Susan Conroy, 2nd rev. edn., (New York: Alba House, 1969/1994); *With Empty Hands: The Message of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Mary Seymour (London: Burns & Oates, 2002); Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *Under the Torrent of His*

literature discussed here will follow that trend. A third section (3) selects particular authors who highlight Thérèse's holiness.

Section (1) will address this first focus — psychological theories.¹⁹³ My interest in these aspects is their relevance to Thérèse's developing understanding of faith and sin, especially in terms of the overcoming of her 'false self' in order to let the 't/True self' emerge fully.

Thérèse's Years of Infancy and Childhood

Alice Miller states that the 'roots of a whole life' are 'hidden and entwined in its childhood'.¹⁹⁴ 'Experience has taught us that we have only one enduring weapon in our struggle against mental illness: the emotional discovery and emotional acceptance of

Love: Thérèse of Lisieux, A Spiritual Genius (New York: Alba House, ?); Mgr. Laveille, *St Thérèse de L'Enfant Jésus 1873 - 1897: According to the Official Documents of the Carmel of Lisieux*, trans. M. Fitzsimons (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1928); Bernard Bro, *The Little Way: The Spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans Alan Neame, intro. Paul McPartlan (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979, 1997); Joann Wolski Conn and Walter E. Conn, 'Self-transcendence in the spiritual life: Thérèse of Lisieux', in *The Pedagogy of God's Image: Essays on symbol and the religious imagination* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1982); 'Conversion as Self-Transcendence exemplified in the Life of St Thérèse of Lisieux', *Spirituality Today* 34 (1982): 303-311; Àngel de les Gavarres, *Thérèse, the Little Child of God's Mercy: Her Spiritual Itinerary in the Light of Her Autobiographical Manuscripts* (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1999). This last-mentioned well written and well documented book discusses Thérèse's 'trial of faith' in but four pages.

¹⁹³ I own a certain resistance to using psychological theories in relation to Thérèse. On one hand, they are a very useful tool that allows one to penetrate the psyches of Thérèse and her family; on the other hand, one can make incorrect assessments. In relation to Thérèse, who is already a canonised saint and Doctor of the Church, it seems somewhat irreverent to do so. However, I do use them in this dissertation, my main purpose being to show that Thérèse suffered the weaknesses of human nature like all of us and that she was needed to overcome her 'false self' in order to become holy. The following citation is interesting in this regard: 'The importance of [Thérèse's] childhood's exploits must not be exaggerated, although she has confided them to us; there was another side to them. She was not afraid to give trouble to her father and mother and to oppose them; that was in accordance with her high-spiritedness. The second stage was when her guardian angel moved her to self-reproach and shame and to beg pardon. Then she would cry for hours, and it was not easy to comfort her ... We are trying to grasp the very human inner weakness of Teresa's nature. Long before she was a saint, the little four-year-old ... displayed a rapacity, an egoism, a spirit of conquest, in a word, an "imperialism", of quite remarkable energy; and this would one day have to be given an entirely new direction and transmuted into a tragical stripping away of self. It was a revelation, nay, an explosion, of Teresa's nature, a nature that had to be broken-in like a thoroughbred to bit and saddle, if she was not to run the risk of being carried down to the depths of revolt rather than up to the heights of holiness. That cry of hers was not a Christian cry: Nietzsche would have roared his approval; a limitless "will to power" was written all over it — and over her own authentic characteristics' (see Henri Ghéon, *The Secret of The Little Flower*, 39, 41f).

¹⁹⁴ Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, translated from the German by Ruth Ward (New York: Basic Books: 1981), 4.

the truth in the individual and unique history of our childhood'.¹⁹⁵ Daniel Stern writes: 'The mother is involved in a natural process with her baby, a process that unfolds with a fascinating intricacy and complexity for which both she and the baby are well prepared by millennia of evolution.'¹⁹⁶ Stern also notes: 'The infant's first exposure to the human world consists simply of whatever his mother actually does with her face, voice, body and hands'.¹⁹⁷

Theresian researchers such as Michael St Clair,¹⁹⁸ Constance Fitzgerald,¹⁹⁹ Mary Frohlich,²⁰⁰ Robert J. Giugliano²⁰¹ and Joann Wolski Conn²⁰² also look to specific streams of psychoanalytic thought²⁰³ such as Object Relations Theory to draw the specific connection between the theory and the particular aspect of Thérèse's life they study. 'Object Relations is a *set of theories* which postulate that *relationships*, beginning with the mother-infant dyad, are primary, and that intrapsychic, interpersonal, and group experiences lay the foundation from the development of individual identity'.²⁰⁴ In their articles, these authors contribute insightful ideas to the topic of my dissertation.

Michael St Clair's later book (1996)²⁰⁵ is mainly a summary of the theories of significant object relations theorists: Melanie Klein, W. R. D. Fairbairn, Edith Jacobson, D. W. Winnicott, Margaret Mahler, and Otto Kernberg.²⁰⁶ In his earlier

¹⁹⁵ Miller, 3.

¹⁹⁶ Daniel Stern, *The First Relationship: Infant and Mother* (Glasgow: Fontana/Open Books, 1977), 10.

¹⁹⁷ Stern, 16.

¹⁹⁸ Michael St Clair, 'Case Studies of Two Contrasting Saints' [St Augustine and St Thérèse of Lisieux], in *Human Relationships and the Experience of God: Object Relations and Religion* (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1994):50-78.

¹⁹⁹ Constance Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', <http://www.geocities.com/baltimorecarmel/therese/tlconnie.html> [Accessed 28/02/2008]. The article originally appeared in *The Way Supplement* (Summer 1997): 74-96.

²⁰⁰ Mary Frohlich, "'Your Face Is My Only Homeland": 177-205.

²⁰¹ Robert J. Giugliano, 'Separation, Loss, and Longing in the Infancy and Early Childhood of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face', *Studies in Spirituality* 14 (2004): 225-254.

²⁰² Joann Wolski Conn, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: Far From Spiritual Childhood', *Spiritus* 6 (2006): 68-89. Conn's emphasis is not Thérèse's "little way" as such, but a psychological analysis of Therese's spiritual maturity using the "little way" as a medium.

²⁰³ See 'Psychology and spirituality' — Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, William James, Carl Jung, Victor Frankl — in Philip Sheldrake (ed.), *NWDCS*: 49-52.

²⁰⁴ 'Object Relations': <http://www.object-relations.com> [Accessed 26/04/08].

²⁰⁵ See Michael St Clair, *Object Relations and Self Psychology: An Introduction*, 2nd rev. edn. (Pacific Grove CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1996).

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 11

book (1994), St Clair notes that Thérèse suffers 'an extraordinary series of key losses during the early years of her life, during the pre-oedipal period [before the age of 3 years²⁰⁷], with traumatic consequences',²⁰⁸ such as her serious childhood illnesses — some of which seem to have been the result of holding back an understandable anger at her painful losses. St Clair states that Thérèse 'felt her anger, which would have seemed alien to her, as a demonic experience, and in a kind of psychological splitting [the idealized mother from the 'bad' mother] the Blessed Virgin appeared as an idealized maternal figure.'²⁰⁹ Further, writes St Clair: 'the significant losses in her life (see Chapter 4 below) seem to have delayed Thérèse's maturing and intensified her dependent relationship on subsequent sisters'.²¹⁰ In his opinion, Thérèse's spirituality has a child-like quality to it, 'a child unabashedly seeking the comfort of a parent ... a loving Divine Parent'.²¹¹

On the other hand, Joann Wolski Conn would want to paint a picture of a mature Theresian psychospirituality in order to present Thérèse's *petite voie* in a favourable light. Using, in part, object relations theory of 'relationship', Conn traces Thérèse's developmental maturing by 'tracing the meanings of "to remain little" through letters, poetry, and plays written between 1893 and 1897'. This research 'reveals a rich and practical theology of *how* to live maturely in Jesus. Love requires littleness because through love Jesus became a little infant'.²¹² In the conclusion to her article, Conn writes that 'the phrase, "way of spiritual childhood" which Thérèse never uses — [Thérèse calls it (without capitals) *une petite voie*] — has become 'a barrier to understanding her spiritual development'. Wolski Conn writes that yes, in a sense 'Thérèse's "little way" is analogous to childhood'. For one thing, 'It is trusting, based on a relation to God as our reliable parent.' 'On the other hand, the "little way" is far from childhood. It is the outcome of decisions through which Thérèse, cooperating with grace, created a freer self to be given away, of struggle in darkness to surrender

²⁰⁷ For discussion on this, see Nancy J. Chodorow, 'Object-Relations and the Female Oedipal Configuration', in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and Sociology of Gender*, 2nd rev. edn., with new preface (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978/1999): 111-129.

²⁰⁸ St Clair, *Human Relations and the Experience of God*, 73.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 73.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 73f.

²¹¹ Ibid., 74.

²¹² Conn, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: Far From Spiritual Childhood), 79.

to Love, choices far beyond the capacity of childhood.²¹³ From the perspective of this dissertation, the value of Thérèse's insight into the sin of unbelief would only be significant if it were the outcome of her mature psychospirituality.

Constance Fitzgerald states the need to 'radicalize the text, to read it into our postmodern times, to "grow it up"'.²¹⁴ Knowing that *object* in Object Relations is a technical word and refers to that 'with which a *subject* relates',²¹⁵ Fitzgerald selects the object *face* [*un regard*] and notes its importance in Thérèse's understanding of *mission*. It was in the very last months of her life, she writes, that Thérèse surrendered her metaphorical 'attachment' to the face of Jesus. And having negotiated this act of final surrender, her mission to save souls broke all previous limits and opened out to global breadth and heaven's infinity. Fitzgerald, in her article, also chooses to look through 'the lens of mothering and female bonding' to speak of Thérèse's relationship to her mother and *vice versa*.²¹⁶ And here, among other resources, she consults the work of Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*²¹⁷ the central theme of whose book is the individual psyche.

²¹³ Ibid., 89.

²¹⁴ On the other hand, a text like *An Echo of the Heart of God* finds no reason to want to 'grow the text up'. This book is centred on Thérèse's spirituality in such a way that it makes convincing reading to the most educated of people as well as to those who seek a deeper understanding of Thérésian spirituality. (See *An Echo of the Heart of God & Studies of the Self-Offering of St Thérèse of Lisieux*); see also, Christopher O'Donnell, *Love in the Heart of the Church*: 'Although systematic theology and spirituality are two distinct ways of coming to knowledge, they are not independent: it is the one mystery of the Church which theologians study and which Thérèse grasped through prayer and love', 31; see also, Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *Under the Torrent of His Love*: 'At the height of her spiritual development St Thérèse made a great discovery. "My vocation", she cried out with joy, "is to be love in the heart of the Church". In perhaps a slightly different sense it may be said of her that her vocation was also to be *faith* in the heart of the Church. That faith came to shine so brightly in the dark night through which she walked for many years, that she was able to proclaim it to "a vast army of little souls" in crystal-clear tones which touch their hearts', 'Foreword', x.

²¹⁵ Michael St Clair, *Object Relations and Self Psychology*, 5.

²¹⁶ Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', 2.

²¹⁷ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. As stated above, the central theme of Chodorow's book is 'the individual psyche'. 'This is formed', Chodorow explains, 'mainly through unconscious communications between mother and child; this internal world is shaped as the child unconsciously creates rudimentary pictures of herself in the world and copes with anxiety and other unpleasant affects. Women experience a sense of self-in-relation that is in contrast to men's creation of a self that wishes to deny relation and connection ... The mother is very important in the daughter's psyche and sense of self, such that core psychological and interpersonal experiences for women can be understood in terms of this internal mother-daughter lineage' (see Chodorow, viii).

Fitzgerald uses such theories as she weaves her way through a series of steps centering on 'mother loss'. The displacement of the mother-face [Zélie Martin's] in the 'veil' which shields the face of M. Martin in Thérèse 'prophetic vision' [see Chapter 4 below] and which, as a symbol, is 'the sign not only for intersubjective transcendence but also for the promise it gives of an even greater transcendent experience with yet another face, the holy, loving Face from eternity'²¹⁸ — this is the Face which, to some extent, mirrors M. Martin's disfigurement and Thérèse's love both for her father and for the Holy Face. Further, there is a tradition in Christian spirituality, Fitzgerald notes, where Jesus is both Mother and Beloved. Here, then, Thérèse gives and receives spiritual nourishment: 'the way the reciprocity is experienced is not to mother the infinite but to understand oneself as limitlessly mother to the others' [as in 'mission'].²¹⁹ At the end of her life, Thérèse is unable to see the Face for the veil of faith has become a wall which reaches right up to the heavens; yet she still desires to remain resigned to eat the bread of sorrow and to remain at the 'table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating'. She is a sinner among sinners, and yet, it can be said, their 'mothering' intercessor as well. Fitzgerald suggests that it is the series of 'mother losses' which Thérèse suffers all through her life — and not just the loss of the Face of God in the final months — that defines the significance of Thérèse's mission; it 'prefigures' the atheism of our day.²²⁰

In his paper, Robert Giugliano uses 'Attachment Theory'.²²¹ This is a 'psychological, evolutionary and ethological theory that provides a descriptive and explanatory framework for discussion of interpersonal relationship between human beings. In infancy it is primarily a process of *proximity seeking* to an identified *attachment*

²¹⁸ See Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', 5.

²¹⁹ Thérèse 'redefines this motherhood to cosmic and limitless dimension' (cf. Fitzgerald, 12). Michelle Jones has another interpretation of Thérèse and 'mothering souls'. Jones sees a positive progression in Thérèse's view of mission when Thérèse can move from 'mothering souls' to 'being a sister to them' (see Michelle Jones, 'The Development in the Understanding of Mission in the Life and Writings of St Thérèse of Lisieux and its Contemporary Relevance'. (Dissertation, M.Theol., Notre Dame University, Western Australia, 2006).

²²⁰ Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', 17.

²²¹ Giugliano, 'Separation, Loss, and Longing in the Infancy and Early Childhood of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face': 225-254. The major hypothesis of Giugliano's paper 'is that the suffering Thérèse endured from birth until she was four and a half years old was extreme, at times traumatic, and the essential foundation for her psychological and spiritual development', 227.

figure in situations of perceived distress or alarm'.²²² This theory, too, falls under the umbrella category of Object Relations. Giugliano uses 'attachment' as the 'object' figure. His article can be read as a continuing discussion on the 'mothering' theme discussed above. Giugliano's summary reads:

Thérèse and Zélie's relationship was painfully ambivalent and insecure and could not sustain or metabolize the anger, distress, and grief Thérèse experienced when separated from her wet nurse Rose Taillé. Rose was Thérèse's primary attachment figure from the age of two months to fifteen months and the source of primary experiences of loving and being loved. The suffering Thérèse endured during the first four and half years of her life before her mother died of breast cancer was as intense and severe as any she was to suffer subsequent to her mother's death with the exception of the physical and psychological suffering from tuberculosis that caused her death.²²³

Though Giugliano's view is plausible, I do not believe it takes into consideration the power of Thérèse's will: 'Teresa was eager, intelligent, headstrong, and almost unbelievably stubborn: when she had said "no", nothing could move her'.²²⁴ Thérèse exhibited a strong will from a very early age. She knew what she wanted and she demanded that she get it. I also am reluctant to concede that the relationship Thérèse had with her mother was 'painfully ambivalent and insecure ...' There was certainly some ambivalence and insecurity due to the circumstances, but 'painfully' so? I am not so sure. M. Martin's letters do not suggest this; and Thérèse does not say it in her writings. I also want to retain the view that concerns a Near Death Experience experienced by Thérèse at two months (see Chapter 4 below).

Mary Frohlich's article, 'Your Face is my only Homeland: A Psychological Perspective on Thérèse of Lisieux and Devotion to the Holy Face',²²⁵ also employs Object Relations theory and uses theorists Denis Vasse, C.D. Winnicott and Christopher Bollas. Frohlich writes that according to the French psychologist, Denis Vasse, Thérèse registered 'anguish' on her mother's face when Zélie realised she could not satisfy Thérèse's need for her mother's milk because of her advancing breast cancer. This anguish was heightened for Zélie by the remembrance that she had

²²² Attachment Theory. <http://en.wikipedia> [Accessed 26/04/08].

²²³ Giugliano, 253.

²²⁴ See Ghéon, *The Secret of the Little Flower*, 38.

²²⁵ Frohlich, 'Your Face is my Only Homeland'. This title is taken from Thérèse's poem, *PN* 20, 3.

already lost five previous children, four in infancy.²²⁶ This anxiety on the part of Thérèse might develop into a 'false self' which seeks security by 'prematurely and compulsively attuning to the claims and requests of others'. In Thérèse's case, Rose Taillé's repeated success in meeting the needs of the infant Thérèse enabled Thérèse's 'true self' [also] to become a living reality without completely obliterating the call from her 'false self'. Rose protected Thérèse from primitive anxieties and let her enjoy the illusion of omnipotence — which will later be a source of her creativity and when necessary, also provides for disillusionment (reality-sense) without despair.²²⁷ As noted also by Fitzgerald, Thérèse's angst finds resolution in Devotion to the Holy Face.

Again using Object Relations theory, Ana-Maria Rizzuto posits 'God' as a love object. She notes that 'the child's creation of his [or her] God is a very private process which takes place in silent exchanges between the child and his parents' and later, with educators, ministers, and authority figures. Rizzuto continues:

It is not so much what these people say, as what they do, and how they relate to the child that the child will use to reshape his [or her] God according to his needs ... The process of continuous reshaping of the God representation is delicate and requires that the adult provide respect for the child's adaptive or defensive activities.²²⁸

In this respect, Thérèse pays sincere tribute to Pauline, her 'maternal' sister, for the 'religious formation' she gave her young sister.²²⁹ Even if Mme. Martin had 'failed' in her role as 'mother' to Thérèse [Giugliano], Pauline seems to have very successfully 'mothered' Thérèse after Mme. Martin's death. I do concede, however, that what

²²⁶ Hélène, born 13 October 1864, died 22 February 1870 (5 years); Joseph-Louis, born 20 September 1866, died 14 February 1867 (4 months); Joseph-Jean-Baptiste, born 19 December 1867, died 24 August 1868 (7 months); Mélanie-Thérèse, born 16 August 1870, died 8 October 1870 (8 weeks).

²²⁷ See 'Winnicott's View of Early Infanthood'. <http://www.candleinthedark.com/winnicott> [Accessed 2404/2008].

²²⁸ See Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 210. See also James W. Fowler, 'Early Childhood and the "Birth of God"', in *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996): 46-53 where Fowler discusses Rizzuto's book; see also Fowler's *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

²²⁹ Cf. SS Manuscript A, 175.

happens in the very early years of a child's life is what is most important in his or her later psychological and emotional development.

Yes, Thérèse did experience much suffering throughout her short life.²³⁰ While some, if not all of her references to it can be subjected to physiological analysis — 'what a real cross is the martyrdom of the heart, the interior suffering of the soul'²³¹ — there is another way of looking at her suffering: the way of suffering used vicariously.²³² This is the chosen path of the mystic in his or her association with Jesus Crucified and Risen.²³³ 'Love never finds impossibilities, because it believes everything is possible, everything is permitted', Thérèse wrote.²³⁴ Mary Frohlich writes: 'In Thérèse's mature spirituality, the core focus is clearly shifted from desire for suffering to desire for participation in divine love'.²³⁵

Mini-summary

These articles show something of the analyses of Thérèse's childhood from a psychological point of view. This, in turn, can help us to understand the struggle in which she engaged in order to lose her 'false self' and to grow into the person of great faith amidst the darkest of darkness.

D. The Last Eighteen Months of Thérèse's Life ²³⁶

In this period, Thérèse's *suffering* reflects her intense interior suffering of experiencing herself as having no faith, and her exterior suffering of dying from

²³⁰ Cf. Chapter 4, 166.

²³¹ GC II, 872.

²³² In the August, the month before her death, Thérèse wrote: 'Oh, my God, how gentle You are to the little victim of Your Merciful Love! Even now when You join exterior suffering to the trials of my soul, I cannot say: 'The agonies of death have surrounded me'', but I cry out in my gratitude: 'I have descended into the valley of the shadow of death, nevertheless, I fear no evil because You are with me, Lord!' (cf. GC II, 1170).

²³³ See Raymond Gawronski, "'My Name is Sacrifice': The Mission of Blessed Faustina', *Communio* 24 (Winter 1997): 815-841.

²³⁴ SS Manuscript A, 114, citing *Imitation of Christ* III 5.4.

²³⁵ See Frohlich, 'Your Face is my Only Homeland', 201.

²³⁶ The texts cited above in the earlier part of this chapter are taken from Manuscript C, written in the last weeks of Thérèse's life.

tuberculosis. She wrote in 1897: 'For a long time I have not belonged to myself since I delivered myself totally to Jesus, and He is therefore free to do with me as He pleases. He has given me the attraction for a complete exile and He has made me understand all the sufferings I would meet with, asking me if I would want to drink this chalice to the dregs'.²³⁷

Jean-François Six, writing in 1995, states that 'a large number of theologians or historians who have studied Thérèse have hardly spoken of it — [her trial of faith from Easter 1896] — quite simply because they did not see its importance'.²³⁸ Thérèse's interior trial and her exterior illness, these combined, are her lived-out experience of the *sin against faith*. That is, Thérèse, in her final months, is a living symbol of the interior state of the soul of one who sins against faith to an extreme degree (or even lesser degree?). This thesis highlights that the seriousness of the *sin against faith* is realised not only in her words but also in her witness. She, herself, becomes a symbol of the darkness in the soul of one in the state of serious sin.

One of the most significant of the authors, along with Six, writing on the topic of the last eighteen months of Thérèse's life is Frederick L. Miller.²³⁹ Miller dedicated his book to Pope John Paul II, who on 19 October 1997 declared Saint Thérèse a Doctor of the Church. Miller's thesis is: 'to prove that Thérèse had indeed attained the mystical marriage before the inception of the "trial of faith"'²⁴⁰ — [against those who proposed otherwise, for example, Hans Urs von Balthasar²⁴¹ and perhaps, even, Conrad de Meester who writes 'But the bride was not ready. She still needed to undergo the work of additional suffering ... All this preparation was God proceeding with his purifying work, just as St John of the Cross describes the process so inimitably in his *Dark Night of the Soul*']²⁴² — and to demonstrate that this trial, far

²³⁷ SS Manuscript C, 218. The text continues: 'I wanted to seize this cup immediately when Jesus presented it, but He withdrew His hand and made me understand that my resignation alone was pleasing to Him'. It seems to me that Thérèse was already 'very conformed' to the Crucified Christ.

²³⁸ Six, *Light of the Night*, 170.

²³⁹ Frederick L. Miller, *The Trial of Faith of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux* (New York: Alba House, 1998). Also see Antoine Thérèse Lawlor, review of 'The Trial of Faith of St Thérèse of Lisieux' by Frederick L. Miller. <http://findarticles.com> [Accessed 7/04/2008].

²⁴⁰ Miller, *The Trial of Faith in Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, xv.

²⁴¹ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*, 251-272.

²⁴² See Conrad de Meester, *With Empty Hands*, 77, 79.

from indicating a need for purification in Thérèse, manifests an intensity of union with Christ acknowledged intuitively by the Church but not fully recognized in the field of spiritual theology until the publication of the critical editions of Thérèse's writings.²⁴³ Miller draws a parallel between the death of St Thérèse and the death of Jesus. As Jesus takes upon himself the sins of all humankind, so Thérèse does likewise.²⁴⁴ This opinion is again expressed in *An Echo from the Heart of God*.²⁴⁵ This dissertation concurs with those opinions and further suggests that Thérèse was given this specific share in the sufferings of Christ as a mystical gift. Julian Stead, in his review of Miller's book, states:

Not loss of feeling, but loss of the will to believe, is sin, and Thérèse felt it was the besetting sin of her times. She felt called to offer herself in union with Christ for its expiation; she felt that her mission was to strengthen the gift of faith in others. She emerges in Miller's treatment as a giant of supernatural intelligence.²⁴⁶

These words provide the closest link yet to the emphasis of this dissertation, the point of difference being that my emphasis is the *sin* of unbelief itself and its possible presence in today's culture, and not merely referencing it, more or less in passing. Miller argues that Thérèse's trial is the final stage in a life-long journey of self-offering to God. This dissertation agrees with that also. (The previous section in this Literature Review indicated that Thérèse's infancy and childhood years influence her final months in her terminal illness — as they necessarily must, of course). However, on the other hand, whereas Miller develops this point gradually throughout his entire *opus*, this dissertation focuses particularly on Thérèse's relationship to *faith* and to *sin* throughout her short life. And it argues that that relationship *climaxed* in her insights into the *sin against faith* in her 'trial'. In other words, the thesis is different.

²⁴³ Miller, *The Trial of Faith of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, xv.

²⁴⁴ See also Elaine Hallett, 'Transformation into Christ', review of *The Power of Confidence: Genesis and Structure of the "Way of Spiritual Childhood" of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, by Conrad De Meester, *The Trial of Faith of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, by Frederick L. Miller, and *Under the Torrent of His*, by Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, in *New Oxford Review* 68/3 (Mar 2001): 32-39.

²⁴⁵ See 'Thérèse in the state of Spiritual Marriage' in *An Echo from the Heart of God*, 237-240.

²⁴⁶ Dom Julian Stead, review of *The Trial of Faith of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, by Frederick L. Miller, in *New Oxford Review* 66/3 (Mar 1999): 46f.

In his review of Miller's book, Dom Julian Stead also notes that Thérèse in her *Trial of Faith* 'shared [in her emotions not in her will] the feeling of the honest atheist for whom God, Heaven, and life everlasting are illusions, less real than a dream'. In this, Stead comes right to the heart of the application of Thérèse's trial for today, and it is here that John Paul II's observation that 'one finds an uncanny contemporaneity in most of Thérèse's themes' is pertinent.²⁴⁷ As noted above, insights such as Stead finds in Miller's work — these insights are within the context of a thesis different from mine.

Ida Görres, as she treats the last months of Thérèse's life, cuts through to the essence of Thérèse's 'trial'. Görres highlights the importance of Thérèse's remark: 'Oh, if you knew what horrible thoughts constantly oppress me ... The reasoning of the worst materialists forces itself upon my mind'. Thérèse, writes Görres, was 'the prey of *raisonnements*, ideas, arguments of the materialists. She was suffering from genuine intellectual temptation; her possession of the truth was threatened by active hostility, not only by passive shadowings'.²⁴⁸ Again, these insights belong within a specific chapter of Görres' book; the entire book is not built on them.

Jean-François Six's *Light of the Night* was published in 1996. As he notes, Schopenhauerian pessimism seized the last quarter of the nineteenth century in which Thérèse lived.²⁴⁹ This philosophy influenced Nietzschean *nihilism*. Of *nihilism* Friedrich Nietzsche who died in 1900 — Thérèse in 1897 — wrote:

A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *NOT* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist. According to this view, our existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning: the pathos of 'in vain' is the nihilists' pathos — at the same time, as pathos, an inconsistency on the part of the nihilists.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Pope John Paul II, 'Fervent Communion with Christ's Sufferings', *L'Osservatore Romano*, (23 June 1980): 13-14. Cited in Frederick L. Miller, *The Trial of Faith of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, xii. See also John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *DAS* where the pope elaborates on Thérèse's significance for today.

²⁴⁸ See Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 357f.

²⁴⁹ Six, *Light of the Night*, 204, fn. 68.

²⁵⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed., commentary, Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), section 585. Julian Young, in his book *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 201, writes that the argument of his book has been that, 'though Nietzsche rejects the God of Christianity, he is not anti-religious. On the contrary [Young argues] he is *above all* a religious thinker'. [The name

Thérèse sensed the increasing dominance of a culture in which God was not evident and the collapse of a Christianity in which God was evident.²⁵¹ Yet she tells those people who think faith is certain because they 'see' it in images and myths, 'that faith does not offer itself in this 'direct' glare'.²⁵² Finding evidence in Thérèse's life, Six continues: 'On the contrary, faith which has come to maturity is subject to the trial of not seeing, a trial which issues in the only outcome possible: trust. It is impossible to look at the burning bush'.²⁵³

Writing at almost the same time as Jean-François Six (perhaps two years later), Constance Fitzgerald echoes something of Six's insights: 'In her decisive life experience, an experience of absolute barrenness in the face of shattering 'Otherness"... Thérèse prefigures the atheism of the [last] century ... [she] shows in her last suffering how self-destructively sentimental it is to allow our understanding of God who is Love to be separated from the hidden God'.²⁵⁴

Similarly, Mary Frohlich in her article, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux', traces the relationship between Thérèse's desolation in the last eighteen months of her life and the desolation of postmodern culture, and concludes that Thérèse 'appears not to have been a stranger to the roots of postmodern desolation'.²⁵⁵ And in another article, Thérèse of Lisieux: "Doctor for the Third Millennium?",

'Nietzsche' can seem synonymous with 'the death of God' and can, therefore, bear some comparison to Thérèse's trial of faith]. Young expands his argument thus: '[Nietzsche,] Accepting (as he should) Schopenhauer's twofold analysis of religion as an affective-intellectual-institutional construction which (a) responds to the existential problems of death and pain and (b) expounds and gives authority to community-creating ethos, [he] Nietzsche (a) offers "Dionysian" pantheism as the solution to the problems of death and pain, and (b) argues that we must hope and work for the new "festival": that flourishing and authentic community, absent from modernity, can only be restored through the rebirth of a life-and humanity-affirming religion modelled on that of the Greeks'. Young places Nietzsche within German intellectual history ... Nietzsche's views, argues Young, 'are very much the views one would expect from someone with his perceptions and anxieties, writing at his time and in his place'. [In light of the analysis of modern atheism in the Conclusions to this dissertation, perhaps we can class Nietzsche as a 'believer' in Schneiders' terms of 'fidelity to one's "ultimate value"'].

²⁵¹ Six, 168.

²⁵² Six, 168f.

²⁵³ Six, 169.

²⁵⁴ Constance Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux' (13 of www copy). Fitzgerald also references David Tracy, *The Hidden God* (See Lois Malcolm, 'An Interview with David Tracy', www.religion-online.org. [Accessed 22/09/2008], and Denys Turner's *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁵⁵ Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux', 272.

Frohlich writes: 'To be truly a "Doctor for the Third Millennium" would, it seems, require that the individual offer a response to the issues of what we call "postmodernism"'. Frohlich proposes that 'Thérèse indeed lived a remarkably "small" life ... and yet from this small place, intimately linked to God, it is possible [for us as it was for Thérèse] to love without boundaries'. And herein, Frohlich suggests, 'there is profound material for reflection of how to resolve one of the quandaries of postmodernism: How can we affirm the vast diversity of cultures and worldviews, without gutting completely the notion of "truth"?'.²⁵⁶

Joann Wolski Conn, in reference to Thérèse, writes:

Nineteenth and twentieth century spirituality was, like all previous spirituality, a creative response to God's presence discerned in events and ideas. Response to the enlightenment, secularism, atheism, and political revolution ranged from anti-intellectualism in theology and piety on the one hand, to redemptive identification with modern struggles of faith in Thérèse of Lisieux and attempts to reconcile science and religion in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.²⁵⁷

A book that has proved helpful for me in understanding something of the 'trial of faith' that Thérèse experienced is Brian Kolodiejchuk's *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*. Here we can detect — as we will later when speaking specifically of Thérèse in relation to unbelief — the extreme anguish experienced by these two women who experience 'no faith'. Mother Teresa wrote in her private diary:

They say people in hell suffer eternal pain because of the loss of God ... I feel just that terrible pain of loss ... of God not being God — of God not really existing ... That darkness that surrounds me on all sides ... in my heart there is no faith — no love — no trust ... I do not doubt that it was You who called me with so much love and force. — It was You — I know. That is why the work is Yours and it is You even now — but I have no faith — I don't believe.— Jesus, don't let my soul be deceived — not let me deceive anyone ... I want to satiate Your Thirst with every single drop of blood that You can find in me ...²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: "Doctor for the Third Millennium?"', 33, 35f.

²⁵⁷ Joann Wolski Conn, *Spirituality and Personal Maturity* (New York /Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 24f.

²⁵⁸ *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the 'Saint of Calcutta'*, edited and with commentary by Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 192-194. This book is the edited private writings of Mother Teresa — writings to her spiritual directors, and writings that she wished

The parallels with Thérèse are strong: in the themes of satiating Jesus' thirst; in the darkness of faith; and in searching for truth and not wanting to be deceived in that search.²⁵⁹

Dermot O'Donoghue, in 'The Jonas Experience', centres his discussion on the 'absolute and unrelenting quality of the darkness which oppressed [Thérèse's] spirit during the last eighteen months of her life'. O'Donoghue notes that 'the night of mere co-existence, *la nuit du néant*: this is not a pious cliché ... it tells of an experience which no man or woman can undergo without the kind of horror and dismay which has strong physical repercussions'.²⁶⁰ His line of argument, however, links this 'trial' to Thérèse's *petite voie* where 'the "little way" vanished into its own littleness, being no more than a whispered word that died away into the eternal silence'.²⁶¹ On the other hand, my interest in Thérèse's 'trial of faith' is to show its connection to the sin against faith.

Apropos of a possible 'false self' in Thérèse (spoken of earlier as sin under psychological guise), Joseph F. Schmidt writes:

Now, in her extreme weakness [1897], as she was pampered by her sisters, if any wilfulness, self-love, or self-centeredness had remained in Thérèse it would surely have surfaced. The temptation to feel that she had achieved some degree of holiness; the pride of having been successful in acquiring merit to be rewarded; the secret self-satisfaction of having lived a notable life, of having made a good impression, and of having pleased her sisters: the self-love of having acquired some kind of virtue and status — all these traps were now

destroyed after her death. These writings reveal the deep, intense, interior darkness of soul that she experienced for years; and they show that the more she responded to the call to be His light for the 'poorest of the poor', the deeper the darkness her faith became. My contention is that, similarly, the more Thérèse also responds to Jesus' cry from the Cross 'I thirst', the more redemptive her sufferings become for sinners, especially those who have lost the faith. The 'fruit' of Mother Teresa's 'trial' was evident — in the flourishing of her work; with Thérèse, the 'fruit' was unseen — in the souls of 'sinners'.

²⁵⁹ On the other hand, while both Thérèse and Teresa experienced 'no faith' in the midst of a firm and living faith and described that using similar imagery, Teresa's 'darkness of faith' was not directly connected to 'sinners', while that of Thérèse's was. Thérèse's mission was in answering Jesus' cry 'I thirst' by associating herself with Jesus' saving mission of bringing faith to 'souls'. Mother Teresa's was in answering that same cry, 'I thirst', by associating herself with Jesus mission to 'love one another as I have loved you' by healing bodies.

²⁶⁰ Noel Dermot O'Donoghue, 'The Jonas Experience', in John Garvey, ed., *Modern Spirituality: An Anthology* (Springfield ILL: Templegate Publishers, 1985): 88-99.

²⁶¹ O'Donoghue, 'The Jonas Experience', 97.

lying in wait for Thérèse as she became more and more vulnerable. But she had grown into a spirit free of any self-consciousness, self-preoccupation, and self-importance, and this freedom allowed her to be even idolized without guardedness, resistance, or fuss. 'I see only the graces I've received from God', she said.²⁶²

Here is evidence of the emergent 't/True self'.

E. Literature that highlights Thérèse's *Holiness*

Among other authors consulted, several have been particularly helpful in my understanding of Thérèse's *holiness*: the author of *An Echo from the Heart of God*,²⁶³ Jean Guittton's *The Spiritual Genius of St Thérèse*,²⁶⁴ Henri Ghéon's *The Secret of the Little Flower*,²⁶⁵ *My Vocation is Love* by Jean Lafrance,²⁶⁶ *The Story of a Family: The Home of St Thérèse of Lisieux*,²⁶⁷ *Love in the Heart of the Church* by Christopher O'Donnell,²⁶⁸ *With Empty Hands*,²⁶⁹ Marie-Eugène's *Under the Torrent of His Love*²⁷⁰ and Bernard Bro's *St Thérèse of Lisieux*.²⁷¹ Perhaps it is because these authors are mainly French and/or members of the Carmelite Order that they penetrate Thérèse's spirituality so positively. Jean Lafrance, for example, seems to describe the spiritual life from a position of knowing it intimately himself. To appreciate Thérèse's holiness one almost needs to have one's own in-depth experience of God's love, and because this is not always the case, the deeply spiritual writings of another can help one to better understand the 'upper reaches' of the spiritual life and thus to better appreciate

²⁶² See Joseph F. Schmidt, *Everything is Grace: The Life and Way of Thérèse of Lisieux* 319f.

²⁶³ *An Echo of the Heart of God* and *Studies of the Self-Offering of St Thérèse of Lisieux*.

²⁶⁴ Guittton, *The Spiritual Genius of St Thérèse*.

²⁶⁵ Ghéon, *The Secret of The Little Flower*.

²⁶⁶ Lafrance, *My Vocation is Love: Thérèse of Lisieux*. Two other books by this author (1931-1991) give deep insight into the soul's journey to holiness: *Abiding in God* and *Preferring God*, trans. Florestine Audette (both books published by Mediaspaul: Sherbrooke, Canada, 2004).

²⁶⁷ Fr. Stéphane-Joseph Piat, *The Story of a Family: The Home of St Thérèse of Lisieux (The Little Flower)*.

²⁶⁸ O'Donnell, *Love in the Heart of the Church*.

²⁶⁹ de Meester, *With Empty Hands*.

²⁷⁰ Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *Under the Torrent of His Love*.

²⁷¹ Bro, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*. Bernard Bro O.P. assisted with the English translation of Thérèse's poetry from French into English. Referring to *The Last Conversations*, Bro says: 'It is not a matter simply of a few leaves put together after the fact through a misplaced affection, but rather the rereading of an entire life in the face of death and of Christ', 57. Bro implies that Mother Agnes did not 'doctor' the pages to suit her own sense of piety.

Thérèse's holiness.²⁷² Jean-François Six, too, is French; his writing though is perhaps more psychological than deeply spiritual, as is that of the German author, Ida Görres, whose book is surely yet a classic.²⁷³

Conclusion

While this survey indicates a certain similarity with the content material of my dissertation, I would like to think that in my work there is an emphasis not found elsewhere. This might be stated thus: Thérèse's reference to the 'sin against faith' (see text cited above) can open out into an area of personal and moral responsibility to become truly human²⁷⁴ — one where the search for *truth* rather than truth's anti-allurements becomes the determining factor in the human person's response to life. For today 'we are being brought face-to-face with our sin — the reality of the extravagant ruptures in which we collude'.²⁷⁵ Thérèse in the nineteenth century faced ruptures within the narrow confines of her life (see Chapter 5) even though she did not have access to instant electronic historical analysis as we have today. Nonetheless, her searching is authentic. And while, in the twenty-first century, not all, or not even a few, might be called to live with the 'passion' with which Thérèse responds to life, her life is, nevertheless, an example of a fervent search for the truth in the midst of much complexity.²⁷⁶

Joann Conn and others have chosen to highlight Thérèse's maturity rather than her 'littleness'. Yet Denis Vasse writes that there are certain traits in Thérèse that a psychoanalyst might name as anorexia and melancholic depression, and he raises a

²⁷² If one needs to balance this emphasis with another, then Monica Furlong's work provides an example that brings that balance.

²⁷³ Görres, *The Hidden Face*.

²⁷⁴ See the Academy of Human and Social Sciences, inaugurated in Rome on 17 April 2008. Inspired by the thought of Pope John Paul II, the Academy's objective 'is to gather people from the world of culture, professors and students, in a unitarian project that aims to study the human being from different points of view, in the first place, from the human and social sciences, but also form the point of view of philosophy, theology and religion' (see 'World News' in *The Catholic Leader*, 4 May 2008, 6).

²⁷⁵ See Donna J. Markham, 'The Leader's Mantle: Creating Connection in Chaotic Times', *Human Development* 27/4 (2006): 5-12.

²⁷⁶ See Constance Fitzgerald, 'Passion in the Carmelite Tradition: Edith Stein', *Spiritus* 2 (2002): 217-235.

query: She has been proclaimed a Doctor of the Church; is she a Doctor or is she sick? Thérèse is a fine example of a Doctor of the Church precisely because she shares her experiences of vulnerability. She is holy in spite of her woundedness, or psychological weaknesses. All this only enhances her position. Thérèse is a Doctor of the Church and at the same time, an excellent example of a 'wounded healer'. Vasse continues. He notes that Thérèse speaks of the love of God in the disconcerting words of a 'little girl'. But, he adds, hers is not the autobiography of pathological discourses. *'Car il est question de notre humanité: nous sommes appelés à devenir "homme" au Coeur de nos maladies, our symptômes, de nos ambivalences'*. [For it is a question of our humanity: we are called to become 'human' in the midst of our sicknesses, our biases, our uncertainties]. Thérèse's humanity speaks to us, *'de chacun de nous'*. *'N'est-ce pas "ça", aussi, qui explique le succès persistant des écrits de Thérèse auprès d'un large public?'²⁷⁷*

In the writings of Thérèse of Lisieux we see scripted — and in 'capital letters' — the human struggle between belief and unbelief, between faith and sin, between faith and a deeper faith — a struggle that is common to all humankind. Thérèse's writings give an example of how this 'pans out' in the life of one specific person. This dissertation will be a step in *affirming* that engagement with these issues is a worthwhile human project.²⁷⁸ Full engagement in the struggle, I suggest, is the expression of a life of holiness.

²⁷⁷ Denis Vasse has written a number of books that delve deep into the heart of what makes one human. He speaks as a dedicated clinical psychoanalyst patiently seeking his truth, which he offers to those who tell him of the distress of having life pass them by. He writes as a Christian, integrating faith and the sacred texts with delicate touches that emphasise the Truth of Man, as in the following quotation from the Old Testament: "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning" (Ps 130, 6). See *Commentaire sur le livre La Sourrance sans Jouissance ou Le Martyre de L'Amour* (Denis Vasse, Paris: Seuil, 1998). Review:

<http://www.jesuites.com/bibliographie/auteurs/vasse.htm>. [Accessed 05/05/08].

²⁷⁸ These words describe the goal of the engagement: 'I believe that we are adored by the mystery we dare to call God. I believe that God invites us to take this dear cherishing of us at his word and to live always and everywhere in the spirit of it, giving and forgiving along the way so as to divine at long last our own human nature' (Aidan Mathews, 'Towers of Strength', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 87 (1998) 232-239, at 238 and cited in Michael Paul Gallagher, 'From Social to Cultural Secularization', 117f.).

CHAPTER 3

Faith and Sin: Thérèse's Early Years

*'I have never refused God anything since I was three';¹
'Our Lord, willing for Himself alone my first glance, saw fit to ask my heart in the cradle, if I
can so express myself.'²*

As long as I knew her, the only part of her that touched the ground were the soles of her feet.³

Introduction

We move, now, to a discussion of our understanding and interpretation of Thérèse's life and writings. Application of the results of our reading is always a background issue, for this dissertation holds that there is a weakening of faith and a lack of a sense of sin in today's *milieu*.

The next three chapters, however, do not set out to detail all aspects of Thérèse's life as in a biography, but rather to choose and discuss only the ones that bear upon the topics of faith and sin. Of course, *all* the details of her life relate either directly or indirectly to these subjects. Still, some specific selections more than others can serve

¹ See Christopher O'Mahoney, ed., and trans., *St Thérèse of Lisieux by those who knew her: Testimonies from the process of beatification*, 115.

² *GC II*, 1016.

³ This is a section of Sister Agnes of Jesus' testimony regarding at the diocesan inquiry (cf. O'Mahoney, ed., and trans. *St Thérèse of Lisieux by those who knew her: Testimonies from the process of beatification*, 41.

to highlight the particular argument of my thesis that sin, being the refusal to accept the call to faith, is the great impediment to a life of holiness and happiness.

This present chapter covers the years from Thérèse's birth in 1873 to the celebration of Christmas Midnight Mass in 1886. Thérèse discusses these events by looking back on her life from the vantage point, now in 1895, of a spirituality 'matured in the crucible of exterior and interior trials'.⁴ She finds material for writing about the early period of her life in letters which their mother, Mme. Martin, had sent to Pauline, which Pauline has kept and now gives to Thérèse. Of course, Thérèse also has her own memories of this period to draw upon. Regarding Thérèse's early years, Céline said while speaking at the *Deposition for the Apostolic Process*, said: 'It is important to note that, even during these years, she [Thérèse] was, in spite of her apparent weakness,⁵ truly strong.'⁶ When Thérèse's story-telling 'catches up' to the events of

⁴ SS Manuscript A, 15.

⁵ The words 'weak' (*faible*) and 'weakness' (*faiblesse*) are recorded in Thérèse's writings 80 and 35 times respectively. When the words apply to herself, Thérèse seems to intend the words to carry the meaning of the weakness of human nature of which she is part (in body and in will), her inability to love God adequately, and her mature insight that littleness (weakness) is not a project to achieve but a condition to accept. This latter point — to know and to accept one's weakness — possibly has to do with Thérèse's concept of herself *vis à vis* God. However, by extension, all persons are 'weak' in the human attempt to come to God. In fact, Thérèse's insight is that God comes to *us* and we do not have to climb the mountain of perfection. In the following examples one finds a variety of uses of *faible* and *faiblesse*: 'I was *weak*, so *weak* that I consider it a great grace to have been able to support a trial that seemed to be far above my strength! [Pauline's departure — Thérèse's second *Mama*] (SS Manuscript A, 58); 'I felt within me the same burning zeal with which they were animated [the great saints like Joan of Arc]. Then I received a grace which I have always looked upon as one of the greatest in my life ... I considered that I was born for *glory* and when I searched out the means of attaining it, God ... made me understand my own *glory* would not be evident to the eyes of mortals, that it would consist in becoming a great *saint*. This desire could certainly appear daring if one were to consider how weak and imperfect I was, and how, after seven years in the religious life, I still am weak and imperfect. I always feel, however, the same bold confidence of becoming a great saint because I don't count on my merits since I have *none*, but I trust in Him who is Virtue and Holiness. God alone, content with my weak efforts, will raise me to Himself and make me a *saint*, clothing me in His infinite merits' (SS Manuscript A, 72); 'She preserves, in the bottom of her calyx, the precious drops of dew she had received [before the trial of the last eighteen months when she experiences 'the night of faith'], and these serve to remind her always how little and weak she is' (SS Manuscript C, 206); 'These desires of martyrdom *are nothing*; they are not what give me the unlimited confidence that I feel in my heart. They are, to tell the truth, the spiritual riches that *render one unjust*, when one rests in them with complacency and when one believes they are *something great* ... These desires are a *consolation* that Jesus grants at times to weak souls like mine (and these souls are numerous), but when He does not give this *consolation*, it is a grace of *privilege* (GC II, 999); *There are really more differences among souls than there are among faces*. It is impossible to act with all in the same manner. With certain souls, I feel I must make myself little, not fearing to humble myself by admitting my own struggles and defects; seeing I have the same weaknesses as they, my little Sisters [the novices] in their turn admit their faults and rejoice because I understand them *through experience*. With others, on the contrary, I have seen that to do them any good I must be very firm and never go back on a decision once it is

1895, she is then writing about the current events in her life. It was Thérèse's understanding that she would then have completed the task given her by her Prioress — to record her memories. Little did she know then that she would write a further two manuscripts that would complete what history now designates as her autobiography.

Before commencing to write the details of this life, Thérèse sets the scene. She kneels before the statue of Mary (the one that gave so many proofs of the maternal preferences of heaven's Queen for the Martin family), and begs her to guide her hand as she writes.⁷ Thérèse then ponders upon the reason *why* she is writing and she spends a few pages developing this topic.

A. Thérèse's Introduction: Life through the Lens of *Grace*

We look at those ponderings now. Before the 'curtain', so to speak, goes up on her life *per se*, Thérèse announces the theme that will constantly run through the manuscript she is about to commence: *the mercies of the Lord*. It is not her life, properly so-called, that she is going to write; 'it is my *thoughts* on the graces God deigned to grant me'.⁸ She is going to write a spiritual autobiography — the story of her soul — where she intends the emphasis to fall not so much on her, but on the graces God has deigned to grant her.⁹ She also tells us that she is going to fulfil her

made. To abase oneself would not then be humility but weakness' (SS Manuscript C, 240); 'Ah! my dear little Brother, ever since I have been given the grace to understand also the love of the Heart of Jesus, I admit that it has expelled all fear from my heart. The remembrance of my faults humbles me, draws me never to depend on my strength which is only weakness, but this remembrance speaks to me of mercy and love ever more' (GC II, 1133); 'If sometimes I feel sadness / And fear coming to assail me / Always supporting me in my weakness, / Mother, you deign to bless me' (PN 7, 3, 7 [Song of Gratitude to Our Lady of Mount Carmel]); 'Lord, you chose me from my earliest childhood, / And I can call myself the work of your love ... Alas! I am nothing but weakness itself. / You know that, O my God!' (PN 53, 1, 1-2; 2, 1-2 [For Sister Marie of the Trinity]).

⁶ Cited by Mgr. Laveille, *St Thérèse de L'Enfant Jésus: 1873 - 1897, according to the official documents of the Carmel of Lisieux*, trans. M. Fitzsimons (Dublin, Clonmore & Reynolds, 1928), 82.

⁷ SS Manuscript A, 13.

⁸ SS Manuscript A, 15.

⁹ The graces referred to by Thérèse in her opening remarks are not isolated to special moments in prayer. They cover everything in her life from sickness (headaches, cold, tuberculosis), a loving family environment (in which she, though not spoilt, was her father's 'little Queen'), special graces (like the 'ravishing smile' of the Blessed Virgin and intimate union with Jesus at the time of her First Holy Communion), separation (from her mother, from Rose Taillé, from Pauline and Marie), death (especially that of her mother and father, her siblings who died before she was born, her grandparents, and many Carmelite sisters during an influenza epidemic), isolation (the feeling of not really 'fitting in'

obligation, under obedience.¹⁰ This task that she is about to undertake is not of her own choosing. Because Pauline, in her role as Prioress, has told her to write, Thérèse chooses to obey, though she does wonder if so much concentration on herself will be a distraction from her relationship with God. But she reasons that God will be all the more pleased if she obeys the direction of her lawful superior. This is the faith of an existential 'living-in' the belief that one holds. It is the obedience of faith. Although this to us may seem strange and somewhat lacking in 'self-assertion', we need to see this in the context of how Thérèse understands her vow of obedience: in the 'voice' of lawful authority she 'hears' the voice of God.

That Thérèse stresses 'mercies' rather than 'graces' in this opening section seems to indicate a certain nuance of meaning in her understanding of *grace*. *Grace*, for Thérèse, indicates the totally unmerited *merciful* love of the Lord. In this regard she develops a special fond devotion to Mary Magdalene.¹¹ As noted, Thérèse wrote

to the school environment and perhaps, at times, into the Carmelite *milieu*), human fragility (self-will, for example, stubbornness, and inadequacy, for example, an inability earlier to cease crying and later, to speak effectively to her Mistress of Novices), the difficulties of life in Carmel (like the austerities of the life which would have been very difficult for any delicate *little flower*, and the living aside people not naturally to one's taste and who might even be more akin to '*prickly bushes*' [see SS Manuscript A, 246 for examples], to God's Providence overarching all. She sums it all up: 'I find myself at a period in my life [now] when I can cast a glance on the past ... to me the Lord has always been "merciful and good, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps 102:8)'. Karl Rahner states that grace accompanies the human person at every turn: 'God communicates himself [Godself] to man [sic] in his own proper reality' (see Karl Rahner, 'Grace', in Gerald A. McCool (ed.), *A Rahner Reader*, 178). God came to Thérèse in the reality of her life; she recognises that and refers to it as the 'mercies of the Lord'. Referring to the idea that Thérèse, as a child, was spoilt, Thérèse answers that judgment. Addressing Pauline in the manuscript she wrote for her (Sister Agnes of Jesus), (Thérèse writes): 'I wonder at times how you were able to raise me with so much *love* and tenderness without spoiling me, for it's true you never allowed an imperfection to pass, you never scolded me without a reason, and you *never* went back on something once you made a decision' (see SS Manuscript A, 44).

¹⁰ One evening in 1894 at community recreation, Thérèse was amusing her blood-sisters with memories of their childhood. Marie, Thérèse's god-mother, the eldest of the Martin girls and now Sister Marie of the Trinity, a Carmelite nun, remarked what a good idea it would be if Pauline, the second of the Martin girls and now the Prioress in Carmel, were to ask Thérèse to record her childhood memories. Pauline agreed that this was a good idea. However, she went a step further than merely *asking* Thérèse to do the family a service in this way, and she (as Prioress) *commanded* in obedience Thérèse to write down memories of her childhood. Thérèse, for the moment, thought that Pauline was not really serious; but she then realized that Pauline, as her Prioress, was telling her to do it. Thérèse, therefore, undertook the task as an act of obedience and because she tried to fulfil her vows faithfully, she undertook the task with fidelity and total dedication. The task took a year to complete, the year of 1895.

¹¹ Thérèse understands Mary Magdalene to be the woman mentioned in the gospels who is a sinner (SS Manuscript A, 83; Lk 8:2) and who, upon being forgiven and healed by Jesus, received him into her house, sits at Jesus' feet [later scriptural exegesis knows this particular woman as Mary of Bethany] (SS Manuscript C, 258; Lk 10:41), pours ointment on his head [Mary in the house of Simon the Leper] (GC II, 882, 1133; Mt 26:7), who is present at the Crucifixion and who receives the good news of the

Manuscript A of her autobiography commencing early in 1895. In June of the same year, she will solemnly offer herself as a 'Victim of Holocaust to God's Merciful Love'.¹² 'O my God! Will Your Justice alone find souls willing to immolate themselves as victims? Does not Your *Merciful Love* need them too?'¹³ In naming it 'merciful love', Thérèse intimates her awareness of God's condescending love in loving her, little and weak as she is. She wants to respond, and she chooses to offer herself as a 'victim of Holocaust'. 'Victim of holocaust' and 'fire' are symbols. For Thérèse, they image total self-giving, and a testing by fire, should this latter be a part of God's will for her.¹⁴

Resurrection (SS Manuscript A, 130; Jn 20:11). Very near the end of Thérèse's autobiography we read these words: 'Most of all I imitate the conduct of Magdalene; her astonishing or rather her loving audacity which charms the Heart of Jesus also attracts my own' (SS Manuscript C, 259). (For further references see GC II, 732). The point for Thérèse is this: Jesus forgave Mary Magdalene 'much' and therefore she (Magdalene) has loved much. Thérèse reasons that Jesus has forgiven her (Thérèse) this and much more and, further, Jesus has forgiven Thérèse *in advance*. His prevenient grace has saved her (SS Manuscript A, 83f.); therefore, Thérèse loves him even more than Mary Magdalene does. Thérèse loves Jesus *to folly* (for 'folly' see Manuscript A, 84, 178, 180, 193, 197): 'He was *foolish*, Our Beloved, to come to earth in search of sinners in order to make them His friends, His intimates, His equals ... We shall never be able to carry out the follies He carried out for us ...' (GC II, 882). Thérèse also holds an affinity with the Prodigal Son of Luke Chapter 15 — the son who was forgiven so readily by his father: 'Ah! must not the infinitely just God, who deigns to pardon the faults of the prodigal son with so much kindness, be just also toward me who "am with Him always?"' (Lk 15:31).

¹² See *Act of Oblation to Merciful Love* (SS Appendices), 276. The Carmelite nun responsible for the *Studies of the Self-Offering of St Thérèse of Lisieux* writes: 'Thérèse never used the word "Oblation" or even "act of Offering" in her own writings. She speaks simply of her "Offering". It is true that she offers herself as a victim of holocaust to be completely consumed by Love. It is also true that the word "oblation" denotes a person or thing completely consumed in holocaust as an act of worship to a deity. However, "oblation" has overtones of something dead, cut up or tied up ready to be burnt, if not already reduced to a cinder. When praying the Offering (particularly at the words relating to Mary: "To her I entrust my offering with abandon, begging her to present it to you"), Thérèse is offering a living thing, tremulous with hope and feeling, as fresh as a sheath of flowers and green grasses newly picked. "Offering" is just such a green-growing word, tremulous with hope and feeling'. (See Dr. G. Gennari, *An Echo of the Heart of God* and A Discalced Carmelite nun, *Studies of the Self-Offering of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 246, fn. 4). In view of this, throughout this dissertation I shall use the word 'Offering' rather than the word 'Oblation' when referring to Thérèse's prayer.

¹³ SS Manuscript A, 180.

¹⁴ Pursuing the topic of God's merciful love further, we know that the words 'holocaust' and 'fire' can carry overtones of a complete burnt offering as found in the notion of 'sacrifice', for example, in the Book of Leviticus (cf. Lev 3:4), and they might also bring to mind certain biblical phrases from the Book of Prophets where gold (the soul) is tested by fire (suffering), see, for example, Zech 13:9, Rev 3:17-19. These metaphors give indication of the extent of Thérèse's awareness regarding the graces she has received and of her desire to make a *total* response to them. The graces speak to her of the *merciful* love of God. *Grace* is the reception of this kind of love. The images of holocaust and of fire are symbols of the *intensity* of the love aroused in her soul by God's love; they carry absolutely no negative overtones. Testing (should she interpret 'suffering' in the light of being 'burned') is a joy in the sense that it allows her to more closely resemble the Suffering Christ. Thérèse's poem, *An Unpetalled Rose* (19 May 1897) symbolises, yet again, the extent to her self-giving: 'probably few mystics have gone as far as Thérèse — wasted away by illness, at the end of her strength — in offering her "nothingness" by throwing herself under Jesus' feet, in an act of pure and total love' (see 'Commentary', PN 51, 210).

Jean-François Six speaks of that same intensity of loving:

A heart which loves with an ardour like that of Thérèse takes account of the love which beats in the heart of the other. Because she is a very great lover, Thérèse can measure the love possessed by the heart of this Other, which sets her on fire. She can measure what a profound mystery it is, almost unfathomable: the heart of Jesus loves so much that it [sic 'she'?] can only know this intensity without knowing its degree and its folly.¹⁵

And yet, furthermore, Thérèse's great love throws into relief and by comparison, the enormity of sin. Marie-Eugène writes:

St Thérèse of the Child Jesus thus came to what we might call the great vision of the divine furnace of Love. This vision in living faith includes experiential knowledge of Love's need to expand and its disappointment in the face of hatred and indifference.¹⁶

Receiving God's merciful love, this, she writes, is the mystery of her vocation, her whole life, and especially the mystery of the privileges Jesus has showered on her soul.¹⁷ *Merciful* love is a forgiving love, a love that lifts up the weak and forgives sin.

Why is Thérèse so Blessed?

However, Thérèse still wonders: but why *her*? Why is *she* so graced? Her answer is that 'God does not call those who are worthy but those whom God *pleases* or as St Paul says: "God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will show pity to whom he will show pity. So then there is question not on him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God showing mercy"' (Rom 9:15, 16). Pondering upon evidence from her life, she *knows*, both notionally and experientially, she has been blessed. In Thérèse's mind, this initial reflection recalls an unanswered query from previous days: How is it, she wonders now, why God has preferences, why some 'souls'

Describing the mystical interpretation of fire and divine love, Richard Rolle writes: 'A heart set on fire produces a feeling of fiery love; I liken this love to some inextinguishable fire, which no adverse force can quench ... this love purges our sins, and its immense heart consumes all those obstacles which hinder loving; in the flaming blaze of God's love it makes us purer than gold and brighter than the sun' (see Richard Rolle, *Fire and Love*, trans. with intro., Clifton Wolters (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972), 89, 182).

¹⁵ Six, *Light of the Night*, 134.

¹⁶ Marie-Eugene, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 106f.

¹⁷ See SS Manuscript A, 13.

[people] seem to receive more grace than others — ‘souls’ like St Paul and St Augustine?

When reading the lives of the saints, I was puzzled at seeing how Our Lord was pleased to caress certain ones from the cradle to the grave, allowing no obstacle in their wayI wondered why poor savages died in great numbers without even having heard the name of God pronounced.¹⁸

Here we have two classes of people: God's chosen ones (herself perhaps?) and those who have never heard the name of God, the ‘poor savages’. This is a problem for Thérèse. She would prefer, it seems, that all people hear and heed the word of God. No doubt, the phrase ‘poor savages’ displeases twenty-first century ears; it even suggests that these people are not only deprived of God's word but also of the ordinary human necessities of life. However, it is noted, that in the French, Thérèse uses the word as an example of a wider community of people who, she fears, do not receive God's choice. The French version reads: *‘je me demandais pourquoi les pauvres sauvages par exemple mouraient en grand nombre avant d’avoir même entendu prononcer le nom de Dieu’*.¹⁹ The words, *par exemple*, are not included in the English translation. We can take from this that Thérèse intends the ‘poor savages’ to be but one example of a wider group of people who have not yet heard the word of God. (A little later she will include ‘very small children’ in this group). Her great concern for these people is the reason for her strong desire to ‘save souls’ and to be a missionary — ‘I would like to save souls and forget myself for them; I would like to save them even after my death’;²⁰ ‘Dear Mother, as you told me, a very special vocation is necessary to live in foreign Carmels. Many believe they are called to this, but it isn't so. You told me, too, that I had this vocation and only my poor health stood in the way’. But poor health is no deterrent to Thérèse's great desire; she prays and she lives the austere life of Carmel for this very intention.

¹⁸ SS Manuscript A, 13f.

¹⁹ *Histoire D'une Âme de Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux selon la disposition originale des autographes nouvellement établie par Conrad De Meester*, 76.

²⁰ GC II, 1072.

In explaining the phrase, 'to save souls', it could be more readily understood if we thought of it in terms of 'to have a faith that saves' and to wish that faith, with all its richness, for others.²¹ In her time, Thérèse names it simply as saving souls.

Thérèse is theoretically restricted in her thinking by a nineteenth century theology that claimed that 'there is no salvation outside the church', but she feels a strong desire it seems, to resolve the issue in a way that will include all. We note that later, at Vatican Council II, the idea of 'salvation' underwent theological development — a development which Thérèse intuits now, though she cannot, notionally, reconcile her desires with the official church teaching of the day,²² and certainly cannot express it in

²¹ We note that John Paul II summarises the approach for missionary engagement today in classic terms of witness, proclamation, communion and service (cf. *RM*, # 41-60).

²² In the topics of *salvation* and the *nature of the Church*, we find possibilities for arguing for a development in doctrine. For example, 1 Tim 2: 4-6 states: 'God our Saviour ... desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' is a text that is cited repeatedly these days. Not so long ago, however, the doctrine *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation), as found in its classical form in the Papal bull *Unam sanctam* and issued in 1302 by Pope Boniface VIII, was the accepted 'catch-cry' in some Catholic circles. Its presence persisted, in some form of interpretation (if only in the pre-Vatican II Catholic imagination), until Vatican II. It is around the topic of how one may be baptised that this issue is mostly controversial — water only, or in one of three ways—water, blood, desire. However, another interpretation of the aforementioned Latin phrase is in the translation 'without the church there is no salvation'. This interpretation seems to move in the direction of 'who constitutes the church?' The notion of 'who' constitutes the church was expanded / developed in Vatican Council II. Regarding the question 'who can be saved?' *The Catechism of Trent* (Council of Trent 1545-1563) states: 'There are but three classes of persons excluded from the Church's pale: infidels, heretics and schismatics, and excommunicated persons. Infidels are outside the Church because they never belonged to, and never knew the Church, and were never made partakers of any of her Sacraments.' (See <http://www.cin.org/users/james/ebooks/master/trent/tcreed00.htm> [Accessed 09/10/05]. Vatican Council I, Session 2: 6 January 1870 began with the words: 'I, Pius [IX] bishop of the catholic church, with firm faith *believe and profess* each and every article contained in the profession of faith which the holy Roman church uses'. Then followed the text of the creed, and reference to apostolic and ecclesiastical traditions and all other observances and constitutions, sacred scripture, and the seven sacraments, after which, Pius 'promises, vows, and swears' to steadfastly maintain and confess all that 'this true catholic faith, *outside of which none can be saved*', teaches.' *Mystici Corporis Christi*, the encyclical of Pope Pius XII (1943) states: 'Actually only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith' (#22). Vatican II in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, #3, states: 'For it is through Christ's Catholic Church *alone*, which is the universal help towards salvation that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.' *LG* states: 'All men [sic] are called to belong to the new People of God' (*LG* # 13). What is the relationship between the People of God and the Church, we ask? According to *Dominus Iesus* (2000), and in line with Vatican II (1963-1965), we read, 'the salvific action of Jesus Christ, with and through his Spirit, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church to all humanity' (#12). *Dominus Iesus* affirms that 'it must be *firmly believed* as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God' (# 14). (The Concluding Chapter of this dissertation aims at an answer to these questions, particularly the question: who can be saved?). In regard to all this, there can be said to be a development of doctrine. However, what is actually meant by doctrinal development is still somewhat elusive. The reliable standard for orthodoxy must be what has been believed in the Church everywhere, always and by all. 'But will there then be no progress of religion in the Church of Christ?'

the sophisticated language of a Karl Rahner or the Vatican II Council documents. Even since Vatican II, a still further broadening of the concept of salvation has taken place, so that, besides the 'vertical dimension' of reconciliation with God, it also includes the 'horizontal dimension' of reconciliation of people with one another through the overcoming of systems of oppression and the establishment of a just social order in the world, recognising this also as an indispensable foundation for the achieving of durable peace.²³

Undoubtedly, Thérèse would have theoretically understood the term, 'catholic church', as the church of Roman Catholicism and not the 'catholic' church in the universal sense that Vatican Council II opened up where all peoples receive the call to salvation in some way. Still, even within Roman Catholicism, Thérèse seems troubled by God's apparent preference for some souls rather than for others. And even when quite small, she had sought to fathom this mystery relating to the prerogative of God to choose whom God will. Her sister solved her query then by stating that a glass and a thimble both have the capacity to be filled to the brim.²⁴ So it is with God's distribution of grace, for each human person has the capacity to be completely enriched by it. Pauline was right in her explanation — if she understood it in the 'catholic' sense. But I fear she did not, for her theology would not approve of that interpretation.

Yes; but it is truly progress and not a change of faith. What is meant by progress is that something is brought to an advancement within itself: by change, something is transformed from one thing into another. (See *Cardinal John Henry Newman and the development of doctrine*. http://www.ad2000.com/au/articles/1998/aug1998p10_553.htm. [Accessed 21/06/05]). See also Gerard Hall, 'Catholic Church Teaching on its Relationship to other Religions since Vatican II', in *AEJT* 1 (August 2003); and 'The Call to Interfaith Dialogue', in *AEJT* 5 (August 2005). In the present climate of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue (2005 onwards) there is a real challenge to be met in maintaining the distinction between progress and change in the sense just cited. Thérèse, however, adequately meets the challenge in her all-embracing love. In fact, it is possibly fair to say that Thérèse 'saw' all of us (herself included) as sinners — those whose 'un-holiness' removes one from the holiness of God, and therefore all are in need of God's merciful love. Of course, Thérèse is not constrained by having to write a detailed theological treatise on the topic of 'salvation': that is the role of theologians. Thérèse spoke with a prophetic voice. We can raise the question, though: how does the official church combine its prophetic role and the teaching role in matters pertaining to ecumenism? These are all questions that this present dissertation implicitly raises when it claims that 'sin is the refusal to obey the call to faith that is offered by grace'. We can but discuss how *Thérèse* answered the questions in her day and look to how they might be answered today.

²³See Francis Sullivan, *The Church We Believe in: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 150, 132ff. Cited in Brian Gleeson, 'The Church as Sacrament Revisited: Sign and Source of Encounter with Christ', *AEJT* 4 (February 2005).

²⁴SS Manuscript A, 45.

Thérèse Answers the Query

However, Thérèse *now* records the solution given her by *Jesus* some time earlier. The answer takes the form of an image:

Jesus deigned to teach me this mystery. He set before me the book of nature; I understood how all the flowers He has created are beautiful, how the splendour of the rose and the whiteness of the Lily do not take away the perfume of the little violet or the delightful simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be decked out with little wild flowers.²⁵

Recalling Schneiders' description of language as 'essentially metaphoric', we are introduced here to the mode of writing to which Thérèse, again and again, will resort in her autobiography — the expression of her theological thought through imagery and symbol. Within this 'book of nature', there are splendid lilies and roses, perfumed violets and simple daisies, and 'little wild flowers' that bedeck the fields. Thérèse claims for her own self-description the title of 'little flower'.²⁶ Now she brings the splendid lilies and roses and the small violets and daisies into the 'garden of the soul' where she names it 'Jesus' garden'.²⁷

And so it is in the world of souls, Jesus' garden. He willed to create great souls comparable to Lilies and roses, but He has created smaller ones and these must be content to be daisies or violets destined to give joy to God's glances when He looks down at his feet.²⁸

²⁵ SS Manuscript A. 14.

²⁶ 'Little flower' is the symbol of her life. When taken out of the context which Thérèse intends, the public taste can find it insipid. Thérèse's life is anything but that. Albino Luciani (Pope John Paul I) wrote: 'I was seventeen years old when I read your Autobiography. For me it was like a bolt from the blue. "Story of a little flower" you called it. To me it seemed like the story of a "steel bar" because of the will power, the courage, and the decision that shone from it. Once you had chosen the path of complete devotion to God, nothing then could stand in your way: no illness, no external contradictions, no inner shadows or uncertainty' (see Albino Luciani, *Illustrissimi, Letters from Pope John Paul I* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 146, cited in GC I, 6.

²⁷ Thérèse is 'little' even within Jesus' garden. An interesting thought here is that, maybe, the 'little flower' — Thérèse — is a 'cross' between a cultivated flower and a wild flower (I think of 'wild flowers' as little). If so, then, indeed, Thérèse truly belongs to both 'inside' and 'outside' the Church by her very title of 'the little flower'. See SS Manuscript A, 108, for Thérèse's own words that tell of 'little white flowers, like lilies in miniature', growing near a low wall in the Martin garden and which symbolically represent herself.

²⁸ SS Manuscript A, 14. There are forty references to *le jardin* in Thérèse's writings.

Looking more closely at this symbol now explained in a metaphorical way, one wonders whether there are any weeds in 'Jesus' garden'; or does the garden consist of flowers only, untouched by disease. After all, because Thérèse says that 'Jesus deigned to teach her this mystery', we need to accept that her statement carries theological 'weight'. Should we then opt for this latter interpretation — flowers only, untouched by disease? If so, then the garden image becomes a symbol of the goodness of God's creation as God sees humanity, both before the Fall — all of God's creation is 'good' — and after The Fall — when, in Christ, it 'has been restored to its original beauty enabled by grace'.²⁹ Retaining the symbol of 'Jesus' garden', we can then understand it to mean all the flowers in it are beautiful and untouched by disease, even though some are big and some small. And would it necessarily include 'wild flowers' to which Thérèse refers just a little later (and discussed below)? But now, returning to the former interpretation — there are weeds among the flowers — we maybe have a symbol of humanity in its fallen state, as perceived and experienced by the human person — a mixture of good and evil in one's experience of, and response to life. This is the human angle.

So, from what angle does *God* see humankind in the symbol of 'Jesus' garden'? Thérèse, in line with the Tradition, would answer that, yes, God sees us as totally lovable. Does that mean, then, that God looks only at humankind's goodness and beauty; or does God see humankind as good and beautiful in spite of human weakness (weeds)? Thérèse chooses the second state. She will work with her human weakness in so far as it is possible for her to do so, and she will also present it to God to call forth his *merciful* love which, she knows in faith, is always streaming towards her. Thérèse knows that God does not remove human weakness, but God transforms it and, as in her case, uses her weakness to bring about public good.³⁰ Regarding this latter point, we note, in passing, these words: 'Thérèse's spiritual evolution cannot be compared with the usual process among people of her age. She was destined to

²⁹ CCC, # 1701.

³⁰ The year after Thérèse's death, 2,000 copies of her autobiography were printed; the next year saw a reprint of 4,000 copies. Since then, Thérèse's published works have been read by many, many people. Furthermore, academic research into the relevance of Thérèse's *opus* continues to inform. As well, testimonies abound to St Thérèse's continuing powerful intercession in heaven.

become a model for countless other souls'.³¹ Because Thérèse was called by God to become a Saint with a capital 'S', all her graces, so to speak, are 'writ large' in order that others might reflect upon them for instruction and inspiration. After all, the weeds have their place in the overall ecology, just as God's usage of sin serves to show forth his grace. Unbelief too, even if no sin, is a part of God's plan. It 'bears a witness to the reality of God and the authenticity of faith which is as striking and as powerful as it is strange and unexpected.'³²

Yet, Christianity — or, perhaps, more correctly the Christian scriptures (both Testaments) — seem, at times, to offer conflicting messages, for example, punishing evil doers *versus* forgiving them.³³ The astounding point about this is that, in Thérèse's time, it was common to view God's justice in precisely the way that the Matthean parable seems to indicate, that is, as a retributive justice, whereas, Thérèse, herself, reasoned differently.

³¹ De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, 5.

³² Reid, *Man Without God*, 130.

³³ One example is in a comparison between 'Jesus' garden' in which all are flowers, with the meaning in Matthew's parable of the Weeds among the Wheat — which concludes with the words: 'Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn' (Mt 13:30). The Matthean Jesus explains the parable: 'The harvest is the end of the age ... The Son of Man will send his angels and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'. A further conflict arises when we consider issues relating to God's mercy and God's justice that this parable can raise, for example, the pain of the (metaphorical) fire that comes from cutting oneself off from what we most desire. Does God's justice come to the fore now? We also note the image of 'the furnace of fire'. There, the image is a symbol of God's punishment, whereas for Thérèse, as we saw earlier, 'fire' is a symbol of the intensity of God's love, not God's punishment. Now all of this kind of discussion possibly belongs under a heading of *analogy of faith* (or of *truth*). Referring to a statement made by Cardinal Ratzinger in 1985, Aidan Nichols, addressing the latter, notes the Cardinal's use of the phrase 'Truth is *the whole*'. Referring back to Irenaeus of Lyons, Nichols says that Ratzinger continues to explain the meaning of the phrase: 'theology needs to express unity – the unity of the covenants, the unity of the Creator with the Redeemer, the unity of philosophy and faith' (see Aidan Nichols, 'Introduction', *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, 2nd rev. edn. (London: Burns & Oates, 2007), xiii. Offering a somewhat different view, Dermot Lane states that 'some degree of pluralism in the expression of faith follows from the fact that the unity of truth has many faces and that beliefs are culturally conditioned. Pluralism in belief should not be misinterpreted as relativism or as a soft alternative to rigorous and critical thought. Pluralism in theology has always existed to some extent: Thomism, Scotism, Bonaventurianism, mysticism. It has become more evident today in view of the absence of a universally acceptable philosophy. Furthermore, a consensus exists today that a monolithic unity in the expression of faith is neither desirable nor possible' (see Dermot A. Lane, *The Experience of God*, 96). Chapter 6 of this dissertation will make the point that the solution to this apparent dilemma lies in each person *searching* for the truth [with appropriate guidelines etc.] in his or her particular life's situation. Thérèse's desire was 'to seek only the truth' (see SS Manuscript B, 197).

In her ponderings on salvation and grace, Thérèse is not yet finished. Her thoughts return to the 'wild flowers', and she uses the phrase to explain that salvation is intended for all. The wild flowers include 'the child who knows only how to make his [sic] feeble cries heard [and perhaps is not yet baptised] and 'the poor savage who has nothing but the natural law to guide him'. She explains a thorny theological problem creatively and in two steps. Step one leads her to conclude:

I understood, too, that Our Lord's love is revealed as perfectly in the most simple soul who resists His grace in nothing as in the most excellent soul; in fact, since the nature of love is to humble oneself, if all souls resembled those of the holy Doctors who illumined the Church with the clarity of their teachings, it seems God would not descend so low when coming to their heart.

And Thérèse surely places herself among the 'simple souls' in 'Jesus' garden' — those to whom Jesus has to descend low. In 1886, in a letter to her sister Marie, now Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, Thérèse will write, addressing her words to Jesus: 'O Jesus! why can't I tell all *little souls* how unspeakable is Your condescension?'³⁴ It is of no matter, she reasons, whether one is great or small — a lily or a violet — what is important, she notes, is that one 'resists His grace in nothing', that one becomes 'perfect' by 'doing His will'.³⁵ So 'little' means one's attitude to receiving God's grace.

And now it is, as she continues her reflection, that her creativity and sheer inspiration really come to the foreground. In a further step, she says: 'But God created "the child" and "the savage" — the wild flowers — *as well as* the Great Doctors and 'little doctors'³⁶ and in doing so God reveals God's nature, the nature of self-emptying love (Cf. Phil 2:6-8):

It is to their hearts that God deigns to lower Himself. These are the wild flowers whose simplicity attracts Him. When coming down in this way, God manifests His infinite grandeur. Just as the sun shines simultaneously on the

³⁴ SS Manuscript B, 200.

³⁵ SS Manuscript A, 14.

³⁶ Thérèse was once referred to as *little doctor* by Father Domin when preparing for her First Communion. Thérèse was always first in the class in knowing the correct catechism answers (see SS Manuscript A, 81).

tall cedars and on each little flower as though it were alone on the earth, so Our Lord is occupied particularly with each soul as though there were no others like it.³⁷

With this thinking, Thérèse predates the teaching of Vatican Council II. She intuitively includes the inclusion of all within the universal Church even in her early years.

We will look later with interest to note any development in Thérèse's theology expressed through the symbols of *garden* and, later, *gardener*. Particularly, in Chapter 5, our attention will focus on one other, though related symbol / image: 'this table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating'.³⁸ Taken together, these symbols shape the imaginal / theological horizon against which Thérèse's perspective on faith and sin evolves. For the present, and at the time of writing introductory words to the 'story of her soul', Thérèse — who knows, as Patrick Sullivan notes, 'that everything, literally everything in our life, depends upon what we know and think of God' — is moving very close to the third of Sullivan's developmental stages in imaging God: God loves me unconditionally and all of us with a non-comparing love. This is the kind of love that the Lucan Jesus describes in The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother (Lk 15:11-32).³⁹

Thérèse was not, technically speaking, a theologian.⁴⁰ She was a holy person whose intuitions regarding God's dealing with humanity were theologically sound. 'Infused wisdom' I would call it. Faith, for Thérèse, is not a matter of whether or not God exists. She seems well past that point of inquiry in Manuscript A. Her faith has moved into a relationship with the One whom she trusts. Her faith is a living — a [be]-li[e]ving — in the reality of the transcendence of God. Her faith is a faith that 'saves' in all its richness. Ultimately, 'saving souls' is to wish for others the rich fruit of this faith.

³⁷ SS Manuscript A, 14.

³⁸ SS Manuscript C, 212.

³⁹ See Sullivan, 6.

⁴⁰ John Paul II writes: 'though Thérèse does not have a true and proper doctrinal corpus, nevertheless a particular radiance of doctrine (*de véritables éclairs de doctrine*) shines forth from her writings' (cf. DAS, # 8).

Having cleared away these immediate thoughts on Christian perfection and on the mystery of God's grace, Thérèse is now ready to write about her childhood.

B. Thérèse's Infant Years (1873-1877)

As noted previously, Thérèse speaks in her autobiography of her life falling into three periods: (1) from January 1873 to August 1877 (four and a half years up to the death of her mother); (2) from August 1877 to December 1886 (ten years during which she was to experience sadness, sickness and scruples); and (3) from December 1886 to September 1897 (ten years covering the years after her 'conversion' when she 'discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a half, and which she was to preserve forever'⁴¹, to her death in September 1897)⁴². This section now combines (1) and (2) as it looks at *faith* and *sin* in her early life. The period begins with her birth on 2 January 1873 and concludes Christmas Eve, 1886 when Thérèse is almost fourteen.

Much information on Thérèse's infant years is to be had from letters Mme. Martin wrote to relatives.⁴³ These letters clearly depict some of Thérèse's natural tendencies

⁴¹ See SS Manuscript A, 98.

⁴² See SS Manuscript A, 98.

⁴³ Unfortunately, because of this dissertation's ceiling word count, excerpts from these letters cannot be included in the body of the thesis. The letters reveal so much about the baby Thérèse: her joy (cf. GC II, 1200: Letter from Mme. Martin to Mme. Guérin [sister-in-law], January 1873, telling how Thérèse is always smiling, and even when in the womb, sang along with her mother); her traumas (cf. GC II, 1200, 1203, 1204, 1205: Letters from Mme. Martin to Mme. Guérin, 17 January - March 1873, describing Thérèse's illness at two months. This illness is significant in that it is said that Thérèse carried, for some years, a negative emotional response to the fact that her mother could not breast feed her sufficiently. Thérèse, it is claimed, registered 'terror' in her mother's face because of Mme. Martin's inability in this regard and, further, because Mme. Martin had previously buried four children who exhibited symptoms similar to those which Thérèse is now presenting and because of that Zélie registered alarm and fear on her face; and this, Thérèse somehow 'noticed'); her piercing cries (GC II, 1206, 1208f: Letters from Mme. Martin to Pauline [the second eldest daughter and away at boarding school], telling how Thérèse, on her intermittent visits to the Martin home during her thirteen months' stay with Rose Taillé [Thérèse's wet-nurse], makes known her preferred intention to be with Rose and people dressed like Rose, instead of with the fashionable ladies coming to Mme. Martin's house for lace, 22 May and 30 November 1873); Thérèse's joyous nature, nice disposition, intelligence and 'the good face of the predestined' (cf. GC II, 1207: Letter from Mme. Martin to Pauline, 1 July 1873); Thérèse's definitive return to the Martin home (cf. GC II, 1208f.: Letter to Pauline describing Zélie's preparation to receive Thérèse home, 23? March 1874); Thérèse's good health and intelligence (cf. GC II, 1209, 1210: Letters to Mme. Guérin telling of Thérèse's 'charming disposition', her walking alone, 11

— not only to joy and happiness of her 'true self' but also to seeking perhaps unreasonable attention and to other traits of a wounded and or false self. We will leave aside the view that these traits are the result of an unsatisfactory relationship with her mother in preference to placing them at the door of Original Sin. Thérèse, nor any other person for that matter, is not a saint from birth, though Thérèse is a potential saint from that moment; she becomes a saint (holy)⁴⁴ by engaging in the struggle between good and evil, between faith and sin, between the acceptance or rejection of the call, offered through grace, to deeper faith, and between her true and false self.

Thérèse's Illness at Two Months

This particular incident at two months — taken from Mme. Martin's letters — describes Zélie's inability to provide her infant daughter with sufficient milk from the breast. (She supplements with a 'bottle'). Thérèse becomes seriously ill and the doctor's diagnosis is that only complete breast feeding that will save her. Zélie, Thérèse's mother, has no option but to employ the services of a wet nurse, Rose Taillé. When Rose eventually arrives at Martin house, Thérèse feeds happily and contentedly from her breast, only within seconds of finishing, to fall back, as if dead. She remains in this state for fifteen minutes: she appears not to be breathing.

Both Constance Fitzgerald and Mary Frohlich interpret the facts associated with this entire episode as having a profound effect upon Thérèse's later development. In

January 1874, and early attempts at talking, 24 June 1874); her attention seeking (?) (cf. *GC* II, 1210: Letter to Mme. Guérin telling that Thérèse, though a darling, can be a 'little burden', always under her mother's feet. Mme. Martin has to make up for lost time by continuing her lace-work 'up until ten o'clock at night', and by rising at 'five o'clock', 24 June 1874); her need to hear her mother's response at each step as she climbs the stairs; 'a matchless rascal' (cf. *GC* II, 1218f. Letters to Pauline, 21 November and 5 December 1894); her extremely precocious intelligence and desire 'to become learned' by pursuing her mother 'incessantly' to teach her to read (cf. *GC* II, 1220: Letter to Mme. Guérin, 28 December 1874); Thérèse, a 'little rascal', 'joy of the whole family' and 'extremely intelligent' (see *GC* II, 1222: Letter from Mme. Martin to Pauline, 26 March 1876); Thérèse's determination and excitable nature' (cf. *GC* II, 1213: Letter to Mme. Guérin describing how Thérèse, wanting to go to Mass, 'opened the door and took flight in the direction of the church' in the pouring rain and by herself, 14 March 1875); her various childhood illnesses (cf. *GC* II, 1211, 1215, 1216: Letters to Mme Guérin, 9 August 1874 and 19 May 1875; to Pauline, 10, 14, 17 October 1875. This last letter tells that Thérèse's childhood illness trouble Zélie considerably because she fears Thérèse might die - like four of her previous children).

⁴⁴ Thérèse was called to be holy, Saint with a capital 'S'; her graces are 'writ large' so that others can reflect upon them for instruction and inspiration. However, all people are called to be holy, that is, saints ('saints' with a low case 's').

articles using Object Relations Theory and already discussed in the Literature Review, they point to the issues of mother-daughter relationship, mother loss, and the highly significant *le regard* of 'face'. Frohlich claims that Thérèse sees rejection in her mother's face when unable to provide her enough milk and acceptance in Rose's face who meets this need. Both authors suggest that such a traumatic and early experience focuses Thérèse's awareness now and into the further on this symbol of face — a symbol of loving regard and of veiled suffering. Mary Frohlich writes:

Thérèse had an extreme experience of potential annihilation by the death-obsessed face of the mother, whose panicked demand that her child not be sick deeply infringed upon the child's need simply to rest 'formlessly' in welcoming arms. The transformational object, the face of Rose Taillé, appeared in the nick of time. The image of the face, then, was planted at the core of Thérèse's sense of hope. Yet the earliest experience of radical dissatisfaction could not simply be wiped out. It too had to be included, even in the image of the face. The Holy Face that became the 'foundation of her piety' was a face that was bleeding, anguished — and veiled.⁴⁵

From a slightly different perspective, Constance Fitzgerald⁴⁶ argues that Thérèse sees herself in the eyes of her own mother whose letters, written before Thérèse was four, attest to how the baby daughter has been mirrored to herself by a loving mother. Fitzgerald claims that when Thérèse reads these letters in 1895 in preparation to writing her autobiography, they bring to Thérèse's awareness 'the affirmative experience of love lying dormant in her psyche'. Fitzgerald writes:

The love which baby Thérèse sees upon looking into the face of her mother (and by extension her surrogate nurse-mother, Rose Taillé), her mother's ability to let her tiny daughter see her own reflection in a loving gaze of total

⁴⁵ See Frohlich, 'Your Face is My Only Homeland', 187. Devotion to the Holy Face was practiced in nineteenth-century France. 'The center of the revival of the devotion was at the Carmel of Tours, where in 1845 the nun Marie de Saint-Pierre consecrated herself to the reparative cult of the Holy Face. The link between a spirituality of reparation and devotion to the Face of Jesus goes back at least to 1694, when the French Dominican Antonin Thomas published a tract on this topic. During Marie de Saint-Pierre's time it was taking on fresh impetus from the aftermath of the French Revolution. In 1846 the Virgin Mary appeared at La Salette calling the devout to acts of reparation, and in 1847 Bishop Parisis of Langres founded a new archconfraternity, the "Society of Reparation for Blasphemies and the Violation of Sunday". A major movement, arising from the grassroots but quickly taken up and underwritten by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, was underway. The cult of the Holy Face, then, developed in close conjunction with this intense reaction of many French Catholics, both clerical and lay, against the threatening tide of secularization and anticlericalism that they saw rising on all sides' (ibid., 179).

⁴⁶ Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux': 74-96.

regard,⁴⁷ is foundational for Thérèse's life and her experience of God. Her mother's face functions as the first mirror into which Thérèse looks to discover her own precious identity which is secure and self-assured until her mother dies.⁴⁸

Both writers highlight the significance of the fact that, as will be noted later, Thérèse, in Carmel, even added to 'Thérèse of the Child Jesus' — her religious name in Carmel — the further title of 'and of the Holy Face'. Here, among many other possible interpretations, is an example of allowing the circumstances of one's life to lead to God.

Robert J. Giugliano⁴⁹ sees a pattern developing in the child Thérèse of painful ambivalence and insecurity leading to anger, distress and grief, all resulting from the incident described above. Mme. Martin's letters certainly do cite occasions when her youngest daughter shows signs of a very strong will, where Thérèse is sometimes ill, where she is highly excitable and at times distressed. Giugliano argues that these signs result from Zélie's inability to bond with her daughter, on Thérèse's return to the Martin home after having lived away with Rose Taillé for thirteen months. However, Thérèse also shows very positive personality traits in her childhood years and which, one can argue, outweigh Giugliano's emphasis on negative ones.

Our interest here in this behaviour is not to analyse it from a psychological point of view (though it truly can be), but to posit the possibility that these behaviours show signs of the emerging 'true' and 'false' self — each of which, in Thérèse and all of us, vies for supremacy. This often interior battle can be between true and false, between good and evil, or between faith and sin.

In the following scene, we witness something of Thérèse's strength of will and her determination. When she was about three and Léonie, thirteen, Léonie approaches

⁴⁷ Fitzgerald uses the word 'regard' (*un regard*) throughout her essay to mean both 'the look or gaze, and one's appearance, that is to say, one's face'. It also signifies 'being face to face as if one were looking into a mirror and considering the face on which one gazes and, therefore, by extension the word "regard" indicates "esteem"' (see Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', 3). Thérèse herself uses this word 152 times as against once only for *le visage* (face).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2f.

⁴⁹ Robert J. Giugliano, 'Separation, Loss, and Longing in the Infancy and Early Childhood of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face': 225-254.

Céline and Thérèse with a basket of dolls' clothes and invites her young sisters to choose what they want. 'Here, my little sisters, *choose*; I'm giving you all this.' 'Céline', writes Thérèse, 'stretched out her hand took a little ball of wool that pleased her. After a moment's reflection, I stretched out mine saying: "I choose all!" and I took the basket without further ceremony'.⁵⁰ This seems an impetuous gesture. Yet, Thérèse reflects on this action of hers as she writes her autobiography. 'This little incident of my childhood is a summary of my whole life'. She writes:

Later on when perfection was set before me, I understood that to become a *saint* one had to suffer much, seek out always the most perfect thing to do, and forget self. I understood, too, there were many degrees of perfection and each soul was free to respond to the advances of Our Lord, to do little or much for Him, in a word, to *choose* among the sacrifices He was asking. Then, as in the days of my childhood, I cried out: 'My God *I choose all!*' I don't want to be a *saint by halves*, I'm not afraid to suffer for You, I fear only one thing: to keep my *own will*; so take it, for '*I choose all*' that You will!⁵¹

Thérèse places great importance upon one's ability to *choose*. Whatever she says and does in her short life, it is the outcome of *choice*. In the face of those who might consider Thérèse but a baby with very little of importance to say, this is an important counter-point. According to Bernard Lonergan 'moral conversion changes the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfactions to values'.⁵²

Another Interpretation

Ken Wilber states that Spirit is 'both totally and completely immanent and completely transcendent. Spirit is both Ground and Goal'.⁵³ Maybe we can apply this to Thérèse's

⁵⁰ SS Manuscript A, 27.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 240.

⁵³ Wilber explains further: 'Being and consciousness exist as a spectrum, reaching from matter to body to mind to soul to Spirit. Spirit is, in a certain sense, the highest dimension or level of the spectrum of existence, it is also the ground or condition of the entire spectrum ... Spirit is both totally and completely immanent and completely transcendent ... There is no contacting immanent Spirit, no way to reach It, no way to commune with It, for these is nothing It is not. Transcendent Spirit is the highest rung on our own ladder of growth and evolution ... The realization of our Supreme Identity with Spirit dawns only after much growth ... only then to understand that the Supreme Identity was there, from the beginning, perfectly given in its fullness' (see Ken Wilber, 'Preface to the Second Edition', *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Wheaton ILL.: Quest Books, 1993: xvi-xix). To me, this description of the 'Supreme Identity being there from the beginning ...', has much in common with Karl Rahner's notion

illness at two months. According to Mme. Martin's letter of 16 March (?) 1873, Thérèse was unconscious for fifteen minutes after her first breast-feed from Rose Taillé. 'The little one was apparently not breathing; we bent over her in vain trying to find some signs of life and we saw none'.⁵⁴ This situation raises questions: was this a Near Death Experience for Thérèse?⁵⁵ What did she 'see' in those fifteen minutes? Was it 'the face' of God? In Christian spirituality, it is not unusual to speak of God's 'face' as a symbol of intimate and personal encounter, even though we know God is a pure spirit.⁵⁶

Of course, Thérèse is too young at eight weeks to even begin to understand any *texts* that reference 'face'. Yet, because *life*, from beginning to end is God's gift, and because the grace of God flows in each life, we claim that God and God's grace would not have abandoned Thérèse during these fifteen minutes that she is seemingly unconscious. Further, it can be said that in some way, she experiences God's saving presence in a metaphorical '*Eternal Face to Face*':⁵⁷ 'And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:18).

of the all-pervasiveness of grace, with Thérèse's understanding that 'everything is a grace' and with much of the dissertation's previous references to transcendence. Space does not permit these links be followed.

⁵⁴ See GC II, 1204.

⁵⁵ The original question was raised by Patrick Oliver in Private Notes; the development of the question is mine.

⁵⁶ Psalm 42:2 reads: 'My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?' Jewish mysticism associates God's face with the communication Moses held with God on Mt Sinai: 'thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend' (Ex 33:11). However, in Ex 33:20, we note that Moses is told by the Lord, 'You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live'. There is a seeing and not seeing strain in one's faith; a 'veiling' and an 'unveiling'. St Paul, speaking metaphorically to explain the hope of being with God when one dies, also invokes the symbol of face. He writes: 'for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face' (1 Cor 12:13). In 1893, Thérèse writes to her sister, Céline, to encourage her. Céline is having problems at home, being the only one there to look after their father who is ill: 'He [God] hastens to perfect His work for the day when the shadows having vanished, He will no longer use any intermediaries but an *eternal Face to Face*' (see GC II, 814). In June 1895, Thérèse concludes her *Act of Self-Offering* with the words: 'I want, O my *Beloved*, at each beat of my heart to renew this offering to You an infinite number of times, until the shadows having disappeared I may be able to tell You of my *Love* in an *Eternal Face to Face*!' (Appendix B, *SS Appendices*, 277).

⁵⁷ See *Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love*, Appendix B.

This, of course, cannot be proven to be the case; but neither can it be proven that it is not the case. Thérèse is not dead; she only appears dead. Might Thérèse have touched the transcendent Spirit during those fifteen minutes — in Wilber's terms, 'the Supreme Identity ... there, from the beginning, perfectly given in its fullness'? It is possible. In this Near Death Experience, there was no split or gap between subject and object; both had vanished into non-dual Subjectivity. This is the timeless Now, where life and death are one.⁵⁸

Most accounts of Near Death Experiences do record an experience of light and / or of the sacredness of life with every moment being important, or some 'other-worldly' experience.⁵⁹ The *fact* is (in Zélie Martin's words): 'Finally, after fifteen minutes passed by, my little Thérèse opened her eyes and began to smile. From that moment on she was totally cured; her healthy appearance returned and her gaiety as well'.⁶⁰ We do not know what Thérèse experienced — if anything — but we do know her subsequent total focus on holiness of life and her own words: 'Our Lord, willing for Himself alone my first glance, saw fit to ask my heart in the cradle, if I can so express myself.'⁶¹ The *strength* that Thérèse exhibits in her childhood and beyond it can find its root here in this experience.

Mini-Conclusion

There can be no question of personal sin here in these infant years. Despite her precocious intelligence, Thérèse has not reached the age of clear reason and so, according to the ways of understanding then and now, she is not sinning. However, she is showing signs of 'pathos' in her psyche, the root cause of which — in Thérèse and all other people — can be traced to what in the Tradition is called Original Sin. This sin 'wounds human nature in the natural powers proper to it'.⁶² From a

⁵⁸ See Wilber, 291f.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Raymond A. Moody, *Life after Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977); Melvin Morse with Paul Perry, *Closer to The Light: Learning from the Near Death Experiences of Children* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990).

⁶⁰ See GC II, 1204.

⁶¹ GC II, 1016.

⁶² Cf. CCC, # 405.

psychological point of view, Thérèse's psyche is wounded and will need to recover before gaining a state of 'wellness' (Bourgeault). Later, she would write:

You can see, dear Mother, how far I was from being a faultless little child! They weren't even able to say about me: 'She's good when she's asleep' because at night I was more restless than during the day, throwing off the blankets and sending them in all directions and (while still sleeping) banging myself against the wood of my little bed. The pain would awaken me and I'd cry out: 'Mama, I *bumped myself!*' Poor little Mother was obliged to get up and convince herself I really had bruises on my forehead, that I really *bumped myself!* She'd cover me up and then go back to bed, but in a short time I would be *bumping myself* again, so much so they had *to tie* me in bed. And so every evening, little Céline came to tie me up with a lot of cords that were to prevent the little rascal from *bumping herself* and waking up her Mama; this was so successful a means that I was, from then on, *good when sleeping*.⁶³

'The little rascal'⁶⁴ recognises in herself, even as a child, that she has need for attention and closeness — a need that can tend to lead her into self-centeredness, self-will, and an excessive sensitivity'.⁶⁵ With the help of grace, Thérèse will conquer some of these signs of her 'false self'; some others, again, will be healed, by prayer and grace alone.⁶⁶ Further, it can be said that Thérèse understands *faith*, experientially, through love, the love shown her in her family. Notionally, she is beginning to adopt and to understand the values relating to its practice by sharing in those ideas and values to the extent a four-year-old is able.

The next three sections discuss elements in Thérèse's life from early childhood to early adolescence that can bear upon the overall theme of the chapter, namely, to provide evidence of Thérèse's continuing struggle in growing towards holiness. The

⁶³ SS Manuscript A, 24.

⁶⁴ See previous reference to Mme. Martin's letters and her use of 'little rascal'.

⁶⁵ See Schmidt, *Everything is Grace*, 68.

⁶⁶ When Thérèse claims to be writing only of 'the mercies of the Lord' in her life, she is tacitly acknowledging that, in her *petite voie* [not addressed in depth in this dissertation, but a summary title given by Thérèse to her method of going to God], her very weakness or littleness becomes a strength because 'God takes pity on the lowly' (cf. Mt 5:3; Mk 10:15; Lk 1:48). Her weakness claims God's attention because God has promised to comfort the lowly of heart. She lets her 'false self' be the way into receiving the Mercy of God. But for now, in 1876 / 77, Thérèse's 'true self' is also becoming apparent: she has 'a heart of gold, she is very affectionate and very honest'. These qualities will grow and develop. Her honesty is particularly important in the context of this thesis. Thérèse seeks only the truth in all honesty and she views her weakness in the light of God's Merciful Love.

refinement of this struggle will appear in Chapter 5 as a paradoxical union between loving to the point of dying of love and sitting among sinners knowing their distress.

C. Thérèse's Early Childhood Years (1877-1884)

Thérèse's Emotional Response to her Mother's Death (1877)⁶⁷

Following Zélie Martin's death, her family moves from Alençon to Lisieux to be closer to their relatives, the Guérin family.

But before moving to Lisieux, let us consider the scene now at Alençon immediately upon the death of Mme. Martin. Thérèse has been staying with relatives in Alençon in these last days of her mother's terminal illness, but now returns home to gather with her father and her sisters around Zélie Martin's bedside. Her father lifts her up to kiss her mother's cold forehead. Recalling the scene in her autobiography, Thérèse writes:

I don't recall having cried very much, neither did I speak to anyone about the feelings I experienced. I looked and listened in silence. No one had any time to pay any attention to me, and I saw many things they would have hidden from me. For instance, once I was standing before the lid of the coffin which had been placed upright in the hall. I stopped for a long time gazing at it. Though I'd never seen one before, I understood what it was. I was so little that in spite of Mama's small stature, I had to *raise* my head to take in its full height. It appeared *large* and *dismal*.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ In a letter to Mme. Guérin: December 1876, we read these words from Mme. Martin: 'I am ... far from disillusioning myself, and I hardly sleep at night when I think of the future ... Now Marie is grown up, she has a very, very serious character, and has none of the illusions of youth. I am sure that when I am no longer here, she will make a good housekeeper and will do everything possible to rear her little sisters well and give them good example. Pauline [the second daughter] is also charming, but Marie [the eldest daughter] has more experience: she has besides much influence over her little sisters. Céline [the fourth daughter] shows the best dispositions, she will be a very pious child. It is rare to show at her age such inclinations to piety. Thérèse [the youngest daughter] is a real little angel. As for Léonie [the third daughter], God alone can change her, and I am convinced that He will do it' (see *GC* II, 1229). Mme. Martin, Thérèse's mother, died 28 August 1877. Her death brings upon Thérèse, now aged four and a half, the experience of definitive separation from a maternal figure.

⁶⁸ SS Manuscript A, 33f.

According to Fowler, logical thought is normally not present in the three to seven year old but what is present, is the imaginative process. 'Imagination in this stage is extremely productive of long-lasting images and feelings (positive and negative) that later, more stable and self-reflective valuing and thinking will have to order and sort out'.⁶⁹ Thérèse's words bear out the truth of Fowler's statement. Thérèse remembers the experience of her mother's death clearly. 'God granted me the favour of opening my intelligence at an early age and of imprinting childhood recollections so deeply on my memory that it seems the things I'm about to recount happened only yesterday'.⁷⁰

I explore the implications for this dissertation of Thérèse's childhood recollection of her experience of the death of her mother by employing the aid of Dermot Lane. Experience can be classified in many ways, states Lane: primary and secondary experiences, ordinary and extraordinary experiences, or outer and inner experience. 'Perhaps the clearest classification', he says, 'is simply that of 'sense-experience' (experiences that do not go beyond the external surface of life) and 'depth-experience' (experiences that go below the surface of life to discover a deeper dimension which is not immediately evident).⁷¹ Explaining the latter further, he states that a 'depth dimension' in life is the point where we discover such diverse realities as meaning, value, goodness, beauty, and truth.⁷² We have noted much of this previously. Might we also add here to Lane's listings, though, the reality of 'death'? Through viewing her mother's dead body and seeing the nearby awaiting coffin and the lid (which appeared *large* and *dismal*), Thérèse experiences (we can only assume, for she says she did not speak about her feelings at this time) something of the tragedy and misery the death of a mother can be for a four and a half year old child.⁷³ It was a depth experience for her though not, I suggest, a further deepening of that into a religious experience. 'I don't recall having cried very much, neither did I speak to anyone about

⁶⁹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 133.

⁷⁰ SS Manuscript A, 16f.

⁷¹ Lane, *The Experience of God*, 23.

⁷² Ibid., 24. These can be examples of what Sandra Schneiders names as 'ultimate values'.

⁷³ Fifteen years later, Thérèse was to stand before another coffin, Mother Geneviève's, and this time her reaction to experiencing 'death' was quite different. We don't quite know where the first experience left her — she says she did not speak to anyone about the feelings she experienced, though she did write that the lid of the coffin appeared *large* and *dismal*. However, this second experience of standing before a coffin — this experience seems to turn her thoughts heavenwards (see SS Manuscript A, 34).

the feelings I experienced', she had written later.⁷⁴ However, judging from some of the events in Thérèse's life from this time onwards until the age of fourteen when she was cured of deep psychic hurt, this definitive separation from her natural mother was not something that could be repressed without some ensuing consequence. It is to be expected that the death of her mother increased Thérèse's sense of anxiety over her need for maternal protection.

After the funeral, the five girls were again gathered and Louise, the maid, with them. Seeing Céline and Thérèse, Louise said: 'Poor little things, you have no mother any more!'⁷⁵ Céline threw her arms around Marie, and said: 'Well, you will be my Mama!' Thérèse, accustomed to follow Céline's lead, threw herself into Pauline's arms crying: 'Well, as for me, it's Pauline who will be my Mama!'⁷⁶ Pauline is the most consciously important mother in Thérèse's life. It is now Pauline 'who is able to provide a consistent, loving *regard*'.⁷⁷ Thérèse will come to see in Pauline, as well as in her father, the look of total love and acceptance.

Thérèse's Emotional Development after her Mother's Death (1877-1882)

Thérèse belongs in a very loving environment where the seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are fused in an undifferentiated way.⁷⁸ And in an extraordinary maturity of the two elder girls, Marie and Pauline, and the continual 'maternal'⁷⁹ protection of her father, this loving environment is not to diminish by their sad self-absorption or by selfishness after Zélie Martin's death. However, there will continue to be in Thérèse two notionally unrecognised struggles: (a) to prefer to trust her care-givers or (b) to hold on to fear and anxiety about her future. If she grasps the first option, there is a further likelihood that she will try to please these care-givers to gain their approval by

⁷⁴ SS Manuscript A, 33.

⁷⁵ SS Manuscript A, 34.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See Fitzgerald, *The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux*, 6.

⁷⁸ Ida Görres expresses another opinion: 'The mother's death destroyed this sunny, happy family life at the core. What followed was still dear and sweet, peaceful and sheltered, but also perceptible muted, fragmentary. It was a surrogate' (see Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 61 [Winston translation]).

⁷⁹ See SS Manuscript A, 35. Did Thérèse transfer onto her father, the warm, maternal response she experienced from her mother; and did M. Martin, in his turn, successfully meet her expectations? Unconsciously, she possibly did. He certainly responded.

the repression of her feelings. And if this is the case, there could develop in Thérèse an image of God that, according to O'Sullivan, reads like this: 'If I am good, God will love me; if I am bad, God will punish me'.⁸⁰ If, however, she does trust her caregivers, and if she appears to have no fear or anxiety regarding her future, her image of God is more likely to be an early development of 'God loves me'.⁸¹ However, there is still the possibility that her unexpressed feelings have gone 'underground', and this might not be helpful in developing a positive image of God. Perhaps her feelings are indeed repressed, and this latter is the case, for she notes:

I experienced no regret whatsoever at leaving Alençon; children are fond of change, and it was with pleasure that I came to Lisieux. I recall the trip, our arrival at Aunt's home; and I can still picture Jeanne and Marie waiting for us at the door. I was very fortunate in have such nice little cousins. I loved them very much, as also Aunt and especially Uncle [her mother's brother]; however, he frightened me, and I wasn't as much at ease in his home as I was at Les Buissonnets [the name of their Lisieux home].⁸²

Later events will also seem to suggest that Thérèse's immediate feelings on the death of her mother are indeed repressed. However, she states that she is happy *now* that she has come to Lisieux.⁸³ She writes: 'I cannot say how much I loved Papa; everything in him caused me to admire him'.⁸⁴ Describing the salient characteristics of Louis Martin, Joyce Emert writes:

[M. Martin was] a tender and devoted father, an amusing and inventive gentleman, detached from earthly life though fond of humanity and preserving of tradition and heritage to an unusual degree, the very contrasts within his character all serving to convey a man of *authentic mien*.⁸⁵

Countering any repression of feelings, however, is Thérèse's warm relationship with her father and this helps her build an image of a loving God. Fowler states that

⁸⁰ See O'Sullivan, *'Sure Beats Selling Cardigans'*, 5.

⁸¹ This will develop gradually.

⁸² SS Manuscript A, 35.

⁸³ On special feastdays and on Sundays, Marie curls Thérèse's hair and Pauline spoils her in other ways like allowing a longer sleep in the mornings and bringing her hot chocolate in the evenings. Pauline cares for Thérèse with 'maternal tenderness', especially every winter when Thérèse is ill. It is Pauline, too, who receives all Thérèse's intimate confidences and clears up all her doubts. M. Martin (Papa) takes special delight in Thérèse (his 'little Queen') and she in him (her King of France and Navarre).

⁸⁴ SS Manuscript, 48.

⁸⁵ See Joyce R. Emert, *Louis Martin : Father of a Saint* (New York: Alba House, 19983), xxiii.

children at age six or seven (Thérèse is five or six) are 'marked by increased accuracy in taking the perspective of other persons.'⁸⁶ Perhaps in an unreflected way at present, Thérèse sees her father as a symbol of God's love for her. 'Steeped as he was in the common human experiences of work, marriage, a large family, travel, deaths of most of his loved ones, and, finally, even mental illness, ... Louis portrayed the very highest of godly virtues.'⁸⁷

Thérèse's Use of Imagery⁸⁸

We recall that in her autobiography, Thérèse is recounting the graces in her life. One of these is her obvious capacity for loving relationships with others, mainly family members. Another one is her gift to be keenly aware and appreciative of the beauty and terror in nature. Each time she encounters nature's power to thrill her, it becomes a means of uniting her soul with God.

They were beautiful days for me, those days when my 'dear King' took me fishing with him. I was very fond of the countryside, flowers, birds, etc. Sometimes I would try to fish ... but I preferred to go *alone* and sit down on the grass bedecked with flowers, and then my thoughts became very profound indeed ... my soul was absorbed in real prayer ... speaking of clouds, I remember one day when the beautiful blue sky became suddenly overcast and soon the thunder began to roll and the lightning to flash through the dark clouds. I saw it strike a short distance away, and, far from being frightened, I was thrilled with delight because God seemed to be so close!⁸⁹

Another time when Thérèse touches the supernatural in nature is when she sees the sea for the first time: 'I was six or seven years old when papa brought us to Trouville. Never will I forget the impression the sea made upon me; I couldn't take my eyes off it since its majesty, the roaring of its waves, everything spoke to my soul of God's grandeur and power'.⁹⁰ Later, again taking another page from the 'book of nature', she

⁸⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 149.

⁸⁷ Emert, *Louis Martin*, xx.

⁸⁸ Thérèse writes: 'I have noticed in all the serious circumstances of my life that nature always reflected the image of my soul. On days filled with tears the heavens cried along with me; on days of joy the sun sent forth its joyful rays in profusion and the blue skies were not obscured by a single cloud' (see SS Manuscript A, 109f).

⁸⁹ SS Manuscript A, 38.

⁹⁰ SS Manuscript A, 48.

will describe her relationship with Céline as ‘two petals swayed by the same breeze’.⁹¹

Thérèse's great capacity for beholding God's Beauty in creation and the naturally loving relationship she holds with family members are examples of a lived-out faith in the circumstances of one's life. Thérèse will build on these gifts until the day she dies.

Thérèse's Prophetic Vision of her Father's Great Trial (Summer 1879 or 1880)

Thérèse touches the supernatural in a different way. ‘One day’, she writes: ‘God showed me in a truly extraordinary *vision* the *living* image of the trial He was pleased to prepare for us in advance.’⁹² Thérèse was going on seven at the time. ‘The sun was shining and all nature seemed to be rejoicing. I was all alone at the window of an attic which faced the large garden; I was looking straight ahead, my mind occupied with joyful thoughts, when I saw a man dressed exactly like Papa standing in front of the laundry which was just opposite’. This man was ‘the same height and walk’ as her Papa, ‘only he was *much more stooped*. His *head* was covered with a sort of apron of indistinct color and it hid his face’. The man began ‘walking at a regular pace’ along Thérèse's little garden. ‘Immediately’, writes Thérèse, ‘a feeling of supernatural fright invaded my soul’. Later, she felt that the apparition had been given her in order to prepare her for the painful malady that struck M. Martin in the ensuing years.⁹³

This was another ‘depth experience’ for Thérèse; and we note how clearly she describes it. Was the vision a *symbol* — of her father's future illness? Considering that ‘the symbol is the mode of presence of something that cannot be encountered in any other way’ (Schneiders), ‘a sign pregnant with meaning’ (Ryan), and a sign that gives participatory knowledge, we can surely say that this apparition for Thérèse was, indeed, a symbol. Thérèse names it a *vision* and associates it with a presence of the supernatural. Lane, taking his discussion of experience further, now states that one

⁹¹ See SS Manuscript A, 56f.

⁹² SS Manuscript A, 45f.

⁹³ See SS Manuscript A, 45-48.

can begin to talk about 'religious' experience from within the realm of a 'depth experience'. 'To this extent', he says, 'every religious experience is always a depth-experience, though not every depth-experience is necessarily a religious experience'. 'As a basic principle', he continues, 'we can say that a religious experience is at one and the same time an experience of something else. It is this experience of 'something else' which serves as the medium disclosing that dimension in life which is called religious'.⁹⁴ For Thérèse, this 'something else' was certainly present at the time of the vision but she could grasp its meaning only later. She writes:

It was not within my power to think no more about it. Very often my imagination presented again the mysterious scene I had witnessed. Very often, too, I tried to lift the veil that was hiding its meaning from me because I kept in the bottom of my heart the conviction that this vision had a meaning which was one day to be revealed to me. That day was a long time in coming; but after fourteen years God Himself tore away the mysterious veil.⁹⁵

That being the case then, the experience was not only a 'depth experience' but also a 'religious experience'. In spite of 'supernatural fright', there was also 'something else' about this vision that 'spoke' to the enduring realities of life and death and through which, for Thérèse, 'God is co-experienced and co-known' [Lane]. Thérèse is 'finely tuned' to these realities — yes, because of the trauma of losing her mother in death — but also, maybe, because of her Near Death Experience at the age of two months. Thérèse's entire life toggles between the two realities of life and death, earth and heaven.

Not only does Thérèse have a keen awareness of the power of nature to inform her God relationship, but also she is also capable of penetrating beyond merely sense impression in another medium and searching for a supernatural meaning there as well.⁹⁶ Thérèse will not forget this latest experience. It was not a psychologically

⁹⁴ Lane, *The Experience of God*, 24f.

⁹⁵ SS Manuscript A, 46.

⁹⁶ We might also raise here the existence of the devil. The devil was 'around' Thérèse at certain times in her life: in an early dream where she notes little devils not willing to come too close because her soul is in the state of grace (cf. SS Manuscript A, 28); at her illness, aged ten (cf. SS Manuscript A, 60); on the eve of her Religious Profession (cf. SS Manuscript A, 166); and at her death (cf. LC, 257). It would be interesting to pursue this topic further in order to probe its meaning — but later, perhaps. The 'devil' is not spoken of today; contemporary society would prefer perhaps to speak of 'psychological weaknesses' instead. Of course, when we use the word 'devil' we are not envisaging a figure in red with a pitch fork!

induced experience nor was it a projection of an over-stimulated imagination. According to Thérèse recalling the incident fourteen years after it had occurred, it was a vision allowed her by God to emotionally prepare her for the years of suffering ahead when she would then face the trial with great spiritual maturity. Even though only six or seven at the time, Thérèse does not, in spite of the power of the symbol, allow it to pose a 'danger that could have arisen from the possible "possession" of her imagination by unrestrained images of terror and destructiveness'.⁹⁷ In this, we can see in Thérèse a growing development towards a mature spirituality.

It is further noteworthy that in this vision, M. Martin's *face* receives special mention; it invites curiosity and further investigation; it was veiled. In a 'veiled' way it spoke to Thérèse again of death. 'Men do not wear veils, though a widow does wear a veil as a death symbol'.⁹⁸ In the vision, there is a subtle though probably unconscious recall for Thérèse of the anguish she experienced on the death of her mother. The emphasis on 'face', and again, Thérèse's later devotion to the 'Face of Jesus veiled during His Passion', would suggest that Frohlich's earlier claim that 'Thérèse had an extreme experience of potential annihilation by the death-obsessed face of [her] mother', is correct. Against this interpretation, Fitzgerald would argue that the veiled face of M. Martin, onto which Thérèse tries to project the loving *regard* of her mother's face, 'begins to prefigure the transcendent reciprocity Thérèse will feel with Christ who is going to be both male and female (though ultimately hidden and beyond gender)' and which will eventually 'throw back from eternity a specifically *suffering, obscured face*, a "'Holy Face"''.⁹⁹ Yes, and a Face of the *Beloved* who loves to the extent of suffering and obscurity. (See below for a description of her First Communion when there was *fusion* between Jesus and the Beloved, and in Chapter 5 where that fusion

The CCC treats the topic of 'devil' under the headings 'The Fall of the Angels', # 391-395, and 'Original Sin', # 396-401. The Catechism states: 'Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil"', # 391. It was this 'seductive voice' that spoke to Thérèse at certain times. Yet she always remained free to acquiesce to its demands or to reject them. In this, Thérèse acquired skill in the exercise of the discernment of spirits. Alongside the great love in her heart, this is another reason why she was so highly attuned to not 'sinning' (offending God) — she became 'expert' in reading the signs (discerning the 'voices'). Thérèse lived at a high level of conscious awareness.

⁹⁷ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 134.

⁹⁸ Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

remains amidst even suffering and doubt). A further point of interest is that this 'vision' indistinctly presents Thérèse — in the vision her father 'disappears' — with an invitation to 'die' to 'clinging to a crutch' (her father). Eventually *faith* will demand of her an unconditional love of God alone.

Also worth noting is that some months prior to this vision of her father's future illness, Thérèse had understood a sermon on the Passion. Why is Thérèse drawn to noting this especially? And what particular aspect of the sermon did she notice? Was it the veiled face of Jesus? Perhaps it was; but on another occasion, listening to a sermon in which the preacher spoke about St Teresa, Thérèse recalls that, although her father leaned over and said, 'Listen carefully, little Queen, he's talking about your Patroness', Thérèse 'did listen carefully', but 'looked more frequently at Papa ... for his *handsome* face said so much' to her!¹⁰⁰ The *leitmotif* relating to *face* is certainly present in these accounts.

Again we pause to summarise our position to this point regarding faith and sin. Thérèse is not sinning. However she is participating in human suffering that, according to the Tradition, results from Original Sin. Her particularly sensitive nature registers suffering acutely and she interprets it, as well as the joys in her life, within the frame of faith.

Thérèse's First Confession (end of 1879 or beginning of 1880)

Thérèse's first confession was made to Father Ducellier in about 1880 when she was seven. Speaking to Pauline in her autobiography, Thérèse recalls:

With what care you prepared me for my first confession, telling me it was not to a man but to God I was about to tell my sins; I was very much convinced of this truth. I made my confession in a great spirit of faith, even asking you if I had to tell Father Ducellier I loved him with all my heart as it was to God in person I was speaking.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ SS Manuscript A, 42.

¹⁰¹ SS Manuscript A, 40.

We picture, with certain amazement and amusement, the small seven-year-old making her first confession ‘in a great spirit of faith’. Thérèse was so small that her head was below the arm-rest and Father Ducellier had to ask her to stand up. ‘I stood and faced him directly in order to see him perfectly, and I made my confession ... with *great devotion* for you [Pauline] had told me that at the moment he [the priest] gave me absolution the *tears of Jesus* were going to purify my soul’.¹⁰² For Thérèse, faith, devotion and honesty were obviously important elements in the reception of this sacrament. The experience of her first confession was a positive one, leaving her with a feeling of happiness, light-heartedness and a feeling of great joy — so much so that it was a celebration. ‘Since then’, she notes, ‘I’ve gone to confession on all the great feasts, and it was truly a *feast* for me each time’.¹⁰³ In the experience of some people today, ‘going to ‘Confession’ is / was something of a trial. Not so for Thérèse. She is convinced that she is telling her sins / faults to God (in the person of the priest). Thérèse’s image of God, here, is positive; it seems not to be ‘overly influenced’ — if at all — by the operational image of God that implies: ‘if I am good, God will love me; if I am bad, he will punish me’. Confessing her sins / faults, as she says, makes Thérèse ‘happy and light-hearted’ because it gives God another opportunity to love her.¹⁰⁴ Conversely, the confession of sin gives God an opportunity to be ‘happy and light-hearted’: ‘there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance’ (cf. Lk 15:7).

One wonders, however, what sins Thérèse might possibly have had to tell in her first reception of the Sacrament of Confession. Possibly she told small faults like her outbursts of temper with Victoire, the maid, and shedding tears of anger and calling her a ‘brat’;¹⁰⁵ stubbornness, or faults like being irritated with Céline’s teasing.¹⁰⁶ These faults were not really important as sins, but, perhaps, to Thérèse, with her ability to ‘pour out tears of repentance, having a firm purpose of not doing it again!’, any fault struck a discord and she was pleased that ‘the tears of Jesus would purify her

¹⁰² See SS Manuscript A, 40.

¹⁰³ SS Manuscript A, 41. Remembering that Thérèse is reflecting back on her life as she writes, this is a significant statement in that it reflects an image of God who loves the sinner if not the sin.

¹⁰⁴ SS Manuscript A, 41.

¹⁰⁵ See SS Manuscript A, 39.

¹⁰⁶ See SS Manuscript A, 56.

soul'.¹⁰⁷ In passing, we note that the crisis of scruples that Thérèse was to experience from May 1885 to October 1886 has no connection to her first reception of the sacrament of confession nor to any of her succeeding approaches to this sacrament.

Thérèse Goes to School

When Thérèse is eight and a half, Léonie leaves the Abby and Thérèse replaces her there. Writing about the years which commenced with this event of going to school, Thérèse says: 'I was undoubtedly big enough now to commence the struggle, to commence knowing the world and the miseries with which it was filled'.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps this sounds a little melodramatic; but from Thérèse's perspective, writing years later, that is how she experienced those next years, 1881-1883, which include not only going to school,¹⁰⁹ but Pauline's entrance to Carmel and Thérèse's own strange sickness as well.

Thérèse's Relationship with Céline

If at school, Céline was the strong one and Thérèse, the sweet little girl, at home, the roles are somewhat altered. Though there are four years in difference in age between

¹⁰⁷ Later, however, after her confession to Father Pichon on 28 May 1888, Thérèse does not usually speak of her 'sin' but rather of 'imperfection'. This change, I suggest (against Hans Urs Von Balthasar - see Chapter 6), does not principally derive from Father Pichon's statement 'I declare that you have never committed a mortal sin' (SS Manuscript A, 149) but rather from her own understanding of the nature of sin. Thérèse, while ontologically a sinner, knew she committed 'imperfections' rather than deliberate 'mortal' sins or deliberate 'venial' sins. Thérèse's love of God made it almost impossible for deliberate sin to coexist with that intense love in her soul. But this great love gave Thérèse real insight into the 'misery' of sin — of any kind.

¹⁰⁸ SS Manuscript A, 49.

¹⁰⁹ Thérèse enters a classroom for the first time, 3 October 1881. Of further interest re Thérèse's school is that Louis Martin would not allow any of his daughters to make excuses for poor grades, nor would he allow them to stay at home on weak excuses. Louis is a conscientious watch maker and knows the value of attention to regular discipline and to detail. In October, 1885, when Céline leaves the Abbey, he will go to the school at the end of the day to escort Thérèse home. He rewards her for good schoolwork, sometimes by giving her a small silver coin ... sometimes, he simply looks at her happily, the reward she most treasures (see *Louis Martin Father of a Saint*, 67). (We note the attention to *face*!). Yet, this first time at school and in a class where the pupils were all older than she was, Thérèse experiences the fact that life at school is different from life at home. For example, one particular girl was jealous of Thérèse's academic successes and 'made her pay in a thousand ways'. Thérèse, timid and sensitive by nature, did not know how to defend herself and was 'content to cry without saying a word and without complaining *even to Pauline*' (see SS Manuscript A, 53). However, Céline was there to defend her little sister: 'Who can say with what intrepidity she defended me at the Abbey when I was accused of something?' (SS Manuscript A, 55). But Céline would not always be there.

these two sisters, 'Céline [at home] had become a naughty little rascal and [I] was anything but a sweet little girl, much given to crying'.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, these two sisters love each other 'Our petals were swayed by the same breeze; what gave one joy or pain did exactly the same to the other'.¹¹¹ Perhaps their relationship had taken root four years previously, while Thérèse listened to Pauline preparing Céline for her First Communion. When she was allowed to stay and listen, Thérèse tells us that 'I listened eagerly in order to prepare myself also, but very often you told me to go away as I was too little. Then my heart was very heavy and I thought four years was not too long to prepare to receive God'.¹¹² On the actual day of Céline's First Communion, Thérèse repeats over and over, 'It's today! The great day has arrived'. She continues, 'It seems it was I who was going to make my First Communion. I believe I received great graces that day and I consider it one of the most *beautiful* in my life'.¹¹³

We notice Thérèse's desire to move towards involving herself in religious activities, her deep capacity for friendship while, at the same time, her tendency to be easily wounded by those relationships. We also note the particular description Thérèse gives to her experience of the day of Céline's First Communion: it was one of the most *beautiful* in her life and we recognise the poetry in the description for the experience itself was an experience of God. The experience must have been one of God's consoling Presence, and it reflects an image of a loving God.

In the next few years Thérèse's relationship with Céline will grow in depth in a sisterly kind of way, and there will be much soul sharing between the two sisters. In a letter to Céline from Carmel in 1889, a letter that speaks of the deep bond between the two sisters, Thérèse returns to the theme of the mystery of God's grace. She writes: what memories between us! ... It's a world of memories ... Yes, Jesus has His preferences; there are, in His garden, fruits which the Sun of His love ripens almost in the twinkling of an eye ... Why are we of this number? ... A question filled with mystery ... What reason can Jesus give us? Alas! His reason is that He has no

¹¹⁰ SS Manuscript A, 55.

¹¹¹ SS Manuscript A, 56f.

¹¹² SS Manuscript A, 57.

¹¹³ SS Manuscript A, 57.

reason!'¹¹⁴ However, later still, when Céline enters Carmel and Thérèse has already been there for six years, the relationship will then be that of Thérèse as 'mother' to Céline as 'daughter' — an interesting turn-around.

The Aspirations of Pauline and Thérèse (1876-1882)

In reading Saint Thérèse's autobiography and her letters one gains an increasing awe for the grace which was poured out by the Lord upon one so young and so relatively sheltered and provincial in background. Hers is a wisdom, a love and a faith beyond human capacity, being clearly gifts of the kind bestowed by the holy Spirit.¹¹⁵

Emert wrote those words looking at Thérèse's life in hindsight. Still, in many ways, Thérèse's desire for holiness shows itself early in her life. One of these is a recurring aspiration to become a religious. We can note here a letter which Pauline wrote to a school friend, Louise Magdelaine, on 4 April 1877. Pauline was fifteen and a half at the time. In the letter she speaks of her little sister, Thérèse, who, aged three and a half, had said to Pauline, 'I will be a religious ...' Pauline continued, 'I had a frightful desire to laugh [but] she [Thérèse] was gazing at me thoughtfully. Her little face had such a candid expression; all she was saying was coming from the bottom of her heart, so much so that it was impossible not to take any interest'.¹¹⁶ Nineteen years later, writing to P. Roulland in October 1896, Thérèse confirms her earlier statement, even bringing the date forward from three years to her cradle years. She tells P. Roulland that it was not on that earlier feast of Christmas and its association with her 'conversion' that she received the grace of a religious vocation. But, that: 'Our Lord,

¹¹⁴ See GC I, 557. Here Thérèse returns to her favourite method of seeking answers to perplexing theological questions such as those concerning *grace*: she has resource to the 'book of nature'. However, the mystery of grace must remain, for Thérèse, just that — a mystery. She seems convinced, though, that she and Céline belong to the group of Jesus' preferences. But does Jesus have preferences? Certainly, Thérèse seems to me to be an example of Jesus' preference. Thérèse's sister, Marie, thought that Thérèse was 'possessed by God'. But does Jesus' really have preferences? Or is it that some souls are more predisposed to receive God's grace than others are, but that, in reality, God loves all people equally? Karl Rahner's teaching on grace is of God's personal self-communication to every human being. Does that include an interpretation that grace, while given to every human being, is given in measured quantities, that is, do some people receive more grace than others? 'God's-Self' is surely not divisible into portions! Or are we back in the area of mystery again? However, it is surely unacceptable theological language to describe grace as in quantities being 'poured into' the soul [or as a super-structure over and above one's ordinary nature (Rahner)].

¹¹⁵ Emert, *Louis Martin: Father of a Saint*, xvii.

¹¹⁶ GC I, 108.

willing for Himself alone my first glance, saw fit to ask my heart in the cradle, if I can so express myself'.¹¹⁷ Was this at the time of the Near Death Experience, we wonder!

Still following the development of Thérèse's Carmelite vocation, we read that at some early time after the death of Mme. Martin, Thérèse said to Pauline that she would like to be a hermit and go away with her alone in a faraway desert place. Thérèse's memory of the incident is that Pauline intimated that this was her desire also and that she (Pauline) would wait until Thérèse was big enough for them to leave together. Both were attracted by the idea of 'solitude'. Though Pauline's reply was 'no doubt not said seriously', Thérèse 'had taken it seriously'. Later, when she accidentally hears Pauline telling Marie of her imminent decision to enter Carmel, Thérèse — although she 'didn't know what Carmel was' — immediately registers that Pauline 'would not wait' for her and that she 'was about to lose' her 'second Mother'.¹¹⁸ Showing 'increased accuracy in taking the perspective of other persons', Thérèse had composed a world 'based on reciprocal fairness and an immanent justice based on reciprocity',¹¹⁹ and it seems to her now that that world was shattered. The consequences of Pauline's departure to Carmel later that year are, for Thérèse, dire.

Ah! how can I express the anguish of my heart! In one instant, I understood what life was; until then, I had never seen it so sad; but it appeared to me in all its reality, and I saw it was nothing but a continual suffering and separation. I shed bitter tears ...¹²⁰

This loss easily feeds into Thérèse's already wounded psyche — wounded, in particular, by the death of her mother. In very descriptive imagery, she writes: 'If I had learned of my dear Pauline's departure very gently, I would not have suffered as much perhaps, but having heard about it by surprise, it was as if a sword were buried in my heart'.¹²¹ It seemed the *regard* (the face) was being withdrawn.

¹¹⁷ *GC* II, 1016.

¹¹⁸ See *SS* Manuscript A, 58f.

¹¹⁹ See Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 149.

¹²⁰ *SS* Manuscript A, 58.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, Pauline tenderly consoles her and explains the life of Carmel. Thérèse wrote:

When thinking over all you had said I felt that Carmel was the *desert* where God wanted me to go also to hide myself. I felt this with so much force that there wasn't the least doubt in my heart; it was not the dream of a child led astray but the *certitude* of a divine call; I wanted to go to Carmel not for *Pauline's sake* but for *Jesus alone*. I was thinking *very much* about things that words could not express but which left a great peace in my soul.¹²²

The next day, Thérèse tells Pauline of her secret thoughts and Pauline resolves that when she next visits Mother Prioress, she will take Thérèse with her and Thérèse can tell the Mother Prioress herself of her considerations. This duly occurred, and in words that reveal some humour, Thérèse said: 'Having listened to my *great confidences*, Mother Marie de Gonzague believed I had a vocation, but she told me they didn't receive postulants at the age of *nine* and that I must wait till I was sixteen'.¹²³ But there was a glimmer of joy — one of the sisters at the convent told Thérèse she was pretty!¹²⁴ According to Fowler, and on a more serious note, 'the limitations of literalness and an excessive reliance upon reciprocity as a principle for constructing an ultimate environment can', for a ten year old school child, 'result either in an over controlling, stilted perfectionism or "works righteousness" or in their opposite, an abasing sense of badness embraced because of mistreatment, neglect or the apparent disfavour of significant others'.¹²⁵ However, it seems that neither of these two consequences materialized — certainly not to a marked degree — in Thérèse's life as a result of her 'failed attempt' to enter Carmel. But ...

Pauline's Entrance to Carmel and its Consequences for Thérèse (2 October 1882)

One year later, Pauline enters the Lisieux Carmel and Thérèse, though still attending the Abbey school, begins to develop headaches and eventually gets so sick that the

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 58f.

¹²⁴ See SS Manuscript A, 59.

¹²⁵ Fowler, *The Stages of Faith*, 150.

illness, lasting seven and a half weeks, is so severe that all medical help is ineffectual. Only a miracle will cure her.

Thérèse's Sickness and Miraculous Cure (Easter 1883 – 13 May 1883)

The 'weaknesses' that Thérèse exhibits in this period can be seen in her responses to Pauline's entry to Carmel (2 October 1882). Thérèse begins to have constant headaches lasting until Easter 1883. Then, just prior to Pauline's Reception (of the habit and receiving the name Sister Agnes of Jesus), while Céline and Thérèse are staying with the Guérins because their father with Marie and Léonie have gone to Paris, Thérèse is walking outside with her Uncle (her Guardian). Thérèse recalls that he 'spoke about Mamma and about past memories with a kindness that touched me profoundly and made me cry. Then he told me I was too soft-hearted, that I needed a lot of distraction, and he was determined to give us a good time during our Easter vacation'.¹²⁶ The effect of recalling her mother's illness and death was too much for Thérèse. And now, with Pauline's withdrawal also, 'Thérèse's threatened identity faces collapse; it cannot yet sustain the kind of self-transcendence demanded, since God's face is not adequately unveiled and there is nowhere for her to displace the *regard*'.¹²⁷ Thérèse 'begins to believe she is non-existent' and moves toward a feeling of nothingness. A similar feeling will bear down upon her later, but then, in the last months of her life, 'her soul having been matured in the crucible of exterior and interior trials', Thérèse's deep faith will carry her through death.

Within days she is overtaken by a mysterious illness. She begins to exhibit nervous trembling and hallucinations and medical help is ineffectual. These symptoms, according to a theory developed by Robert Masson,¹²⁸ are congruent with those of encephalitis resulting from infection of the brain by tuberculosis. According to this theory, in regions where the tuberculosis bacterium is endemic, the most common time for children to contract the disease is during their first year of school. Masson

¹²⁶ SS Manuscript A, 60.

¹²⁷ See Fitzgerald, 'The mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', 7.

¹²⁸ See Mary Frohlich, 'Introduction', *St Thérèse of Lisieux: Essential Writings*, 19f, citing Robert Masson, *Souffrance des hommes: Un psychiatre interroge Thérèse de Lisieux* (Versailles: Saint-Paul, 1997).

suggests it is possible for the infection to go into remission and then to reappear many years later. In Thérèse's case, if this theory holds, the infection first appears eighteen months after she commences school at the Abbey as a day-boarder. The reappearance of the infection, resulting in Thérèse's terminal illness from tuberculosis, occurs sixteen years later.

In this first appearance of a possible infection, M. Martin and his daughters are recalled from Paris, and Thérèse's sisters resort to fervent prayer to Mary the Mother of God. At the same time, Louis Martin has a Novena of Masses offered for her recovery at the shrine of Our Lady of Victories in Paris. Marie is constantly at Thérèse's bedside, but it is clear to Thérèse that all this is effectual; only a miracle will save her.¹²⁹ Seven weeks later on the feast of Pentecost and during the Novena of Masses being offered for her cure, Thérèse is cured by the 'ravishing smile of the Blessed Virgin'.¹³⁰ It is on Mary's countenance *alone* that Thérèse gazes.¹³¹ According to Frohlich, in 'transformational object' theory, this face of Mary now held

¹²⁹ This illness was the subject of inquiry at the sessions leading up to Thérèse's Beatification in 1923. The year 1920 'saw the opening of the most important part of the process before the Sacred Congregation of Rites. The Promoter of the Faith (popularly called the Devil's Advocate because his work is to propose all possible objections to the claim to heroic sanctity made on behalf of the Servant of God) delivered his first series of objections against the exercise of the virtues in the heroic degree by the Servant of God [Thérèse] on February 18' (35). 'Amongst the many difficulties proposed ... one concerned the illness from which Sister Thérèse suffered and which seemed to have exercised in her and over her actions such a harmful influence as to render her sanctity suspect and to weaken that which is the first and necessary foundation of heroic virtue [the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity and the Cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance etc.] ... The eye-witnesses of that sickness have testified upon oath, and all give the same identical affirmation of her immediate and complete cure. If, then, we must give credence to the first part [the description of the illness] we cannot deny also the second if we would follow the most elementary juridical laws. If it be objected that the illness suffered by Sister Thérèse had not completely disappeared, that some after-effects of the illness itself remained, we must not forget or pass over a fact of great importance, noted in the acts of the process, viz. that Sister Thérèse, particularly after her entry into the cloister, showed nothing organically which even remotely recalled her former illness or that had anything in common with it. On the contrary, her fellow-religious describe Sister Thérèse as being gentle, humble, patient, cheerful, sociable and even-tempered. If, before the eyes of all who knew and admired her, Sister Thérèse carried herself in this manner, while yet suffering from the effects of her former sickness, it only gives an added lustre to her virtue. For her mastery and dominion over herself only becomes the greater if she came victorious out of such a bitter conflict as that caused by her sickness; in fact she was victorious'. (Signed: 14 August 1921 by A.Card. Vico, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites) (See '1921: Proclamation of the Heroic Virtue of S. Thérèse and Discourse of Benedict XV', in *The Story of the Canonization of S. Thérèse of Lisieux* with the text of the Principal Documents in the Process (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1934): 37-44.

¹³⁰ SS Manuscript A, 66. Thérèse attributes her illness to the 'demon'. Addressing Pauline, now Mother Agnes, she writes that the demon, 'infuriated by your entrance into Carmel, wanted to take revenge on me for the wrong our family was to do him in the future' (SS Manuscript A, 60).

¹³¹ SS Manuscript A, 64-67.

'the power to evoke transformation from the deepest unconscious levels of the psyche'¹³² and effect her cure. Once more we meet the *leitmotif* of 'face'. 'An eternal regard breaks through the aperture, enabling little Thérèse to find enough inner strength to lift the veil' and to find in the face of Mary the 'transcendent Mother-face suffused with absolute esteem'.¹³³ Thérèse is cured.¹³⁴ Michael St Clair interprets Thérèse's illness and subsequent cure as the result of a psychological splitting. Thérèse 'felt her anger', he writes, [but this] 'would have seemed alien to her' and therefore, he implies, she believed the sickness came from the devil ('demon').¹³⁵ But it was rather this way, reasons St Clair: Thérèse, experiencing a kind of psychological splitting — that is, the idealized mother from the 'bad' mother — 'saw' the Blessed Virgin as the idealized maternal figure', and in this insight, she was cured.¹³⁶ Ida Görres makes another interpretation — a most insightful analysis of Thérèse's level of consciousness in this occurrence:

We believe that at this point Thérèse was confronted with a temptation, for all that is was hidden in the unplumbed depths of the soul. For here she was confronted with alternatives, and the second of these alternatives was the perilous one. She could accept the offered comfort [implied in Mary's smile], the new support and protection. That is, she could abandon her wild despair over what she had lost, could really carry out the unendurable renunciation within the core of her ego, could release the hand of Pauline and reach across the irrevocable gulf for the hand of the Blessed Virgin. Or — and this was the other possibility — she could cling to her despair, could hold tight to her neurosis, could maintain her protest, stubbornly persist at all costs in the sinister attempt at blackmail which this disease represented.¹³⁷

However this cure is interpreted by later authors, for Thérèse and her family, it is a religious experience bringing great joy. 'All human experiences of God are indirect, being mediated through our experience of creation and the revelation of God in Jesus,' writes Lane.¹³⁸ God's healing power was mediated through what Thérèse

¹³² Mary Frohlich, 191, citing Edward P. Shafranske, 'God-Representation as Transformational Object', in Mark Finn and John Gartner, eds., *Object Relations Theory and Religion: Clinical Applications* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 66.

¹³³ Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', 8.

¹³⁴ See *II* Manuscript A, 60.

¹³⁵ See *SS* Manuscript A, 60.

¹³⁶ See Michael St Clair, *Object Relations and Self Psychology: An Introduction*, 2nd. Rev. edn. (Pacific Grove CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1996), 73.

¹³⁷ Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 79.

¹³⁸ Lane, *The Experience of God*, 27.

perceives as the smile of the Virgin Mary, and the effects of the experience are positive. Again, there is the ability within Thérèse to touch the supernatural. In Lonergan's schema of the four basic realms of meaning — the realm of common sense, the realm of theory, the realm of interiority, and the realm of transcendence — any realm becomes differentiated from the others when it develops its own language, its own mode of apprehension. However, 'a more differentiated consciousness can master more realms, one of these being religiously differentiated consciousness, approached by the ascetic and reached by the mystic'.¹³⁹ Building on Lonergan's theory of differentiated consciousness, we can say that, for however brief a time Thérèse's experiences Mary's smiling countenance, Thérèse, at that time, moves into a new and different realm of consciousness from that of her sisters at her bedside.

After the Experience of Mary's 'Smile'

This experience was brief and its joys short-lived. It is to be followed by a lengthy period of trial and doubt — four and a half years. 'For a long time after my cure, I believed I had become ill on purpose and this was a *real martyrdom* for my soul'.¹⁴⁰ It is not until Thérèse kneels before the statue of Our Lady of Victories in Paris, November 1887, that — she records — 'the Blessed Virgin made me feel *it was really herself who smiled on me and brought about my cure*'.¹⁴¹

One cannot underestimate the distress Thérèse suffers here in these years. Immediately following her experience of Mary's smile, she knows that in her better self, it is unwise to speak of this miraculous cure, but to keep it secret. However, because Marie with Léonie are at her bedside as it occurs, Marie is curious to know the details of this grace given to Thérèse, and so presses Thérèse to tell her. Against her own better judgment, Thérèse complies. Perhaps Thérèse is not emotionally strong enough to refuse so kind a sister. It would be very difficult for her to do so, especially under the circumstances of Marie's constant care of her. To make matters worse, Marie also asks Thérèse if she can tell Pauline and the other sisters in Carmel; and

¹³⁹ See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 272f.

¹⁴⁰ SS Manuscript A, 62.

¹⁴¹ SS Manuscript A, 123.

again, Thérèse agrees. The situation grows more disturbing for Thérèse, for the sisters in Carmel view her as a visionary: she had seen the Mother of God! Was there much light? Was she carrying the Child Jesus? 'Seeing that the Carmelites had imagined something else entirely ... I thought I *had lied*'.¹⁴²

Without any doubt, if I had kept my secret I would also have kept my happiness, but the Blessed Virgin permitted this torment for my soul's good, as perhaps without it I would have had some thought of vanity, whereas *humiliation* becoming my lot, I was unable to look upon myself without a feeling of *profound horror*. Ah! what I suffered I shall not be able to say except in heaven.¹⁴³

It was 13 May 1883 and Thérèse was ten. Marie tries to reassure Thérèse that she had not lied. Thérèse also tells the matter to her confessor and he, too, tries to calm her, 'saying it was not possible to pretend illness to the extent that I had been ill'.

God, willing no doubt to purify and especially to *humble me*, left me with this *interior martyrdom* until my entrance into Carmel, where the *father* of our souls [Father Almiro Pichon, S.J. 1843-1919] as with the wave of his hand, removed all my doubts. Since then I am perfectly calm.¹⁴⁴

There are at least two 'depth experiences' here. The first is Thérèse's cure. Thérèse is cured by the 'ravishing smile of the Virgin' and there is her joyous response. This experience is a 'religious experience', 'a religious dimension of human experience,' *albeit* one involving a finer level of consciousness which Görres has explained to us. The second experience, her subsequent feeling of profound horror, is certainly a 'depth experience' but it is not a religious experience. It is not its association with the religious reality of sin that cancels its claim to a religious experience; it is rather that the experience is based on a falsity — she had not lied — and its effects in Thérèse's life are negative — 'profound horror'.¹⁴⁵ 'Profound horror' is a very disturbing feeling and, from the aspect of drawing forth a positive point, the description tells us something about Thérèse's view of sin.

¹⁴² SS Manuscript A, 67.

¹⁴³ SS Manuscript A, 67.

¹⁴⁴ SS Manuscript A, 62. See previous fn. 107 and subsequent Chapters 4 and 6.

¹⁴⁵ SS Manuscript A, 67.

Early Adolescent Years (1884-1886)

Thérèse's First Communion

Thérèse prepares with great care and longing for her First Holy Communion that takes place on 8 May 1884. The preparation itself reveals something of the method followed by the Martin family for advancing in perfection.¹⁴⁶ Under the guidance of her sisters — Marie at home and Pauline in Carmel — Thérèse offers Jesus a garland of 1,949 'practices' and 2,773 invocations.

In immediate preparation for her First Communion, Thérèse again receives the Sacrament of Confession. On this occasion, she makes a 'general confession', that is, she reflects on all her life and recalls, in a general kind of way, the sins of her past and present. However, just prior to her Confession, Thérèse begs pardon from her *whole family*. Thérèse is eleven. She is hardly able to speak to them because she is deeply moved by the profound meaning intended in her action.¹⁴⁷ Thérèse's action here reminds us of the importance Vatican Council II, seventy-nine years later, was to place on the 'the social consequences of sin'.¹⁴⁸ Obviously, Thérèse considers that her 'sins' affect not only herself and her relationship with God, but that they might have consequences for others as well, for example, her frequent tears could cast a depressing pall over the family atmosphere.

On the actual day of her First Communion, Thérèse experiences Jesus' presence within her totally as unearned gift — 'no demands made, no struggles, no sacrifices'. Writing of that occasion, she said:

¹⁴⁶ Louis Bouyer comments that the Christianity that Thérèse received from those around her 'could be overburdened with practices — not a Jansenist Christianity, as is everlastingly repeated ... , but much rather a Pelagian one, in its accumulation of good works posted in the account books' (see Louis Bouyer, *Women Mystics*, 135). Both Pelagianism and Jansenism are heresies relating to the doctrine of grace. Pelagianism (Pelagius 5th century) fails to understand the human person's nature and weakness. It teaches that people have full control, and thus full responsibility, for their own salvation in addition to full responsibility for every sin. People do not require God's grace. Jansenism (Cornelius Jansen 17th century) teaches, among other things, that one must earn the right to Heaven.

¹⁴⁷ SS Manuscript A, 76.

¹⁴⁸ SC, # 109.

That day, it was no longer simply a *look*, it was a fusion; [Jesus and Thérèse] were no longer two, Thérèse had vanished as a drop of water is lost in the immensity of the ocean. Jesus alone remained.¹⁴⁹

Thérèse 'experienced her First Communion as a mystical fusion between Jesus and herself', writes Dr. G. Gennari.¹⁵⁰ 'An embrace of this kind is essentially mystical, and the grace it bestows is destined never to pass away, but on the contrary, to develop'.¹⁵¹ And again we note the connection to 'face', ('the *look*'), and the creative word, 'fusion'. A mystical experience is any direct experience of the presence of God. Dermot Lane writes, when referring to mystical experience, 'religious experience is always a graced experience; it is not chosen but given, not created but received, not fabricated but found ... the difference between religious experience and mystical experience is a difference of degree and not of kind'.¹⁵² In the language of the Beloved and the Lover, Thérèse says: 'Ah! how sweet was that first kiss of Jesus! It was a kiss of *love*; I *felt* that *I was loved*, and I said: "I love You, and I give myself to You forever!"' Thérèse is eleven. Can it be said, though, that the rigorous preparation brought about this mystical experience? Perhaps it can be said that such account keeping reflects an image of God as Judge in those who encouraged Thérèse in this practice. But the experience shows that *Thérèse* did not view God in this way.

Thérèse makes three resolutions at her First Communion: 'I will never allow myself to be discouraged; I will say the *Memorare* every day; and I will try to humiliate my pride'.¹⁵³ The first resolution shows her growing trust in God, the second, her devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, and the third her perceptive self-knowledge. It shows a remarkable degree of personal maturity that these resolutions are made by an eleven year old Thérèse.

When Thérèse receives Holy Communion for the second time, two weeks later, she recalls, 'What a sweet memory I have of this second visit of Jesus! My tears flowed

¹⁴⁹ SS Manuscript A, 77.

¹⁵⁰ *An Echo of the Heart of God*, 40

¹⁵¹ Abbé André Combes, *The Heart of Saint Thérèse*, trans., a Carmelite Nun (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, 1952), 8.

¹⁵² Lane, *The Experience of God*, 30f.

¹⁵³ See O'Mahoney (ed. & trans.), *St Thérèse of Lisieux: by those who knew her* (Dublin: Veritas, 1975), 174.

again with an ineffable sweetness, and I repeated to myself these words of St Paul, “It is no longer I that live, it is Jesus who lives in me!” (Gal 2:10)¹⁵⁴ St Paul’s statement is often cited to express the maturity of the spiritual life. On this occasion, also, Thérèse is ‘flooded with consolations so *great*’ that she looked upon this grace as one of the *greatest* in her life.¹⁵⁵ The grace seems to have been similar to that which Thérèse received on Céline’s First Communion day. This time, though, there is an added grace: a ‘*great desire* to suffer’. This grace is the first of many graces associated with the suffering of Christ. It is repeated again on the occasion of her Confirmation that takes place one month after her First Holy Communion. ‘On that day’, Thérèse says, ‘I received the strength to *suffer*’.¹⁵⁶ The previous *desire* to suffer now became the *strength* to suffer. Surely this is a mystical gift.

There can be no question in all of this period that Thérèse’s faith, understood as belief, is the faith of one who believes in God with all her being. From our observation, she considers both meanings of ‘belief’ are important — that of ‘a set of beliefs’ or the contents of one’s faith, and faith as the experience of God. Thérèse knows the catechism almost word perfect from memory. Father Domin had called her his ‘little doctor’.¹⁵⁷ Yet, her faith is also that of personal relationship with God. Yes, there are the cultural trappings attached to French Catholicism of the nineteenth century, but it cannot be claimed that Thérèse’s faith, her faith in God and her relationship with God are conditioned by her environment to the extent that she is unable to make a free choice. To *choose* is very important for her. Thérèse’s words burn with a personal intensity, a strong desire born of faith, to be united with God. As a young child she *chose* all that Léonie’s basket had to offer. This action became a symbol of her faith journey — to choose to do what she does out of love.

¹⁵⁴ SS Manuscript A, 79.

¹⁵⁵ SS, Manuscript A, 79.

¹⁵⁶ SS Manuscript A, 80.

¹⁵⁷ SS Manuscript A, 81.

Thérèse's Second Solemn Communion (21 May 1885)

In 1885 Thérèse 'was assailed by the terrible sickness of scruples'.¹⁵⁸ 'One would have to pass through this martyrdom to understand it well', she wrote.¹⁵⁹ During her retreat for her solemn communion (one year after her first communion), Thérèse was disturbed by severe remarks made by the preacher. 'Thérèse', writes Conrad de Meester, 'paid a heavy tribute to the morality of her day, which so easily imputed grievous sin to a person and situation wholly devoid of any such thing'.¹⁶⁰ Now, Thérèse takes to heart the chaplain's admonitions on death, hell, sacrilegious Communion and the Last Judgement.¹⁶¹ Her sensitive conscience is troubled by the sermons and she can find peace only when she tells 'her absurd thoughts' to Marie¹⁶² only to endlessly repeat the pattern of 'troubled-conscience followed by peace-only-for-an- instant'. Scrupulosity is a very severe spiritual disease. One imagines that one is committing sin when, in fact, there is no sin. In Fowler's Stage 3 faith development – early adolescence – 'there is a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs'.¹⁶³ If then, at this time, Thérèse had confirmed for herself that her image of God is that of a God of love, Fr. Domin's sermons thwart that image. If so — and it does seem likely — then Thérèse is experiencing being drawn toward God's love and, at the same time, being filled with fear that she is offending God. The tension of that might even have been worse than the actual scrupulosity — or, perhaps, it was *part* of the malady. This trial lasted for one and a half years.

For the cure of this interior harassment, Thérèse seeks the help of her siblings in heaven. Léonie has attempted the life of a religious with the Poor Clares — the first of four attempts Léonie makes — and Marie has entered Carmel (see below). Céline and Thérèse are alone at home now with their father; Thérèse can claim only heavenly support for her malady. She is cured through the intercession of 'the four angels who had preceded me' to heaven. 'Their departure for heaven', she argues, 'did not appear

¹⁵⁸ Scrupulosity is obsessive concern with one's personal sins, including 'sinful' acts or thoughts usually considered minor or not sins at all within one's religious tradition.

¹⁵⁹ See SS Manuscript 84.

¹⁶⁰ De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, 46.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 46, 6.

¹⁶² SS Manuscript A, 84.

¹⁶³ Fowler, *The Stages of Faith*, 173.

... as a reason for forgetting 'the 'youngest of the family'. 'On the contrary, finding themselves in a position to draw from the divine treasures, they had to take peace from these treasures and thus show me that in heaven they still knew how to love!' She concludes, 'the answer was not long in coming'. Thérèse's soul is 'inundated' with peace.¹⁶⁴

Thérèse's Relationship with Marie

Marie enters Carmel 15 October 1886, and Thérèse is still 'very scrupulous'. Marie is twenty-six, and thirteen years older than Thérèse. When Pauline entered Carmel, Marie replaced her at home as Thérèse's 'maternal support' and now this support, too, is withdrawing. Thérèse describes Marie as 'the only support of my soul'.¹⁶⁵ She explains this support in detail:

It was Marie who guided, consoled, and aided me in the practice of virtue; she was my sole oracle. Pauline, no doubt, had remained well ahead in my heart, but Pauline was far, very far from me! I had suffered martyrdom getting accustomed to living without her, to seeing between me and her impassable wall ... And so, in reality, I had only Marie, and she was indispensable to me, so to speak. I told my scruples only to her and was so obedient that my confessor never knew my ugly malady. I told him just the number of sins Marie permitted me to confess, not one more, and could pass as being the least scrupulous soul on earth in spite of the fact that I was scrupulous to the highest degree. Marie knew, then, everything that went on in my soul, and she knew my desires for Carmel. I loved her so much I couldn't live without her.¹⁶⁶

Before learning of Marie's imminent departure, Thérèse had prized spending time in the attic, 'to stay alone [there] for hours on end to study and meditate before the beautiful view that stretched out before my eyes'.¹⁶⁷ (We notice, once more, Thérèse's ability to allow nature to draw her to God and also her desire for solitude, 'the desert'). But when she learns of Marie's departure, her *room* loses attraction 'and I didn't want to leave for one instant the dear sister who was to fly away soon. What

¹⁶⁴ SS Manuscript A, 93.

¹⁶⁵ SS Manuscript A, 88.

¹⁶⁶ SS Manuscript A, 88.

¹⁶⁷ SS Manuscript A, 91.

acts of patience I made her practice! I wanted to get a supply of kisses to make up for all the time I was to be deprived of them.'¹⁶⁸

From a twenty-first century point of view, Thérèse's behaviour here can, perhaps, seem immature. Still, Thérèse belonged to nineteenth century France when Classicism, with its strict adherence to formal structure, is giving way to Romanticism and the expression of feeling. Furthermore, aside from any negative judgment from a post modern perspective, Thérèse has the ability to show feeling. If, once she could not do so — at the time of her mother's death — this is not the case now. One also gets the impression that this show of affection was not at all unusual in the Martin household.¹⁶⁹ Referring to Marie's imminent departure and its effects upon Thérèse, Constance Fitzgerald writes: '*Each time* [Thérèse] relives the mother-loss and sees through the aperture to eternity [as she does here], she does so with a slight difference and in this movement we see her transformation'.¹⁷⁰ 'Her ability to negotiate satisfactorily Marie's withdrawal to Carmel places Thérèse in the frame of mind to be open to her remarkable Christmas Eve conversion'.¹⁷¹

Thérèse's Summary of These Years

Looking back on the period of her life after the death of her mother in 1877 to the age of fourteen, Thérèse notes that it was the most painful of the three periods (the ones she names) of her entire life. It was thus for a number of reasons: her mother's death

¹⁶⁸ SS Manuscript A, 91.

¹⁶⁹ Bernard Bro has pointed this out in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Ida Görres observes that even Thérèse's language 'replete with lilies and dew-drops, flowers and birds, the flush of dawn and the twinkle of stars, doves and palms' is indicative of the period. She writes: 'The entire sensibility of the period stretching from Rococo to Late Romanticism has been preserved in this language' and, here, in emotional expression as well (cf. Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 20). Towards the end of her book, Görres writes: 'The uniqueness of Thérèse's message did not lie in what she confided to her loved ones, but in the fact that she dared to express it at all, and that she was able to do so ... [and that] there is an inherent value in all the things which seemed to themselves not worthy of attention ... In the quiet life of Thérèse there was revived the ancient, original, Gospel concept of sanctity, of the baptized Christian whose whole life reflects Christ in all its elements, who is saintly not because he [sic] does or says special things which set him off from others, but because he is a tiny member of Christ present in the world and because he endeavours to walk worthily in the path of his vocation' (411). This text also well 'fits' Rahner's *mysticism of everyday life*. Thérèse, I argue, was both — an ordinary mystic and one who also belongs within the upper reaches of sanctity ('upper reaches', that is, if one can, in reality, 'divide' sanctity / holiness into stages).

¹⁷⁰ Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', 9.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

in the first instance; Pauline's entrance to Carmel; Thérèse's performance at school which placed her in a grade higher than that of other children her own age and her own inability to relate well to her schoolmates; Céline's departure from school, leaving Thérèse 'alone' there and unable to cope well (emotionally); Marie's entrance to Carmel; Léonie's attempts at religious life which saw her leave home and soon afterwards, return, only to depart again; and above all, her own sensitive and loving nature which as yet had not found full integration within the flow of God's grace. Her encounter with her 'false self' and its power over her was real.

When I think of my past — [when] I really made a big fuss over *everything*, my soul overflows with gratitude when I see the favours I received from heaven. It is true that I desired the grace of having absolute control over my actions, of not being their slave but their mistress ... but I had to buy, so to speak, this inestimable grace through my desires ... [for] I was still only a child who appeared to have no will but that of others, and this caused certain people ... to say I had a weak character.¹⁷²

But Thérèse did not have a weak character. In Céline's words, Thérèse was, 'in spite of her apparent weakness, truly strong.'¹⁷³

Summary

Within the overall research outline of this dissertation, namely, using the triad of understanding, interpreting, application, this present chapter has simultaneously addressed understanding and interpretation of faith and sin in the life and writing of Thérèse in the years from January 1873-December 1886. It has done this through the hermeneutic of holiness — sometimes mentioned explicitly but nevertheless held implicitly in the background. Also held mainly in the background is an application of the results of the discussion to today's *milieu*. Chapter 6 will concentrate specifically on that third component of Gadamer's triad.

¹⁷² SS Manuscript A, 91.

¹⁷³ Cited by Mgr. Laveille, *St Thérèse de L'Enfant Jésus: 1873 - 1897, according to the official documents of the Carmel of Lisieux*, 82.

Noting the injunction that spirituality in the academy needs to address the subject of religious experience (Schneiders), this chapter has been attentive to addressing that issue. 'Spirituality's primary object is not the *formulated tradition* as it illuminates and is illuminated by the lived experiences of the faith, but the *lived experience* of the faith itself ... We access experience through its expression in "texts"'.¹⁷⁴ Mostly, Thérèse's experiences are depth experiences and often religious experience as well. And at least on once occasion, the religious experience is also a mystical experience. In all, Thérèse is recounting the 'mercies of the Lord', that is, the graces in her life. She is telling the story of her soul through description of her experience.

Thérèse addresses these experiences in a style of writing that is poetically descriptive, using imagery, metaphor and symbol. For example, she addresses the significant issues of grace and salvation through the symbol of *Jesus' garden*. While Thérèse uses symbolic language to tell her story, this chapter set out to explore the meaning underneath her symbolism, especially as that relates to her understanding of faith and sin. Her writing style is also, as one would expect in an autobiography, personal and more self-revealing than would have been the case if she were writing for public interest. At the time of writing, Thérèse considered she was doing so only because Pauline asked her to do so. She had no idea that thousands of people later would read and analyse her words.

James Fowler writes that 'the development of faith has a triadic structure: there is the self; there are the primal and significant others in the self's relational matrix; and there is the third centre of relational engagement — the ultimate Other, or the centre(s) of value and power in one's life structure'.¹⁷⁵

Drawing out specifics from Fowler's theory of faith development in relation to Thérèse's life, we noted her perceptive mind that enables her to write with authority

¹⁷⁴ Sandra M. Schneiders, 'The Discipline of Christian Spirituality and Catholic Theology', in (eds.) Bruce H. Lescher and Elizabeth Lieberet, *Exploring Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sandra M. Schneiders* (New York / Mahwah N.J.: Paulist Press, 2006): 196-212.

¹⁷⁵ James Fowler, 'Faith Development Theory and the Challenges of Practical Theology', in Richard R. Osmer and Friedrich L. Schweitzer, eds., *Developing a Public Faith: New Directions in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James W. Fowler* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2003): 229-249 at 233f

regarding her states of self-awareness, her relationships with God and with family members. Thérèse's desire for relationship with God and her basic character profile of joy, honesty, kindness and love seem to override the first trauma of her infancy and the exterior and interior trails of childhood and early adolescence. This chapter has given evidence of that.

Regarding her attitude to sin, Thérèse's sense of honesty causes her to abhor deceit. In her trials and scruples, Thérèse also has indirect experience of the damaging influences sin can have on one. On the other hand, 'scrupulosity always indicates a desire for perfection, even when it bewilders and leads astray', writes Henri Ghéon.¹⁷⁶ In this area of sin, Jansenism probably had more of a negative influence on Thérèse personally than it did have on her faith development, even though one would expect that these would be interconnected. Perhaps they were in the sense that for Thérèse, her strong relational faith emphasised the 'abhorrence' of sin — that is, her strong resolution to avoid sinning.

Judging from the autobiography's account of her life (1873-1885), Thérèse's developing understandings and experiences of faith and sin can be summarised: first, she is loyal to the theological contents of Catholicism (having been well ground in these, both at home and at the Abbey), and, second, she can creatively circumnavigate their limitations. The story of her life — discussed to date in this chapter — shows Thérèse's image of God is that of a God who is faithful — possibly a very early version of Operational Image No 3 — 'God loves me'. While perhaps Jansenism did bear upon practices in the Martin household, Thérèse seems 'inundated' with grace in spite of physical and psychic weaknesses and appears to have escaped its harmful influence.

In spite of the heavy emphasis on things 'spiritual' that is conveyed in her autobiography, Thérèse is called upon to respond to these experiences within normal

¹⁷⁶ Henri Ghéon, *The Secret of The Little Flower*, 94. Ghéon continues: 'From being unable to judge, the scrupulous person becomes unable to act, and wears himself [sic] out with self-torment and self-reproach ... This form of mental alienation is always a hell for the victim ... but it may also lead to a complete purification of mind and will and affections, even to the degree where God thinks, wills, and loves through his [God's] creature', 94f.

day-to-day living. She is called to become holy within the framework of a normal humanity and an everyday life. Thérèse is not born a 'finished' saint, though it is true, it seems, 'God had laid his hand upon her'¹⁷⁷ from her very early earthly existence.¹⁷⁸ It can be said that Thérèse's movement toward sainthood comes from the conflict between *faith* (and faithfulness to grace) and offending God and others, and between her 'true and false' self.

As is to be expected in the writing of an autobiography — and writing it retrospectively — Thérèse exhibits concentration on *her* self: her life, her faith, and her sins. That is so because she is recording the graces *she* has been given. Still, the next period, which is still within the limits of autobiography, will see a change to an emphasis on others: *their* welfare, their faith or lack of it, and on 'saving souls' — all interconnected. A coming third phase will see a slightly different emphasis again as she, herself, 'sits at the table with sinners' and becomes one with them. In this final period, then, *sin* will be judged to be an offence against *faith*.

¹⁷⁷ See Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 54.

¹⁷⁸ On reflection, one might look again at Palm 139 and its meaning in lines like: 'For it was you who created my being, / Knit me together in my mother's womb ... / Already you knew my soul, / My body held no secret from you / When I was being fashioned in secret / And moulded in the depths of the earth ... / Every one of my days was decreed / Before one of them came into being' and perhaps merely wonder!

CHAPTER 4

Faith and Sin: Thérèse's Middle Years

*'God would have to work a little miracle to make me grow up in an instant, and this miracle
He performed'¹*

*'Thérèse, if you look at her really well, was above all a hero of faith'²
'I have iron health; however, God can break iron just like clay'³*

Introduction

This chapter continues to discuss Thérèse's writings through the lens used in the previous chapter, namely, understanding and interpretation, and with a view to specific application later. That chapter concluded that Thérèse's growth in faith is accelerated — her image of God is 'God loves me'; and to one looking from the outside, she seems to be 'covered' with grace, that is, suffused with grace 'from the cradle'. Yet, there is weakness in her psyche — which, from a theological point of view, the chapter attributes to Original Sin (in the sense that it is because of original sin that one's will is weakened). Because of this, Thérèse is unable to satisfactorily integrate God's all-encompassing action into her life. This last-mentioned situation would seem to place her image of God back in Image No 1 of O'Sullivan's model: 'If I am good, God will love me; if I am bad, God will punish me'. However, that image,

¹ SS Manuscript A, 97.

² Guy Gaucher (Auxiliary Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux), *John and Thérèse: Flames of Love: The Influence of St John of the Cross in the Life and Writings of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Alexandra Plettenberg-Serban, English ed. Bernadette Frenzel (New York: Alba House, 1999), 63, citing Stanislas Fumet, *Mikaël*, 183.

³ GC II, 871 (Thérèse's letter to Céline, July 1894).

in spite of it having some truth regarding Thérèse at this early point of her life, cannot hold as it stands. Variation (a) of it — ‘if I make much effort, God will reward me further’ — is likely: ‘Thérèse inherited a mercenary, calculating mentality, in which the question of merits was foremost’, notes Jean-François Six⁴. Another possibility is Variation (b) — ‘Getting close to God requires that I become perfect, therefore I will take every opportunity to please God’: ‘I had a great desire, it is true, to practice virtue, but I went about it in a strange way’.⁵ Nonetheless, the previous chapter concluded that Thérèse’s image of God is ‘God loves me’ — (perhaps an early version) one that is the one that takes us into this chapter.

Noting the definition of sin as the refusal of grace to obey the call to faith that is offered through grace, one would have to acknowledge that, from the evidence to date, Thérèse does not deliberately err in this regard; her imperfections are due to her particular brand of human weakness which, in itself, is aggravated by human sorrow caused by death and separation. From a psychological point of view, Thérèse is wounded. One might also argue that her ‘true self’ is unable to surface completely. Because of the ‘false self’s’ role in self-deception inviting one to self-transcending love — that is, the self-deception that stops the invitation — Thérèse is unable to quieten the interior voices that tell her she is perhaps too introspective and overly concerned with ‘not sinning’. This latter voice — perhaps the result of an over-anxious conscience, which, in its turn, may well be the result of Jansenism’s influence — leads her to suffer the severe trial of scruples (addressed in the previous chapter).⁶

⁴ See Six, *Light of the Night*, 7.

⁵ SS Manuscript A, 97.

⁶ I realize that, in this dissertation, I have entertained a somewhat ambivalent response to the question of Jansenism’s influence in Thérèse’s life. If that influence were present, it was so indirectly. For example, it maybe came through spiritual conferences. The following citation reveals an attitude to mortal sin that does not appear so explicitly in modern Catechisms: ‘In a general Chapter of Jesuit Fathers, the following question was proposed for consideration: In what way are the members of our Society most likely to sin mortally? The seventy senior professed members of the Society present, all virtuous men, answered unanimously, “In charity”’ (see *Almire Pichon (Spiritual Director of St Thérèse of Lisieux)*, ed., and trans. Lyle Terhune (London: Burns & Oates, 1961), 120). It is no wonder, then, that Thérèse, if she took this kind of teaching literally, would develop scruples. She could be committing a mortal sin for the *least* offence against charity. However, in fairness to Almire Pichon, it is stated in the Biographical Introduction to this particular book that, in his Novitiate training as a Jesuit, Pichon ‘made a resolution to fight all his life against Jansenism, ‘which so harms souls, especially generous souls who have given up all to follow Our Lord, but who follow Him as servants, and not as friends and brothers, as He would have them do’, 5. (Pichon, as this dissertation explains, had a certain influence in the development of Thérèse’s spirituality). Here we cite a fuller description of

But even this argument is not entirely satisfactory either because, in spite of really trying to do otherwise, Thérèse cannot, in truth, help herself. She has done all she can: 'I *cried* like a Magdalene and then when I began to cheer up, I'd begin *to cry again for having cried*. All arguments were useless; I was quite unable to correct this terrible fault'.⁷ (*Faute* here is akin to 'problem' not to 'sin'). The cure lies beyond her control.

This chapter now advances Thérèse's outline of *faith* and *sin* in the 'middle years' and, at the same time, continues to appraise the 'operational image' of God that she holds in her heart. These nine years, commencing with her 'conversion'⁸ experience of Christmas Eve, 1886, are a period of intense spiritual growth for Thérèse as she deals with several large confronting issues. These are: her struggle to enter Carmel at fifteen;⁹ her growing soul-relationship with Céline, her sister;¹⁰ her early years of

Jansenism: 'Jansenism was spiritually, but not doctrinally, akin to Puritanism. The movement had arisen in protest against laxity in morals. The protest had overshot the mark and developed into a self-righteous rigorism.' 'It taught, among other things, that the sacraments are to be received only after a long and rigorous preparation; that Holy Communion is a reward, not a remedy, and should be received but rarely; and that God should always be addressed as a monarch, in fear and trembling. Thus, in the name of high holiness it blocked one of the chief means of sanctification. Clement XI definitely condemned the movement in the Bull *Vineam Domini Sabaoth*, issued July 16, 1705, but its influence was widely felt until Pius X's ruling on frequent Communion in 1905'. In this regard, Pius X was greatly impressed by his reading of Thérèse's autobiography where he found that Thérèse greatly desired to receive Communion daily. Pius X subsequently stated that children as young as seven could receive Communion, daily if they wished. The Pope's declaration was also in defiance of Jansenism whose influence still prevailed, even at that late date (Thérèse died in 1897). 'If one compares the Martin family with a number of other families belonging to the end of the same middle-class century, it is surprising never to find the slightest whiff of Jansenism, not even clinging like a perfume or in a dormant state' (see Jean Guittou, *The Spiritual Genius of St Thérèse*, 17).

Speaking of the efficacy of prayer in relation to one Père Hyacinthe Loyson, Thérèse cites the words of Jesus to Blessed Margaret Mary: "'One just soul' has so much power over my Heart that it can obtain pardon for a thousand *criminals*." She also said, in the same context, 'No one knows if one is just or sinful' (see *GC* II, 729). It was this last statement that caused Thérèse much soul-searching and heartache. One cannot tell whether Thérèse's sensitive conscience in this last statement results from Jansenistic influence or from something else, for example, infused wisdom under the influence of which she made 'love alone' her goal.

⁷ SS Manuscript A, 97.

⁸ Thérèse, herself, uses the word 'conversion'. It is not 'conversion' in the sense of, for example, converting from Catholicism to Islam or *vice versa*. Rather, it is an internal, intrapersonal 'conversion' resulting in a new and different set of behaviours, akin, perhaps to transformation.

⁹ 29 May (Pentecost) 1887 – 9 April 1888. 'The divine call was so strong that had I been forced to *pass through flames*, I would have done it out of love for Jesus' (SS Manuscript A, 106). To gain permission to enter at the age of fifteen, Thérèse approached, in turn, her father, her uncle, her aunt, the Prioress of Carmel, the ecclesiastical Superior of Lisieux Carmel, Father Delatroëtte, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Bayeux (of which Lisieux was part), Father Révérony, the Bishop of Bayeux, Bishop Hugonin, and, finally, the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII. Kneeling before him in audience in Rome, Thérèse was told by the Pope: 'You will enter if God wills it!' Thérèse finally entered the Carmel at Lisieux on 9 April 1888.

adjustment to convent life and to the presence of two of her other sisters there, Pauline and Marie;¹¹ the illness and death of her father;¹² the influenza epidemic in the monastery when all but three sisters were ill and three died;¹³ the three years of Prioress-ship of Pauline (Mother Agnes of Jesus);¹⁴ the work Thérèse did with the

¹⁰ A relationship that perhaps begins with Céline's First Communion (1889), grows deeper with Céline's support of Thérèse's decision to enter Carmel, and with the spiritual conversations of the two sisters in the *le belvédère*. This relationship grows even stronger through the correspondence between the two sisters during their period of physical separation (see *GC II*: 760, 783, 803, 861) and one that culminates with Céline's subsequent entry to Carmel (14 September 1894) upon the death of M. Martin (29 July 1894).

¹¹ Thérèse states that when she entered Carmel 'suffering opened wide its arms to me and I threw myself into them with love' (*SS Manuscript A*, 149); Thérèse had difficulty in explaining to her superiors the state of her soul: 'The little flower transplanted to Mount Carmel was to expand under the shadow of the cross. The tears and blood of Jesus were to be her dew, and her Sun was His adorable Face veiled with tears' (*SS Manuscript A*, 151f); [We note the imagery]. Thérèse's Profession was delayed by eight months. 'I found it difficult, at first, to accept this great sacrifice. I understood that my intense desire to make Profession was mixed with a great self-love'. She therefore reasoned: 'Since I had *given* myself to Jesus to please and console Him, I had no right to oblige Him to do *my will* instead of His own' (*SS Manuscript A*, 158). Thérèse experienced 'absolute aridity and almost total abandonment' in her pre-Profession retreat. 'Jesus was sleeping as usual in my little boat' [her soul] (*SS Manuscript A*, 165). Pauline entered Carmel 2 October 1882, taking the religious name of Sister Agnes of Jesus. Marie entered 15 October 1888, taking the religious name Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart. Thérèse entered 9 April 1888, taking the name Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and adding to it 'and of the Holy Face' ca. 15 March 1889 (see *GC I*, 552). In relation to being with her blood sisters in Carmel, Thérèse remarked on at least one occasion that she entered the convent, not to be with her sisters, but for Jesus' sake. 'I would be happy to stay with you, [Sister Marie of the Trinity], but it is better that I deprive myself, for we are not at home!' (*GC I*, 428, fn. 6). She also advised her sisters that, after she was gone, not to speak on frivolous topics with visitors (see *LC*, 150).

¹² M. Martin's illness lasted from soon after Thérèse's entry to Carmel (23 June 1888) to 29 July 1894. In 1889, when M. Martin had to leave Lisieux to enter a mental institution, the Bon Sauveur at Caen, Thérèse spoke of the occasion as 'the *most bitter* and *most humiliating* of all chalices ... Yes, Papa's three years of martyrdom appear to me as the most lovable, the most fruitful of my life; I wouldn't exchange them for all the ecstasies and revelations of the saints' (*SS Manuscript A*, 156). That remark shows an extraordinary appreciation of the value of suffering. Thérèse found that her acceptance of it was but another way of growing in relationship with Jesus (becoming holy).

¹³ This occurred at the end of December 1891. Thérèse and two other sisters were the only three who did not succumb to the illness. Thérèse writes: 'Never could I describe all the things I witnessed ... my nineteenth birthday was celebrated with a death, and this was soon followed by two other deaths ... It's impossible to imagine the sad state of the community at this time.' During this period, Thérèse showed both strength and presence of mind and common sense and ability in doing the necessary tasks associated with sickness and death (cf. *SS Manuscript A*, 171f).

¹⁴ 20 February 1893 – 21 March 1896. 'O Mother, it was especially since the blessed day of your election that I have flown in the ways of love' (*SS Manuscript A*, 174). It was during this period, one evening at community recreation while Thérèse was delighting her sisters with recollections from their childhood years, that Mother Agnes was persuaded by Marie (Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart) to order Thérèse to write her childhood memoirs. Initially, then, Thérèse's memoirs were written 'under obedience' and for family. When Thérèse completed the task after a year of writing in 1895, Mother Agnes did not read the document immediately (*Manuscript A* in *Story of a Soul*). It was only later, when Mother Marie de Gonzague was re-elected Prioress in March 1896, that Pauline read Thérèse's manuscript. By that time, Pauline realised that Thérèse was very ill and might even die. Therefore, she ingeniously encouraged Mother Gonzague to ask Thérèse to continue the writing — this time by speaking specifically of the latter period of her life in Carmel. Very ill at the time, Thérèse began the

novices;¹⁵ her failing health;¹⁶ the beginning of the formulation of her *petite voie* (1894);¹⁷ the entry of Céline to Carmel, 14 September 1894;¹⁸ and most of all, the movement in her soul from an image of God's love as gift, to the confirmation of that image, brought to realisation on Trinity Sunday 1895 with the praying of her *Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love*, 11 June 1895.

The first major section of this chapter must be limited to showing aspects of Thérèse's *faith* through a discussion of her 'conversion' experience and its effects. The second will examine topics that can reveal something of the interior struggle of her conscience in her pilgrimage to holiness.

A. Thérèse's Middle Years through the Lens of *Faith*

Thérèse 'Conversion' Experience

The first defining experience for Thérèse in these middle years (Christmas 1886 - April 1896) is her 'conversion' experience which, she tells us, affected her in three very significant ways: a return in freedom to the 'strength of soul' of her former self (*'Il me rendit forte et courageuse, Il me revêtit de ses armes et depuis cette nuit bénie, je ne fus vaincue en aucun combat, mais au contraire je marchai de victoires en victoires et commençai pour ainsi dire, "une course de agéant"; ... la petite Thérèse*

task in June 1897 and wrote until she could do so no longer. That document is Manuscript C in *Story of a Soul*.

¹⁵ When Mother Agnes was elected Prioress in 1893, she appointed Thérèse to involve herself in the spiritual formation of the novices. The Prioress, however, carried the final responsibility for the novices. Thérèse was faithful to this task. When Mother Marie de Gonzague was re-elected Prioress in 1896, she confirmed Thérèse in the role of auxiliary mistress in the novitiate — that is, auxiliary to herself, the Prioress. Thérèse 'worked' with the novices in a very responsible manner.

¹⁶ 'It was only when Thérèse was twenty-one and a half in June 1894 that we have the first evidence that she was given medical treatment. It is possible that she had been sick before this date, as many complaints can pass unnoticed by others. "She had a weak throat and often suffered from it", Mother Agnès noted in 1909' (cf. Guy Gaucher, *The Passion of Thérèse of Lisieux 4 April — 30 September 1897*, trans. Anne Marie Brennan (Homebush NSW: St Paul Publications, 1989), 36).

¹⁷ Late 1894 when she discovered among Old Testament texts that Céline brought with her when she entered, particular texts from Proverbs (9:4) and Isaiah (66:13,12) that form the basis of her (Thérèse's) *petite voie*.

¹⁸ 14 September 1894. 'God has not willed that I have one single desire which is not fulfilled ... but the most intimate of my desires, the greatest of them all, which I thought would never be realized, was my dear Céline's entrance into the same Carmel as ours' (SS Manuscript A, 174ff).

avait retrouvé la force d'âme qu'elle avait perdue à 4 ans et demi et c'était pour toujours qu'elle devait la conserver!');¹⁹ charity entered her soul and the grace to forget herself ('Je sentis en un mot la charité entrer dans mon coeur, le besoin de m'oublier pour faire plaisir et depuis lors je fus heureuse!');²⁰ and a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners, a desire that she had not felt so intensely before:²¹ ('Il fit de moi en pêcheur d'âmes, je sentis un grand désir de travailler à la conversion des pécheurs, désir que jen'avais [pas] senti aussi vivement).'²²

The word 'conversion' can be defined in many different ways. I have chosen one explanation from Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*:²³

By conversion is understood a transformation of the subject and his [sic] world. Normally it is a prolonged process, though its explicit acknowledgment may be concentrated in a few momentous judgments and decisions. Still it is not just a development or even a series of developments. Rather it is a resultant change of course and direction. It is as if one's eyes were opened and one's former world faded and fell away. There emerges something new that fructifies in inter-locking, cumulative sequences of developments on all levels and in all departments of human living. Conversion is existential, intensely personal, utterly intimate.²⁴

¹⁹ *Histoire D'Une Âme*, 149f. It is necessary to emphasize that Thérèse's basic personality (her former self) is one of happiness. She was a born mimic and had a good sense of humour. It is especially important to balance a seeming emphasis on *suffering* in her writings with this knowledge and to realize that Thérèse never asked / prayed to suffer. She said: 'I should never ask God for greater pain, for then it would be my own pain; I would have to bear it alone — and I have never been able to do anything by myself' (cited in Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 372). Thérèse's sufferings (apart from those which results from her wounded self and from which, in her 'conversion' experience she receives a basic cure — still yet to be consolidated) belong within a larger mystical gift of *charité*. It seems that this gift is a *big* grace given *very* early in her life and renewed and increased at her 'conversion' experience, and again, later, during her last illness.

²⁰ *Histoire D'une Âme*, 150.

²¹ *SS Manuscript A*, 99.

²² *Histoire D'Une Âme*, 150.

²³ Joann Wolski Conn and Walter E. Conn, 'Self-Transcendence in the Spiritual Life: Thérèse of Lisieux', in Robert Mason, ed., *The Pedagogy of God's Image: Essays on Symbol and Religious Imagination* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1982): 137-152.

²⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 130. 'Self-transcendence underpins Lonergan's study of conversion'; For Lonergan, 'self-transcendence occurs in our effective response to the radical drive, the dynamic exigence of the human spirit for meaning, truth, value, and love' (see Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 24. Lonergan, therefore, treats conversion under the headings of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. Though I have chosen not to do so — for reasons relating to difficulty in maintaining the application of the complex theory throughout such a long work and for the fact that the life of any one person (not to mention Thérèse of Lisieux) does not unfold according to one particular theory — one could, perhaps, undergird this entire dissertation with Lonergan's analysis of conversion.

This definition well describes the process of Thérèse's 'conversion'— a long process followed by one unambiguous moment of truth and insight from weakness to strength. For almost ten years she had tried continually to conquer her weaknesses, but could not do so entirely. And now, on Christmas Night, 1886, it is as if all her previous efforts suddenly concentrate themselves into one momentous declaration of healing under the guise of a simple act.²⁵ While Thérèse's conversion experience seems to be an instant occurrence, the process leading up to it had been long — ten years.

Thérèse's Interpretation of her Conversion

Thérèse writes: 'It was December 25, 1886, that I received the grace of leaving my childhood, in a word, the grace of my complete conversion.'²⁶ *'Ce fut le 25 décembre 1886 que je reçus la grâce de sortir de l'enfance, en un mot la grace de ma complète conversion'*.²⁷ Thérèse likens it to the incident in Luke's Gospel where the disciples, having fished all night and caught nothing, suddenly respond to the invitation of Jesus by playing out their net once more and bringing in a great catch of fish. When Peter saw 'so many fish that their nets were beginning to break', he said in amazement to Jesus, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' (Lk 5:1-11).²⁸ This is certainly a religious experience for Peter; and it might also have been a mystical

²⁵ Thérèse, her father and Céline had just returned from Midnight Mass. Thérèse, at Céline's suggestion, had followed the family custom — particularly suitable for its youngest member — of leaving 'magic shoes' in the chimney corner to be filled with gifts which were to be opened on return from Mass. On their return, M. Martin was a little tired and he showed some displeasure that Thérèse should still be engaging in such childish customs when she was nearly fourteen. Usually, Thérèse would break into tears at the least whiff of a rebuff, but on this occasion she did not. Coming down the stairs after having removed her hat, she 'swallowed' her hurt and appeared delighted to open her presents with joy in order to give pleasure to her father as he watched her delight. Perhaps to us, this seems an extremely small incident in Thérèse's life to have such big consequences, for example, being named later as Patroness of the Missions and Doctor of the Church. But then, Paul's conversion also occurred in one single moment, only to be followed by years of inspired missionary work (see *Acts* Ch. 9 and *Letters of St Paul*). The same is true of Augustine and his conversion — also followed by years of intense spiritual living (see *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Bk. 8, xii). The years preceding the conversions of Paul and Augustine had, in God's providence, prepared the way. We can say that this is also true in Thérèse's case. (For that matter, in any human life one event / experience probably builds on the others that preceded it).

²⁶ SS Manuscript A, 98.

²⁷ *Histoire D'Une Âme*, 149.

²⁸ In the face of the goodness of Jesus, Peter considered himself a sinner. In an experience of God, one feels compelled, in gratitude for the gift, to acknowledge one's sinfulness. In the face of absolute goodness, one is a sinner. Thérèse surely, at this time, had similar thoughts and feelings in relation to herself.

experience.²⁹ Peter is afraid and, at the same time, in awe at the presence of the Lord ('supernatural fright?').³⁰ Certainly, Thérèse understands *her* experience as a grace. It is certainly a depth experience and because great graces flow from it, it is really a religious experience. There are also observable psychological effects that followed the experience — it enables her to react in such a completely different manner from her previously usual tearful response to emotional hurt: 'The source of my tears was dried up and has since reopened rarely and with great difficulty.'³¹ However, let us firstly look at the experience from the aspect of grace; for we recall that Thérèse, in her autobiography, is recounting the *graces* given her; and this is one of those graces. Nevertheless, one cannot see grace. So, what was the experience itself like?

Noting *when* the experience occurred might give some understanding of the grace itself. Did it occur in immediate relation to the incident regarding her father's comment indicating he was pleased that this was the last year Thérèse would be engaging in the 'childish' ways of placing *magic shoes* in the chimney corner to be filled with presents? If so, then, as she descended the stairs to greet her father, it occurred in the timeless Now where Thérèse *is* 'an unambiguous moment of truth and insight — a unified whole person with no split between the "I" and the "me"'.³² Or did it occur during Midnight Mass — from which the family had just returned? Because Thérèse writes that: 'On that luminous *night* which shed such light on the delights of the Holy Trinity, Jesus, the gentle, *little* Child of only one hour, changed the night of my soul into rays of light',³³ it seems likely the experience occurred at Mass and that the later incident with her father was a result of the grace she received earlier. Perhaps it is the very words, 'night changed into rays of light', that really describe the grace. This is a very descriptive image that suggests an experienced dramatic change in Thérèse's soul.

²⁹ We recall Dermot Lane's definition of 'mystical experience' as being an in-depth 'religious experience'.

³⁰ Refer to Thérèse's description of the *vision* of her father's veiled face (Chapter 3, 140).

³¹ SS Manuscript A, 97.

³² See Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, xvi.

³³ SS Manuscript A, 97.

Thérèse's Conversion and its Interpretation by Others

Understanding Thérèse's conversion from a psychological point of view is helpful also. *Holiness* is possibly more of a witness to others when accompanied by a fair degree of psychic wholeness.

In an article written in 1978, Joann Wolski Conn examines the conversion experience in Thérèse.³⁴ In naming the two common types of conversion as moral and religious,³⁵ Conn claims that although Thérèse gives this conversion a religious interpretation, it is, in fact, a moral conversion.³⁶ In his 2005 article, Tom Ryan relates to this same experience in Thérèse's life by arguing that the experience represents psychic conversion.³⁷ Bernard Lonergan's 'intentionality analysis' underpins both discussions.³⁸

Conn justifies her decision of moral conversion: 'Firstly, it can be seen to set in motion a basic change in direction in Thérèse's life from concern for self to concern for a life lived according to value, the truly good'. Secondly, because Thérèse claims that the experience made her '*grow up* in an instant', Conn notes that it is moral conversion — in itself, an experience of mature, more adult decision-making. Thirdly,

³⁴ Joann Wolski Conn, 'Conversion in Thérèse of Lisieux', *SL* 24/3 (Fall 1978): 154-163.

³⁵ See Bernard J. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*: 'Intellectual conversion is a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge. The myth is that knowing is like looking', 238. 'Moral conversion changes the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfactions to values', 240. 'Religious conversion is being grasped by ultimate concern. It is other-worldly falling in love. It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservation', 240.

³⁶ See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*. Lonergan names the levels of conversion as intellectual, moral and religious conversion.

³⁷ Tom Ryan, 'Psychic Conversion and St Thérèse of Lisieux', *ACR* 82/1 (January 2005): 3-18. Lonergan does not define psychic conversion. 'Lonergan was conscious of psychic forces that can structure one's experience and that shape the ways meaning and values are expressed in our lives' (see Tom Ryan, 'Psychic Conversion and St Thérèse of Lisieux', 6f). Robert Doran developed Lonergan's thought further in this area.

³⁸ Lonergan's 'intentionality analysis' underlies the way these terms are used in relation to Thérèse's 'conversion' in these articles being discussed. In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan writes: 'Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity' (292); 'Objectivity is reached through the self-transcendence of the concrete existing subject, and the fundamental forms of self-transcendence are intellectual, moral, and religious conversion' (338); 'Conversion is from unauthenticity to authenticity. It is total surrender to the demands of the human spirit: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, be in love' (268). 'But grace goes beyond nature and perfects it' (288).

'the qualities of strength and freedom of decision — characteristics of moral conversion — are singled out in Thérèse's later interpretations of this conversion'.³⁹

In determining Thérèse's experience as one of psychic conversion, Ryan finds support for his position in the development of Lonergan's analysis suggested by Robert Doran,⁴⁰ Walter Conn,⁴¹ and Donald L. Gelpi.⁴² For conversion to be effective there has to be an intra-cooperation (internal communication)⁴³ between 'organic and psychic' factors.⁴⁴ What Ryan and the aforementioned authors seem to be saying is that in psychic conversion, there is essential conversion involving all levels of consciousness: empirical, intelligent, rational, responsible.⁴⁵ For reasons such as these, Ryan considers Thérèse exhibits signs of psychic conversion.

Andrew Tallon's work can support that view. Tallon reworks Lonergan's stages of intentionality analysis: experience, understanding, judgment, decision.⁴⁶ The thesis of Tallon's book 'defends the right of feeling — meaning the whole realm of passion, emotion, mood, and affection in general — to be admitted to equal partnership with reason and will in human consciousness.'⁴⁷ According to Tallon, this occurs through

³⁹ Joann Wolski Conn, 156f. See also, Joann Wolski Conn and Walter E. Conn, 'Self-Transcendence in the Spiritual Life: Thérèse of Lisieux', in Robert Mason, ed., *The Pedagogy of God's Image: Essays on Symbol and Religious Imagination* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1982): 137-152. Here the authors speak of the need there is to support moral conversion by affective conversion — which, for Bernard Lonergan, is falling-in-love.

⁴⁰ Robert M. Doran, *Psychic Conversion and Theological Foundations: Toward a Reorientation of the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor MI: Edward Brothers, 1981); *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

⁴¹ Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986).

⁴² Donald L. Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1998).

⁴³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 66.

⁴⁴ See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 66.

⁴⁵ In detail, these are: 1. Empirical Consciousness (Level of Experience: sensing, perceiving, imagining); 2. Intelligent Consciousness (Level of Understanding: inquiring — asking questions, insights, formulating concepts and hypotheses); 3. Rational Consciousness (Level of Judgment: marshalling and weighing the evidence, grasping the virtually unconditioned [when all available data is assimilated], judging); 4. Responsible Consciousness (Level of Decision: deliberating, deciding, acting).

⁴⁶ Andrew Tallon, *Head & Heart: Affection, Cognition, Volition as Triune Consciousness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997. See p. 216 for Tallon's diagrammatic re-interpretation of Lonergan's intentionality analysis.

⁴⁷ Tallon, 2.

connaturality, a word that, 'its best sense, means not merely *accompanied* by feelings, nor *of* feelings, but *through* feelings'.⁴⁸

However one explains it, the experience for Thérèse is one through which there is a dramatic turn-around in her attitude to life. It can be said that it was by the power of grace that Thérèse's 'conversion' drew together the previously tattered parts of her *psyche* — perhaps those areas of the 'false self' that she was unable to correct: her touchiness, tears, and over-reliance on the praise of others — and healed them at their core. The grace enables her to complete the long journey from self interest to forgetfulness of self and the pleasure of others. In other words, it healed the root cause of the wound which, it would seem, was inflicted by a five-times removal from her life of a person on whom she depended for nurture in one form or another. Thérèse is now healed of that core wound, for its cancer is excised, so to speak. But physical healing often requires further attention — for example, undergoing radiotherapy, eating good food and taking exercise. It is likewise for Thérèse: in this 'conversion', she will still need to build upon that healing by discerning the interior movements of her soul and acting upon her discernment. I suggest that for a few years yet, Thérèse fluctuates between these two positions. Her soul is like a finely tuned instrument that picks up the least vibration.

B. The Effects of Thérèse's Conversion

Charity⁴⁹

'I felt *charity* enter into my soul', writes Thérèse.⁵⁰ It is important to realize that *charity* is the third and greatest of the theological gifts. It cannot exist in the soul without a living faith. Any discussion of *charity* in the followings sections, therefore,

⁴⁸ Tallon, 225.

⁴⁹ See Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* Encyclical Letter on Christian Love (2005). The Encyclical explains the different dimensions of *philia* (love of friendship), *eros* (worldly love) and *agape* (love grounded in and shaped by faith), # 7. In noting the importance of *charité* in the life of Thérèse, we again recognize the *analogy of faith*. Any discussion of *charité*, therefore, implicitly includes faith, hope, truth, justice and mission.

⁵⁰ SS Manuscript A, 99.

presupposes very strong relational faith. It is also noted that *sin* diminishes the 'intensity' of the gift.

Thérèse's 'conversion' can connect with that previous occurrence already discussed in Chapter 1 where, it was suggested, Thérèse had a Near Death Experience at the age of two months calling her to holiness of life. Here in her 'conversion' experience, Thérèse once again 'touches' that original encounter with the Spirit and call to *holiness*: 'Our Lord, willing for Himself alone my first glance, saw fit to ask my heart in the cradle, if I can so express myself.'⁵¹ But now, in a further call, she is given her *mission*. She is given the potential to be 'strong and courageous' and to 'run like a giant'⁵² and she receives a further infusion of that original gift of *charity* in a particularly significant way.⁵³ Jean Lafrance writes: 'To love is first to be drawn, seduced and seized by the love of God'.⁵⁴ This is the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rm 5:5). This is the gift of *charity* of which Thérèse speaks. Yes, she always had this gift, from Baptism, and maybe, even before;⁵⁵ but now it seems to be increased and her burning contemplative missionary thrust flows from it. She writes:

On that *night* when He made Himself subject to *weakness* and suffering for love of me, He made me *strong* and courageous, arming me with His weapons. Since that night I have never been defeated in any combat, but rather walked from victory to victory, beginning, so to speak, '*to run as a giant*'!⁵⁶

⁵¹ GC II, 1016.

⁵² SS Manuscript A, 97. Thérèse would need these powerful gifts of the Spirit in order to sustain her through the following years of spiritual aridity — yet unknown to her at this stage of her 'conversion'.

⁵³ *Charity* is one of the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) infused into the soul at Baptism. 'Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God' (CCC, # 1813, # 1822).

⁵⁴ Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, 156.

⁵⁵ See GC II, 1200 (Mme Martin's Letter to Mme. Guérin, 16 January 1873). Mme. Martin writes: 'When I was carrying her, I noticed something which never happened with my other children: when I sang, she sang with me ... I am confiding this to you, no one would be able to believe it'.

⁵⁶ SS Manuscript A, 97. Thérèse's claim on 'battle' symbolism comes, perhaps, from her great desire to imitate the patriotic deeds of French heroines, especially John of Arc. Thérèse, however, will not do this on the actual battle field but in her burning zeal to fulfil her own mission.

Because of the *largesse* of this gift to Thérèse, to sin against *charity* would have been so 'easy' for her and yet, at the same time, so disastrous for her conscience.⁵⁷ Thérèse surely receives this grace of her 'conversion' as a sign of God's love as a totally free gift — 'God loves me'. Her *faith* is intensely activated. This strength of her faith enables her to move, henceforth, participatively and courageously, into her life's struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, life and death.⁵⁸

Towards the end of her life, Thérèse attests to an even fuller understanding of this virtue of charity. In 1896 she wrote: 'My *vocation*, at last I have found it ... My vocation is love! ... In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be *Love*'.⁵⁹ And in 1897 she stated: 'This year ... God has given me the grace to understand what charity is; I understood it before, it is true, but in an imperfect way.'⁶⁰

Charity Flowing into Mission

The grace of 'conversion' associates Thérèse with the passion of Jesus and his cry from the cross '*I thirst*': 'These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a *thirst for souls ... great sinners*'.⁶¹ The first of these is Henri Pranzini (d. 1887).⁶² This

⁵⁷ Charity is there in plenty and, for a scrupulous conscience, the least imperfection might spell spiritual torment in her soul. On the other hand, a person on whom this gift of charity is bestowed in such abundance, as seems to have been the case with Thérèse, is surely bound to be very mindful and very sensitive to God's working in the soul — even if *not* tormented by scrupulosity.

⁵⁸ Cf. Michael Fallon's commentary on the Gospel of John 14:1 (Michael Fallon, *The Gospel according to Saint John: An Introductory Commentary*, 249). Fallon is making the point that the disciples received great strength from being with Jesus, but when Jesus spoke to them of his coming suffering and death, they were 'troubled'. True faith is the faith that can endure in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, in life and in death. Thérèse possessed that kind of faith as a very big grace. Here she symbolizes it in the strength of a giant.

⁵⁹ SS Manuscript B, 194.

⁶⁰ See SS Manuscript C, 219.

⁶¹ SS Manuscript A, 99.

⁶² To awaken her zeal in praying for sinners, Thérèse, with Céline whom Thérèse has persuaded to join her in this cause, intercedes for the conversion of Henri Pranzini, a condemned criminal who avowed to die unrepentant. In answer to prayer, however, Pranzini, at the moment of execution, called for the crucifix and '*kissed the sacred wounds three times!*' (see SS Manuscript A, 99f). Later, in Carmel, Thérèse again persuades Céline, still at home looking after their father, to join her in prayer for one Père Hyacinthe Loyson (1827-1912). Loyson outlived Thérèse by fifteen years, but during Thérèse's life time she became acquainted with his case. Loyson was successively Sulpician, Dominican, Carmelite, then separated from his Order and from Rome. Just before Vatican Council I (1869), he married a Protestant widow, founder in Paris of a Catholic Gallican Church (1879), in a civil ceremony. The Gallican Church, referred to previously in this dissertation, rejected papal infallibility, proposed

particular aspect of the gift is of interest in this dissertation and, at this stage of the work, I anticipate to connect this statement to Thérèse's application of it when she expresses her intention 'not to rise up from the table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating until the day set by You'.⁶³ At this later time, Thérèse is conscious that 'we are poor sinners' — herself included — whereas here, because she names Pranzini as her 'first child', her thirst can be seen to be for souls other than herself and those, by implication, whom she can 'mother' to salvation.

Putting that aside, Thérèse's contemplative vocation to Carmel in order 'to remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross and to receive the divine dew',⁶⁴ has a very strong apostolic component. This was so strong in fact, that, as previously noted, Pius XI on December 14 1927 proclaimed St Thérèse of the Child Jesus Principal Patroness, equal to St Francis Xavier, of all missionaries, men and women, and of missions in the whole world.⁶⁵ Speaking of the effectiveness of contemplative love in missionary activity, Hans Von Balthasar writes:

the election of bishops by priests and people, was in favour of a married clergy, and wanted the liturgy to be in French (see John Sullivan, 'Teaching from the Table of Sinners', *Spiritual Life: A Journal of Contemporary Spirituality* (Fall 2000): 161-177). From our previous discussion on personal culpability, we raise the question, was Loyson's conscience in error? Loyson's own conscience obviously condoned his actions. Thérèse says he was culpable, 'more culpable than any other sinner ever was who was converted' (See *GC* II, 728). But was he? Referring to the previous discussion on invincible (unintentional) ignorance, I am led to absolve Loyson from guilt. We can further ask: Did Loyson, then, remain in Jesus' garden? Surely he did. Loyson is reported as saying: 'I am convinced that what God condemns in man is not error when this is sincere, but selfishness, pride and hatred' (cf. *GC* II, 730. fn. 6). However, in a softening of her apparent severe judgement of Loyson, Thérèse also states that, judging from Loyson's actions during his life, she felt that remorse was gnawing at him (cf. *GC* II, 728). And she continued to pray for him. Just one month before her death, when Thérèse received Holy Communion for the last time — her physical condition allowing her no longer to swallow the host — she offered the communion for Loyson. That day, as it happened, was 19 August, the feast of St Hyacinth (see Sullivan, *Teaching from the Table of Sinners*). This incident, when placed alongside the later one where Thérèse speaks of the 'sin against faith' (*SS* Manuscript C, 211) seems to suggest that Thérèse held a view of sin that was formed by her pre Vatican Council II catechetical instruction (might we call it, from our perspective, today, 'rigid'?). This view perhaps caused her unnecessary concern and she had to circumnavigate it by other means in order to hold these 'sinners' in the embrace of God's love. On the other hand, while we, today, perhaps have better informed consciences, and therefore maybe a more 'relaxed' understanding of sin, it is the opinion of some commentators that our age has lost the sense of sin altogether. What is more, unlike Thérèse, we perhaps have also ceased to pray for 'the conversion of sinners'. Space prevents us from following further this topic of Loyson's 'sin' here. However, at the end of Chapter 6, reference is again made to the issue.

⁶³ *SS* Manuscript C, 212.

⁶⁴ *SS* Manuscript A, 99.

⁶⁵ See *SS* Appendices, 287.

By leaving everything in God's hands, the love that bears all things carries us further; it achieves more in the extreme suffering of not 'being able to go on any further' than in potent, self-assured action. This is why Thérèse of Lisieux can describe life in Carmel as the most apostolically fruitful life.⁶⁶

Charity Flowing into Suffering

'Suffering' is a central theme in Thérèse's writings. The noun, *la souffrance* (suffering) is used 134 times and the verb *souffrir* (to suffer) 228 times. Why is it such a frequent reference and what is its significance?⁶⁷

The first thing that must be said is that Thérèse is attracted to the suffering Christ by invitation; her attention is in terms of a mystical gift. She finds in Jesus Crucified her *raison d'être* for loving and for mission. Her attraction is not masochistic; it is not a theological point of reference; it is, rather, a special alignment of herself with the

⁶⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1963, 2004), 116.

⁶⁷ To state that Thérèse saw *suffering* as God's Will for her is fraught with theological difficulties. Thérèse does see suffering as God's will while, at the same time, recognising that God does not will suffering; God wills life. Sometimes one hears the comment upon, for example, the word of the doctor that one has a terminal illness: 'What else can I do but accept?' Then, perhaps, the acceptance is a reluctant acceptance — maybe often with veiled anger. With Thérèse she welcomes suffering. The emphasis here is on the word *welcomes*, not on *suffering*. Thérèse was not a masochist. She *chooses* to adopt this attitude. Ruth Burrows has some very strong words about suffering (and about 'favours', that is, mystical phenomena): 'If we have to remind ourselves that we must never give undue significance to 'favours' of whatever kind, the same must be born in mind regarding suffering. There can be an enormous amount of useless suffering that we really induce because we feel it to be authenticating, a sign that we are making progress, are specially close to God, a 'chosen soul' and so forth. We are wrong to attach such significance to suffering ... As regards interior suffering ... the only way to deal with it is to refuse to have it, refuse to suffer from it. We are far better off without it. If we can't get rid of it at will, we can use it by persistently lifting ourselves out of it, moving up into the real world of Truth and Love ... Reality is the life, the world, of the risen Jesus, where there is utter security and joy, where all is well and will be well. This is where we must live, not in our miserable subjective states of feeling, measuring life as seems to us, as we feel it to be instead of as it *is*. For many people, for us all, really, *the surrender, the dying to self* lies precisely here ... Masochism, dramatisation of suffering is every bit as common and just as much an obstacle as lack of generosity in bearing the hardships of life (see Ruth Burrows, *Interior Castle Explored: St Teresa's Teaching on the Life of Deep Union with God* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1981), 97. When Thérèse was very ill, a comment was made to the effect that it would be difficult to find something to say about her in the 'circular' that would pass around the Carmelite communities treating the life of the deceased. It would be difficult because Thérèse seemed so 'ordinary'. Her holiness was unostentatious; no one noticed it. Nor did they know anything about the sufferings (excluding her last illness) that Thérèse experienced during her life. Thérèse's kind of 'suffering' is not what is to be usually expected in the spiritual life; Thérèse's experience, I argue, was part of her mystical giftedness. And so Ruth Burrow's advice remains sound. However, it does not apply to Thérèse for whom Truth and Love were especially and constantly important. Nevertheless, Thérèse would still have to carefully discern the 'interior movements in her soul' ('voices'). Thérèse, herself, writes that she never *asked* to suffer (see above fn.19).

Suffering Christ which she particularizes in Devotion to the Holy Face. Thérèse was not prone to exaggerations in any form for she sought only the truth.⁶⁸ 'These facts', writes one author, 'lead us to question whether Thérèse, from her early adolescence [her 'conversion'] until her death, might not have experienced an infused share in Christ's suffering for the sake of souls'.⁶⁹ I consider this to be the case. This particular grace to suffer (*souffrir*), along with *charity* (*la charité*), is a core component of her grace of 'conversion'. It is connected to *mission* in that the willingness to endure suffering, even intense suffering, proves one's intention to love, to save souls, to carry their burden and to die a death of love. Thérèse says that the words of Jesus from the Cross 'I thirst' sounded continually in her heart. 'These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a *thirst for souls*'.⁷⁰ In Thérèse's case this gift, then, is directly connected to 'saving souls' and, as I will argue again in the next chapter, 'saving souls', for Thérèse, principally means confessing faith in Jesus, in Jesus crucified and risen.⁷¹

Sebastian Moore reflects on the suffering of Jesus. He writes that the Gospel narrative lays the greatest emphasis on the psychological crisis that the crucifixion was for the disciples. 'The crisis is presaged by their uncomfortable feeling that Jesus is wedded to his oncoming ordeal, and this horrifies them.'⁷² One might think the same about Thérèse; she seems so keen to suffer — she thirsts after suffering. On the day of her Second Communion, 22 May 1884, she had received the inestimable grace of being united with Jesus the experience of which brought to her mind the text of St Paul 'It is no longer I that live, it is Jesus who lives in me! On the evening of that day, in a heart-to-heart talk with Marie, Marie spoke to her about suffering and told her that, in Marie's opinion, Thérèse would 'probably not walk that way', that God would always carry her as a child.'⁷³ Marie was both right and wrong. God would carry Thérèse as a

⁶⁸ See SS Manuscript B, 197.

⁶⁹ See Frederick L. Miller, *The Trial of Faith of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 41.

⁷⁰ SS Manuscript A, 99.

⁷¹ We know, however, that, at the same time, Thérèse intuits a 'universality of salvation' affirmed later by Vatican Council II.

⁷² See Sebastian Moore, *Jesus as Liberator of Desire*, 47f.

⁷³ See SS Manuscript A, 79

child — that much was true. However, Marie was also wrong, for the day after speaking with Marie, Thérèse says:

I felt born within my heart a *great desire* to suffer and at the same time the interior assurance that Jesus reserved a great number of crosses for me. I felt myself flooded with consolations so *great* that I look upon them as one of the *greatest* graces of my life. Suffering became my attraction; it had charms about it which ravished me without my understanding them very well. Up until this time, I had suffered without *loving* suffering, but since this day I felt a real love for it. I also felt the desire of loving only God, of finding my joy only in Him'.⁷⁴

This is where Marie was wrong. Thérèse receives suffering as a mystical gift. Such gifts are not given to everyone. It is with this gift that Thérèse 'wins' souls; that is, suffering (for Thérèse) seems to be the channel through which God / Jesus wills that Thérèse exercise her ministry to bring souls to faith.

There seems to be no other reason for such an attitude towards suffering than the one that Thérèse was *called* to respond so totally. As she, herself, says, she wants to become a saint, and not by halves. And she also states on several occasions that peace reigns in the bottom of her heart in the midst of suffering: 'Although Jesus is giving me no consolation, He is giving me a peace so great that it is doing me more good!'⁷⁵ And in the art of guiding souls, the strong presence of peace in the soul is an indication of the presence of the Spirit as we noted previously.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ SS Manuscript A, 79.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ See fn. 67 above. There are 121 references to *paix* (peace) in Thérèse's writings. Some further examples: 'Let us see life as it really is ... It is a moment between two *eternities* ... Let us suffer in peace! I admit that this word peace seemed a little strong for me [possibly a reference to the *Reflections* of P. Lamennais on the *Imitation of Christ*], but the other day, when reflecting on it, I found the secret of suffering in peace ... The one who says *peace* is not saying joy, or at least, *felt* joy ... To suffer in peace it is enough to will all that Jesus wills' (GC I 553 and written in 1889; Thérèse is sixteen!); 'A few months after this, they spoke of the departure of Sister Geneviève and Sister Marie of the Trinity [to depart for the missions]. This was another kind of suffering, very intimate, very deep; I imagined all the trials, the disappointment they would suffer, and my heaven was covered with clouds; calm and peace remained only in the depths of my heart' (SS Manuscript C, 217); 'You can see that I am a *very little soul* and that I can offer God only *very little things* [like not reacting negatively to dirty water being inadvertently splashed in her face while working with another Sister in the laundry]. It often happens that I allow these little sacrifices which give such peace to the soul to slip by; this does not discourage me, for I put up with having a little less peace and I try to be more vigilant on another occasion' (SS Manuscript C, 250); 'I understand nothing except through what I see and feel. But my soul, in spite of this darkness, in is an astonishing peace' (LC, 199); 'This world's greatest honors /

In their previous relationship with Jesus, the disciples have evaded transforming union — ‘sin with the biggest possible S,’ writes Moore⁷⁷ — and now, at his death, are forced to re-evaluate and accept the inevitable of being ‘brought into sizzling contact with what is evaded, the self now awakened, the self now in love, the self now in sight of its grail’. Applying this to Thérèse, we can say that Thérèse accepts the consequences of ‘dying to self’ and of ‘following Jesus’ to the point of union with him in the manner he wills. She *chooses* to go this way. Her awakened desire seizes every opportunity to follow this course to its end, and, in so doing, she irresistibly plays a contributing role in the drama of Redemption. Thérèse’s vocation to love and her mission to ‘save souls’ are, in miniature, that which is ‘writ large’ in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus — the paschal mystery.

Charity Aiding 'Loss of Self'

For Thérèse, suffering is also connected to ‘dying to self-love’: ‘I felt *charity* enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please others’.⁷⁸ This ‘dying’ to self occurs up until 1895 when, then, the process is almost complete.

In months leading up to her entry to Carmel, Thérèse’s preparation takes the shape of several ‘insights’. One of these she expresses as the need for Jesus to ‘break my bonds’.⁷⁹ ‘The bonds’ are not ones that attach Thérèse to the world; rather, they are her attachment to her own will.⁸⁰ Cynthia Bourgeault writes that “‘our true self’” lies buried beneath the accretions and defenses [sic] accrued through life’s journey’.⁸¹ In our context here, if ‘breaking one’s bonds’ would mean merely pushing the accretions

Cannot compare / To the deep, celestial peace / Which Jesus lets us savor (PN 40, 4, 171). It is of interest to note the strong connection between *suffering* and *peace* in Thérèse’s writings. The presence of peace confirms that the suffering is being dealt with in accordance with God’s Will — that suffering is part of Thérèse’s life as she discerns it and that suffering is part of every human life. Thérèse experiences peace as she suffers from even little things.

⁷⁷ See Sebastian Moore, *Jesus the Liberator of Desire*, 49. The evasion of transforming union — allowing oneself to be loved by Jesus — is, according to Moore, sin with a Capital S. This is a dynamic statement. As I have noted elsewhere (Aim), Jean Lafrance has made the same kind of statement and which I have used as a rephrase of my definition: sin is the refusal to obey the call to faith that is offered through grace.

⁷⁸ SS Manuscript A, 99.

⁷⁹ SS Manuscript A, 141f.

⁸⁰ See De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 74f.

⁸¹ See Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and InnerAwakening*, 95.

and defences further underground rather than opening them to the healing influence of the Spirit, then it is not a good thing. Bourgeault's point is that psycho-spiritual healing is a more preferable form of Christian *ascesis* for our contemporary world than a more aggressive form of purification which the words 'break my bonds' might imply. Thérèse's 'bonds', however, cannot be broken in an instant, for their severing requires repeated personal effort.⁸² For most of the time remaining to her, this 'dying to self' will form the backdrop of the movement to the discovery of her *petite voie* in 1894.

The great spiritual teachers promote cooperation with grace by choices for greater self-knowledge, and surrendering love, all of which ... characterize ... psychological maturity and reinforce the mysterious working of grace with nature.⁸³

⁸² We can cite some examples. Thérèse is now in Carmel. Of her entry to Carmel in 1888, she recalls later 'the *strong* and *very severe* maternal education she received from Mother Gonzague [the Prioress at the time] (cf. SS Manuscript A, 149). On receiving this 'education' — often unmerited — Thérèse responds meekly and humbly though she would have preferred to proclaim her innocence: 'it cost a whole lot', she writes (cf. SS Manuscript A, 159). On another occasion 'a little vase set behind a window was broken, and our Mistress, thinking it was my fault, showed it to me and told me to be more careful in future'. Then she continues: 'Without a word, I kissed the floor, promising to be more careful in the future'. Thérèse says, 'of my lack of virtue these little practices cost me very much and I had to console myself with the thought that at the Last Judgment everything would be revealed' (cf. SS Manuscript A, 159). Responding non-defensively to being judged unfairly seems a little thing, but Thérèse welcomes these and other instances in order to break *her* will that she might be more able to see and to do the Will of God/Jesus in her regard. According to St Ignatius, there are three ways of humility and, according to these, Thérèse fits the third way — almost! St Ignatius of Loyola in *The Spiritual Exercises* treats this subject under the headings of 'The Ways of Being Humble' and 'Three Classes of Persons': '*The First Way of Being Humble* is necessary for eternal salvation, and consists in this: I so lower and humble myself, as far as in my power, that in all things I may be obedient to the law of God our Lord ...; *The Second Way of Being Humble* is more perfect than the first: It is what I have when I find myself in this disposition: When the options seem equally effective for the service of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul, I do not desire or feel myself strongly attached to have wealth rather than poverty, or honor rather than dishonour, or a long life rather than a short one. Furthermore, neither for all creation nor to save my life would I enter into deliberation about committing a venial sin'; *The Third Way of Being Humble* is the most perfect, and consists in this: When I possess the first and second ways, and when the options equally further the praise and glory of God, in order to imitate Christ our Lord better and to be more like him here and now, I desire and choose poverty with Christ poor rather than wealth; contempt with Christ laden with it rather than honors. Even further, I desire to be regarded as a useless fool for Christ, who before me was regarded as such, rather than as a wise or prudent person in this world' (see George E. Ganss et al., ed., *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*. Preface by John W. Padberg (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 156f. 160f). While these Ways sound a little daunting, Thérèse, we know, became a saint by the practise of *little* acts of virtue — acting non-defensively, doing little acts of kindness for others, even the most disagreeable (see SS Manuscript A, 159). A *bigger* act was when the date for her Profession was postponed, possibly because her superiors considered her too young at the time (sixteen). (See fn. 11 above for a description of this). Thérèse tells Jesus: '*I will wait as long as you desire*, but what I don't want is to be the cause of my separation from You through my fault' [*la faute* here meaning through the least imperfection] (cf. SS Manuscript A, 158).

⁸³ See Joann Wolski Conn, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: Far From Spiritual Childhood': 68-98.

Apropos of Thérèse's discovery of her *petite voie*, Conn further notes that these words are a recipe for Christian holiness and whatever connotations *little* throw up to one's imagination, Thérèse's *little* way involves both these elements of holiness.

M. Martin's long illness also gives Thérèse another opportunity to die to self love. On 12 February 1889, M. Martin has to leave Lisieux to enter the mental institution *Bon Sauveur* at Caen. Thérèse loves her father dearly but his illness prevents him from attending her Profession Ceremony and this is a big disappointment. In dealing with her father's long illness, Thérèse 'practises' the 'loss of self-love' by not giving way to self-pity. She refers to the span of his illness — 23 June 1888 - 29 July 1894 — as the period of 'our *glorious* trials'.⁸⁴ Her attitude is even a source of strength to her blood sisters. M. Martin's trial brought out Thérèse's faith: 'It was a trial of faith and hope that matured her astonishingly, so much so that she later saw it as a most special grace'.⁸⁵ And again we recall that Thérèse's autobiography is written primarily to record graces received.

The 'loss of self' is shown, too, in a letter to Céline written just before Thérèse's actual Profession day — 8 September 1890.⁸⁶ In recalling some of the graces of her latest retreat, Thérèse writes that her reflection on Mt 8:20 ('Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head') caused her to conclude that 'This is where we must descend in order that we may serve as an abode for Jesus'. And elaborating on the meaning of 'descend', she wrote: 'What Jesus desires is that we receive Him into our hearts. No doubt, they are already empty of creatures, but, alas, I feel mine is not entirely empty of myself, and it is for this reason that Jesus tells me to descend'.⁸⁷ And 'descend' she did — to 'an infinity of lowliness'.⁸⁸ This 'descent' formed another major insight in the development of her *petite voie*. It moves her desire to 'break her bonds' one step further downward towards the *kenosis* of Jesus. She desires to be humble. Thérèse also ardently desires

⁸⁴ See SS Manuscript A, 157.

⁸⁵ See Guy Gaucher, *John and Thérèse: Flames of Love: The Influence of St John of the Cross in the Life and Writings of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 83.

⁸⁶ We recall that Thérèse's Profession had been delayed.

⁸⁷ GC II, 761f.

⁸⁸ Henri Ghéon, *The Secret of The Little Flower*, 171.

to avoid all sin and forever to redirect the weaknesses of her human nature by living the virtue of *charity*.⁸⁹

In this same letter, Thérèse shows her growing awareness and understanding of the depth of meaning associated with the Servant Songs of Isaiah. She sees the Suffering Servant — the title she applies to Jesus also — as the one who ‘descended’ *par excellence*, and in imitation of him she feels a call to follow. (We recall that Thérèse ‘saw’ Jesus descending most particularly in coming to the ‘wild flowers’). The ‘wild flowers’ are the more insignificant of flowers, and their ‘littleness’ can symbolise the *kenosis* of Jesus. Thérèse wills to meet Jesus at this lowest of levels. In 1893, she again refers to the Isaian theme of the Suffering Servant (cf. Is 53:3) with its message of hiddenness: ‘to find a hidden thing one must hide oneself’.⁹⁰ There is a dual dynamic taking place in Thérèse: it is out of her (false) self and into Jesus. In the same letter, she refers more directly to ‘dying to self’. Using a quotation from the *Imitation of Christ* she writes: ‘After you have left everything, you must above all leave yourself’.⁹¹ These interior movements in Thérèse’s soul of ‘littleness’ and ‘hiddenness’ find expression in her Devotion to the Holy Face — in that this devotion seems a fitting avenue through which to encompass her psycho-spiritual state.⁹²

⁸⁹ The subject of Thérèse’s *weakness* can be misinterpreted; it can give the impression that perhaps she was weaker than the other sisters in Carmel — in the sense of weakness in character as well as in health. However, we know from Céline that Thérèse was *not* weak. When Thérèse speaks of her weakness she is really expressing her insight into the human condition in relation to God and God’s love. Jean Lafrance explains it this way: ‘Thérèse understood perfectly that *love does not mean our love for God* (1 Jn 4:10) ... [we must] experience our own incapacity to love ... we are incapable of breaking the circle which closes us in on ourselves ... Fortunately there is a sequence to St John’s words: *He has loved us first and has given us his Son for the expiation of our sin* (1 Jn 4:10) ... to be consoled by the second part of the sentence, we have to have swallowed the first ... We then begin to love God and our neighbour with a love which is an infinitely poor, wavering and insufficient response to the infinite Love surrounding our hearts of stone ... This was Thérèse’s secret of her discovery of merciful Love. We still stand in wonder at the summit of love that she attained, but we can scarcely guess at the depths of nothingness into which she descended in order to be raised to this height of love. She lived out what St John of the Cross says: ‘I went down so low, so low ... so that I could be lifted up so high, so high’ (see Jean Lafrance, *My Vocation is Love*, 11f). ‘Nothingness’ in this sense is the ultimate meaning of Thérèse’s weakness. Before her ‘conversion’ experience she was weak, emotionally and, at times, physically as well. After that experience, she gradually overcame her remaining false self’s weaknesses; and possibly was always, to some extent, physically weak (not strong). Ultimately, though, it is not weakness of character nor of health that describes Thérèse’s ‘weakness’; rather it is the paradox of her graced strength of spirit.

⁹⁰ GC II, 809.

⁹¹ GC II, 809, citing *Imitation of Christ*, II, 11:4.

⁹² See Appendix C.

Thérèse knows she will be free to follow Jesus only when she ceases loving herself. That does not mean she will not recognise her abilities nor say, for example, she is not humble when, in fact, she is: 'Yes, it seems to me I never sought anything but the truth; yes, I have understood humility of heart ... It seems to me I'm humble'.⁹³ She will love within the Source of the love — Love itself. Noticing her sister, Pauline, and Pauline's responses to situations in the Carmelite Convent during her term as Prioress (1893-1896), Thérèse sees the 'marvels' Jesus is accomplishing in Pauline. Pauline's role brings her into conflict with other 'strong' personalities like that of the previous Prioress, Mother Marie Gonzague. Addressing Pauline (Mother Agnes), Thérèse writes: 'I see that *suffering alone* gives birth to souls, and more than even before these sublime words of Jesus unveil their depths to me: "*Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it will bring forth much fruit*". What an abundant harvest you have reaped'.⁹⁴

In the same vein and speaking about herself this time, Thérèse writes: 'I understood that to become a *saint* one had to suffer much, seek out always the most perfect thing to do, and forget self'.⁹⁵ And as if to allay fears in the face of such a daunting prospect, she adds: 'I understood, too, there were many degrees of perfection and each soul was free to respond to the advances of Our Lord, to do little or much for Him, in a word, to *choose* among the sacrifices He was asking'.⁹⁶ Thérèse has an exceptionally generous spirit: As a child she could say, 'My God, "*I choose all!*" I don't want to be a *saint by halves*, I'm not afraid to suffer for You, I fear only one thing: to keep my *own will*; so take it, for "*I choose all*" that you will!'.⁹⁷ Later, speaking of her first years in Carmel, she writes: 'I understood what *real glory* was. He whose Kingdom is not of this world showed me that true wisdom consists in "desiring to be unknown and counted as nothing", in "placing one's joy in the contempt of self". Ah! I desired that, like the Face of Jesus, "my face be truly hidden, that no one on earth would know me". I thirsted after suffering and I longed to be

⁹³ *LC*, 205.

⁹⁴ *SS Manuscript A*, 174.

⁹⁵ *SS Manuscript A*, 27.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

forgotten.’⁹⁸ In a letter to her sister, Sister Agnes of Jesus, Thérèse writes: ‘You cannot imagine how much I am deprived by not being able to talk with you’. Still, in the same letter, she writes:

Today more than yesterday, if that were possible, I was deprived of all consolation. I thank Jesus, who finds this good for my soul, and that, perhaps if He were to console me, I would stop at this sweetness; but He wants that *all* be for *Himself*! ... Well, then, *all* will be for Him, all, even when I feel I am able to offer nothing; so, just like this evening, I will give Him this nothing!⁹⁹

According to St Ignatius, as we have seen, there are three ways of humility and, according to these, Thérèse fits the third way — almost.

Charity, the ‘*Little Flower*’ and its Significance

But we have moved on too far. Thérèse returns to the imagery of a garden and gardener now in the days after her ‘conversion’ — while awaiting permission to enter Carmel. It was on the Feast of Pentecost, May 1887 that she chooses to seek her father’s permission to undertake this quite serious vocational step.

[M. Martin] was seated by the well, contemplating the marvels of nature with his hands joined. The sun whose rays had lost their ardour gilded the high tree tops where little birds were joyfully chanting their evening song.¹⁰⁰

Thus the scene is almost set, but not quite. ‘Papa’s handsome face had a heavenly expression about it, giving me the feeling that peace flooded his heart’. Her father’s face once again focuses Thérèse’s attention; it is attractive, striking, and good-looking. The face gazes tenderly on Thérèse.¹⁰¹ She makes her request and her father simply states that she is still very young to make such a serious decision. Yet, Thérèse defends her position well and M. Martin, in his deep faith, is convinced that her desire

⁹⁸ SS Manuscript A, 152.

⁹⁹ GC I, 504.

¹⁰⁰ SS Manuscript A, 107.

¹⁰¹ When, later, Thérèse develops a special devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus, the ‘Holy Face’ — itself a symbol of suffering — the Holy Face will also hold the loving gaze [*un regard*] of the Heavenly Father whom Thérèse knows so intimately because she has experienced the love of an earthly father.

is God's will and grants his permission.¹⁰² He then moves to the wall of the garden and performs, what Thérèse names, a *symbolic* action:

Going up to a low wall, he pointed to some *little white flowers*, like lilies in miniature, and plucking one of them, he gave it to me, explaining the care with which God brought it into being and preserved it to that very day ... I accepted it as a relic and noticed that, in gathering it, Papa had pulled all its *roots* out without breaking them.

Thérèse — possibly at the time, but more clearly on reflection — reads this action as a symbol of what Jesus has done for her. She, *little Thérèse* is the *little flower* 'now destined to live on in another soil' — Carmel — 'more fertile than the tender moss where it had spent its first days'.¹⁰³ Thérèse maintains this symbol of a 'little flower' throughout Manuscript A, and commences Manuscript C with it as well. The symbol holds a dual truth of Thérèse's life / soul: it is small, delicate and lovely; it is also taken from its original resting place by its roots: there is a complete break with the place of its previous existence and it will be replanted afresh somewhere else in order to live a life of total self-offering in love.

Charity, Mission and the 'Book of Nature'

However, still awaiting permission from authorities other than her father, Thérèse has occasion to mind some very young children. She speaks to them about 'the eternal rewards that little Jesus would give in heaven to good little children' and they listen carefully. 'Seeing innocent souls at such close range, I understood what a misfortune it was when they were not formed in their early years, when they are soft as wax upon which one can imprint either virtue or vice'. [We notice again Thérèse's interest in 'souls' and her concern that virtue not vice grow there]. 'Ah!', she exclaims, 'how many souls would have reached sanctity had they been well directed!' She continues:

God has no need for anyone to carry out His work, I know, but just as He allows a clever gardener to raise rare and delicate plants, giving him the

¹⁰² The gifts of faith and love of nature are evident in the life of M. Martin. Thérèse relates to her father in a particularly loving way possibly because, she too, is blest with those same gifts and 'like attracts like'.

¹⁰³ See SS Manuscript A, 108.

necessary knowledge for this while reserving to Himself the care of making them fruitful, so Jesus wills to be helped in His divine cultivation of souls.¹⁰⁴

It seems as if Thérèse's reflection here leads her to remember an earlier one where she reasoned that Jesus himself helps the 'weak' souls or those who have not had the opportunities of the 'rare and delicate plants'. Thérèse saw then that Jesus 'descends even lower to meet these'. There, Thérèse sees Jesus as the Divine Gardener who cares for both 'categories of souls', namely, those inside the garden and those wild flowers on the hills. Now she concludes that Jesus wills to be helped in his divine cultivation of souls (Assistant Gardener?). She does this in helping these very young children open up to God. She will do it again later by sitting with sinners. All this directly links to her vocation to Carmel which, at present, she is pursuing with great persistence.¹⁰⁵ At this point in time, she desires to go to Carmel 'to save souls'. Later, on her trip to Rome where she becomes aware that priests are human and subject to temptation, she includes priests also in her role as assistant to the Divine Gardener. In the examination preceding her Profession as a Carmelite, she will declare: 'I came to Carmel to save souls and especially to pray for priests'.¹⁰⁶ She adds later still: 'When one wishes to attain a goal, one must use the means; Jesus made me understand that it was through suffering that He wanted to give me souls'.¹⁰⁷ Thérèse's 'vocation' to save souls, which I contend was given her at her 'conversion' experience, also holds, as we have already seen, the invitation to suffer.

¹⁰⁴ SS Manuscript A, 112f.

¹⁰⁵ I use the word 'vocation' here to mean 'a calling' to follow a particular path in life, for example, to be a spouse and a mother (in the married state) or, in Thérèse's case, to become a Carmelite nun. In this sense, the word 'vocation' is maybe secondary to particular meaning I intended when I used it previously — to become holy. That particular and primary meaning, for a nun joining a contemplative order like the Carmelites, is to become holy by a contemplative gazing on the Face of God. For the person 'in the world', to become holy is still the primary vocation. The word 'mission' (from latin *mittere* 'to send') means the kind of 'work' one does to further the reign of God. In Thérèse's case, that was to 'save souls', that is, to join with Jesus in his work of bringing saving faith to all people. It is noted that Thérèse states that three privileges sum up her true *vocation*: '*Carmelite, Spouse, Mother*' and yet she feels within her other vocations as well: warrior, priest, apostle, doctor, martyr, crusader, papal guard. However, she feels that 'love comprised all vocations, that love was everything, that it embraced all times and places ... in a word, that it was eternal!' She then states: 'Then, in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my Love ... my *vocation*, at last I have found it ... My vocation Is Love ... in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be *Love*' (cf. SS Manuscript B, 192-194. For a person 'in the world', his or her secondary vocation (secondary to loving God) is to love one's spouse and to lovingly raise children. Mission might be described as, for example, being a nurse, doctor, or engaging authentically in any activity. The terms vocation and mission can tend to overlap in modern usage.

¹⁰⁶ See SS Manuscript A, 149.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

In this desire to 'help' Jesus in His divine cultivation of souls, we can, perhaps, note a return to the theme of 'mothering' souls that seems not to include Thérèse herself. This attitude (if one can charitably infer that the attitude merits change) will alter when Thérèse, herself, sits 'at the table of bitterness' among 'sinners'. However, as I will argue later, her purpose even then is still to 'save souls' and so the image is more a combination of mother and sister. If space permitted, it could be argued that Thérèse is, perhaps, neither mother nor sister, but daughter: 'In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be *Love*'.¹⁰⁸

Charity and Thérèse's Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love and Devotion to the Holy Face

The communion in love between Jesus and Thérèse reaches a high point on Trinity Sunday, 9 June 1895. As we know love implies faith, and during Mass she receives the inspiration to offer herself to Merciful Love. Thérèse thinks of the pious custom where souls offered themselves as victims to Divine Justice 'to turn away the punishments reserved to sinners, drawing them upon themselves', and she reshapes this idea of victimhood. Knowing that God's concern is not about retribution or payment of debt so much as love, she offers herself as a victim to God's Merciful Love.

In order to live in one single act of perfect Love, I OFFER MYSELF AS A VICTIM OF HOLOCAUST TO YOUR MERCIFUL LOVE asking You to consume me incessantly, allowing the waves of *infinite tenderness* shut up within You to overflow into my soul, and that thus I may become a *martyr* of Your *Love*, O my God!¹⁰⁹

The Act has an implied theology: Thérèse self-offering is not reparation to an angry God, but cooperation in the work of a loving God. Since the time of making her offering, Thérèse experiences 'rivers or rather the oceans of graces' flooding her soul. She tells Mother Agnes that since that time [9 June 1895]: '*Love* penetrates and surrounds me ... purifying my soul and leaving no trace of sin within it ... I know that

¹⁰⁸ SS Manuscript C, 194.

¹⁰⁹ See *Appendix B*.

the Fire of Love is more sanctifying than is the fire of purgatory'.¹¹⁰ (This particular statement will again come up for discussion in the next section of this chapter). The Carmelite author of *An Echo from the Heart of God* confidently claims that this *Act of Self-Offering* won for Thérèse the grace of mystical marriage, transforming union or confirmation in grace.¹¹¹ Miller states: 'In asking to "die of love" [*martyr of Your love*' in her *Act of Self-Offering*] Thérèse reveals that she has attained this high degree of union with God or at least expected, through grace, to enter the state of spiritual marriage through her Oblation [*Act of Self-Offering*]'.¹¹² This is an inestimable grace. Another of the graces Thérèse describes is an intense experience of the Love of God while beginning to pray the Stations of the Cross. Thérèse sees a relationship between this grace and her previous *Act of Self-Offering*. The experience seems like God's gift of consolation in response to her generous self-offering. She explains the experience: 'It felt as though I were totally plunged into fire ... I was on fire with love ... I experienced it ... for a single instant, falling back immediately into my habitual state of dryness.'¹¹³ (We recall that in the previous chapter considerable time was spent on the significance of similar metaphors relating to being 'plunged into fire' and on the impact these metaphors have on the presentation of Thérèse's theological thought). Brief though the experience was, 'being plunged into fire' is a symbolic way of describing a mystical experience of God. This grace is also linked to Thérèse's love of the Crucified Christ — the grace that was given during praying The Stations of the Cross. Thérèse has now experienced God's love as unconditional gift in a very significant manner and will continue to believe in it, even in spite of her 'habitual state of dryness'. All of this relates back to her 'conversion' experience, from the moment of which she 'began to run like a giant' in the spiritual life within the virtue of *charité*.

In that same year of 1895, Thérèse recalls to Mother Agnes: 'Until my coming to Carmel, I had never fathomed the depths of the treasures hidden in the Holy Face ... I desired that, like the Face of Jesus, [quoting Isaiah 53:3] "my face be truly hidden,

¹¹⁰ SS Manuscript A, 181.

¹¹¹ See *An Echo from the Heart of God*, 236-240; 250-255.

¹¹² Miller, *The Trial of Faith of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 43.

¹¹³ LC, 77.

that no one on earth would know me.” I thirsted after suffering and I longed to be forgotten’.¹¹⁴ (The first record of the addition to her name — ‘Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face’ — is in her letter to Céline in March 1889). In the year, 1896, Thérèse and two of her novices, her sister, Céline (Sister Geneviève) and Sister Marie of the Trinity will pray together a prayer of Consecration to the Holy Face that Thérèse had composed — possibly on the Feast of the Transfiguration, 6 August 1896. According to authors previously discussed, Thérèse's devotion to the Holy Face brings together her previous and perhaps ambivalent feelings regarding ‘face’.¹¹⁵

In this period of her life, the middle years, Thérèse's *petite voie*¹¹⁶ and *Act of Self-Offering* summarise the maturity of her faith. They flow from the grace of *charity* given to Thérèse in such a full measure at her ‘conversion’. Thérèse's *petite voie* shows the ‘littleness’ of her mature faith, that is, the ‘emptiness of her hands’¹¹⁷ and her total reliance and trust on the Mercy and Love of God; the *Self-Offering* shows the commitment she professes to consistently live that faith.

¹¹⁴ SS Manuscript A, 151f. Again, one must remember that Thérèse is not masochistic and that she is, on the other hand, though not perfect, a person of quite sound psychic wholeness. Ann Belford Ulanov discusses this question in detail. See her article: ‘Religious Devotion or Masochism? — A Psychoanalyst Looks at Thérèse’, in *Experiencing Saint Thérèse Today*: 140-156. Ulanov points out that ‘Thérèse acts as a perfect complement to our century’s huge explosions that force power outward — into bombs, into space, across new frontiers. Thérèse show us explosions of energy inward, into inner space, and a spirit so powerful it spills over into relationship with others, near and far. Thérèse recovers for us in our time the mystery of love in person, between persons, between persons and God. That somehow threatens us. Hence the accusations that pile up against her — hers is too much feeling, too much an embrace of suffering. She leaves us her gift of self-assurance, of completeness in love, of a courage to act that overflows out of that love. In return, we accuse her of sentimentality and masochism. We look to protect ourselves from the power she puts into our hands’: 141, 143.

¹¹⁵ In relation to this devotion to the *Holy Face* we recall the significance of a mother’s face for the child Thérèse. Though the sentiment expressed is genuine, the language and structure of this prayer probably does not do Thérèse's spontaneity and creativity justice. Its rather formal style and to modern ears over-laden sentiment, perhaps reveals more the style of nineteenth century formal prayers than formal prayers of today. (See *Appendix C*). Her poem, *PN* 24, stanza 24, 129, is a more spontaneous expression of her devotion. See also, *Pri* 16, ‘To the Holy Face’, 104. However, Ulanov's point is well made: ‘Thérèse shows us explosions of energy inward ...’ That is a very perceptive insight. Thérèse could not have produced this kind of energy by will power alone. It has something about it of the power of God.

¹¹⁶ As stated earlier, Thérèse's *petite voie* is not treated in depth in this dissertation (cf. Bernard Bro, *The Little Way*; Conrad De Meester, *The Power of Confidence and With Empty Hands*).

¹¹⁷ See *Act of Self Offering*: ‘In the evening of this life, I shall appear before You with empty hands, for I do not ask You, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is stained in Your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in Your own *Justice* and to receive from You *Love* the eternal possession of *Yourself*’.

C. Thérèse's Middle Years through the Lens of *Sin*

In this section the discussion will centre on three pieces: Thérèse and her Spiritual Directors; Thérèse and Suffering; and Thérèse and her 'spiritual brothers'. The aim here is to demonstrate further that Thérèse religious experience continues to move her along the path to holiness and that, even amidst the tumult of conscience, she keeps her gaze fixed on the goal to save souls. As we noted previously, a more preferable description for today of 'saving souls' is to 'lead others to faith'.¹¹⁸

Thérèse and her Spiritual Directors

A spiritual director's role is to assist one to leave the false self and to discern the invitation to listen to the desires of the true self to follow the call of God. This process often involves personal suffering.

(Father) Auguste Theophile Almire Pichon (1843-1919)

The first of these spiritual directors is Auguste Theophile Almire Pichon. Pichon became acquainted with the Martin family in October 1882 through Marie's desire to meet this young Jesuit who had come to town and who had a good reputation as a spiritual director and retreat master. Thérèse would have been nine at the time. M. Martin also profited from Father Pichon's counsel and invited him many times to *Les Buissonnets*, calling him 'the friend and director of the Martin family'.¹¹⁹

In May 1888, Father Pichon came to the Lisieux Carmel for Marie's Religious Profession. He told Thérèse, in conversation, that he was surprised to see what God was doing in her soul.¹²⁰ He also told her that, watching her at prayer, he thought her

¹¹⁸ In the first place, that is Christian faith. Secondly, it is 'to lead others to salvation' (in a wider interpretation of 'faithing').

¹¹⁹ Lyle Terhune, 'Biographical Introduction', Almire Pichon, *Seeds of the Kingdom*, 9. Frank O'Loughlin notes that 'having a confessor was the done thing in the Catholic salons of France' (see Frank O'Loughlin, *The Future of the Sacrament of Penance* (Strathfield NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2007), 98.

¹²⁰ See 'On a Particular Date in Fr. Pichon's Deposition Concerning Thérèse', in *An Echo of the Heart of God*: 149-152 for further information.

'fervor was childish' and her 'way very sweet'.¹²¹ Though his words do not seem in the least consoling, Thérèse says she found consolation for her soul in speaking with him, troubled no doubt by the difficulties in her new life and the inability to bring to fruition her desires to race to the top of the ladder of perfection; but, at the same time, she feels unable to really confide in him. However, she makes a general confession where she reviews her past life. In this confession, Father Pichon, who must have realised that Thérèse needed reassurance, said to Thérèse:

In the presence of God, the Blessed Virgin, and all the Saints, I declare that you have never committed a mortal sin. Then he added: 'Thank God for what He has done for you; had He abandoned you, instead of being a little angel, you would have become a little demon'. I had no difficulty in believing it; I felt how weak and imperfect I was and gratitude flooded my soul. I had such a great fear of soiling my baptismal robe that such an assurance, coming from the mouth of a director such as St Teresa desires, i.e., one combining *knowledge and virtue*, it seemed to me to be coming from the mouth of Jesus Himself. The good priest also spoke these words which are engraved in my heart: 'My child, may Our Lord always be your Superior and your Novice Master.'¹²²

The point here is that Thérèse, who has been cured from an attack of scruples in October 1886 just after Marie's entrance to Carmel, is now, in May 1888 and in Carmel, still not entirely free in her spirit. Father Pichon mentions 'mortal sin'. How could Thérèse possibly be thinking she is committing mortal sin? Is this a return of scrupulosity? Or is it the result of the return of a previous rigid teaching given on the occasion of her Second Communion, May 1885? Or is it the result of an over anxious desire to reach perfection? Or is the disturbance in her soul the work of the 'devil'? Or, finally, is it coming from the 'flip-side' of the over-flowing grace of charity given her at her 'conversion' experience and which she has not yet fully integrated into a mature spiritual freedom of conscience? One would have to discern by repeated experience just how to adjust to the like of the extraordinary graces which Thérèse receives. That alone would be a learning experience through success and failure. Whatever the answer, Thérèse is 'suffering' and 'meeting with more thorns than roses'.¹²³ Later [1895], Thérèse reflects:

¹²¹ SS Manuscript A, 149.

¹²² SS Manuscript A, 149f.

¹²³ See SS Manuscript A, 149.

At the beginning of my spiritual life when I was thirteen or fourteen, I used to ask myself what I would have to strive for later on because I believed it was quite impossible for me to understand perfection better. I learned very quickly since then that the more one advances, the more one sees the goal is still far off. And now I am simply resigned to see myself always imperfect and in this I find my joy.¹²⁴

Pichon returned to Canada in November 1888 and so Thérèse is no longer able to speak with him. Like Marie, she writes him letters, but again, as with Marie, he replies infrequently; he was pressured by overwork,¹²⁵ leaving Thérèse no choice but to take Jesus as her director. This is not a new choice but a renewed one. Even before entering Carmel, she relied on Jesus to direct her. Referring to that time, Thérèse says:

Jesus ... allowed my confessor to tell me to receive Communion during the month of May four times a week; the month having passed, he added a fifth whenever a feast occurred. It appeared to be Jesus Himself who desired to give Himself to me, for I went to confession only a few times, and never spoke about my interior sentiments. The way I was walking was so straight, so clear, I needed no other guide but Jesus.¹²⁶

Jesus is Thérèse's Guide

Just after the grace of 'conversion', Thérèse explains the effect of grace in her soul and of her reliance on Jesus alone. Of that period of soul-sharing with Céline, she writes:

How *light* and *transparent* the veil that hid Jesus from our gaze! Doubt was impossible, faith and hope were unnecessary, and *Love* made us find on earth the One whom we were seeking ... Graces as great as this were not to be without fruit and it was abundant. The practice of virtue became sweet and natural to us. At the beginning, it is true, my face betrayed the struggle, but

¹²⁴ SS Manuscript A, 158.

¹²⁵ There are seven letters from Father Pichon to Thérèse recorded in GC I: 18 June 1888, 14 October 1888, 27 December 1888, 10 January 1889, 16 August 1889, 4 October 1889, 27 March 1890. In the letter dated 4 October 1889, he wrote: 'I was counting so much on writing you a long letter for your feast! And Jesus did not will it! Here I am at the last minute. Crushing work, without either respite or thanks. In seventeen days, I just preached eighty-one sermons. There are five retreats for the month of October alone! See how I need to be sustained by your prayers!' In GC II, there are eight letters: 16 February 1891, 20 January 1893, 21 September 1893, 19 March 1894, 25 February 1895, 1 January 1896, 26 July 1897. In these last two letters he mentions his failing sight. The last letter Pichon wrote to Thérèse was dated 4 October 1897. This letter arrived five days after Thérèse's death. Father Pichon did not keep any of the letters that Thérèse wrote to him monthly.

¹²⁶ SS Manuscript A, 104f.

little by little this vanished and renunciation was easy, even the first call of grace'.¹²⁷

A little later, we read:

The way I was walking was so straight, so clear, I needed no other guide but Jesus. I compared directors to faithful mirrors, reflecting Jesus in souls, and I said that for me God was using no intermediary, He was acting directly!¹²⁸

At this same time of pre-entry to Carmel, Thérèse once more resorts to the 'book of nature' to develop her explanation of Jesus' work in her soul:

When a gardener carefully tends a fruit he wants to ripen before its time, it's not to leave it hanging on a tree but to set it on his table. It was with such an intention that Jesus showered His graces so lavishly upon His little flower ... Because I was little and weak He lowered Himself to me, and He instructed me secretly in the *things* of his *love*.¹²⁹

Here, too, besides the influence of Jesus in Thérèse's soul, we again meet the theological question: does God have preferences? In her *petite voie*, as we have already seen, Thérèse implicitly makes reference to God's dealings with herself: that is, God lowers Himself to the little and weak. It is of the nature of God, it seems, to *prefer* to come to the 'lowly'. And according to Thérèse, He will descend even further — to the littlest of the little — as we learned earlier in reference to the 'wild flowers'.

Now, later in Carmel, Thérèse finds herself 'forced' to refer to Jesus again for direction. She has difficulty in explaining the workings in her soul to the Prioress, Mother Marie de Gonzague and her Mistress of Novices, Sister Marie of the Angels. 'The difficulty I had in revealing my soul, while coming from my simplicity, was a veritable trial; I recognize it now [in 1895], for I express my thought with great ease without ceasing to be simple'.¹³⁰ (And Father Pichon is an unreliable correspondent).¹³¹

¹²⁷ SS Manuscript A, 104.

¹²⁸ SS Manuscript A, 105.

¹²⁹ SS Manuscript A, 105.

¹³⁰ SS Manuscript A, 151.

¹³¹ While Pichon did write to Thérèse, she possibly needed more regular assistance than he was able to provide. Thérèse is 'running like a giant' in the ways of the Spirit. However, in her day-to-day ordinary

The ordinary confessor, the convent's chaplain Louis-Auguste Youf (1842-1897), was not really helpful either. Fr. Youf was rather stern and severe and somewhat influenced by Jansenism. However, Thérèse has great confidence in Jesus as her Director and it is he who guides her in walking towards the formation of her *petite voie*. This particular way 'threw a veil' over the great graces pouring into Thérèse's soul; no one, not even her blood sisters, suspected she was anything more than very ordinary. And it was only when Mother Agnes of Jesus (Pauline) read Manuscript A in 1896 that even she began to realize the depth of Thérèse's spirituality.

Thérèse makes Profession on 8 September 1890. The Retreat prior to this occasion was 28 August – 8 September, and it was experienced with 'the most absolute aridity and almost total abandonment'. 'Jesus was sleeping as usual in my little boat'. This is an apt symbol of the perceived state of her soul. In a remark she makes at this juncture, we witness her degree of faith:

Ah! I see very well how rarely souls allow Him to sleep peacefully within them. Jesus is so fatigued with always having to take the initiative and to attend to others that He hastens to take advantage of the repose I offer to Him. He will undoubtedly awaken before my great eternal retreat, but instead of being troubled about it this only gives me extreme pleasure.¹³²

Jesus asleep in the boat of Thérèse's soul is another of the key images she chooses to describe her relationship with God. This poetic expression of the state of her soul would place Thérèse's image of God as a close version of Image No 3 of Sullivan's three possibilities, which is: God loves me: And I allow Him to love me in the way He chooses. This version of Thérèse's image shows an unconditional love for God. Perhaps it still can fluctuate in degree in these middle years; and further, it permits of a further deepening in the last eighteen months of her life. Perhaps though, Jesus-sleeping-in-the-boat-of-her-soul now is a degree more comfortable than later dying from tuberculosis at twenty-four, and experiencing a 'darkness' much more dense than Jesus' sleep in her soul.

'secular' experiences she has difficulty matching this rate of progress and possibly needed more help and encouragement.

¹³² SS Manuscript A, 165.

The evening before her Profession, however, Thérèse is severely tempted to completely doubt her religious vocation. She sees herself as a fraud. Again, in a poetic description taken from the 'book of nature', she says: 'A storm arose within my soul the like of which I'd never seen before ... The darkness was so great that I could see and understand one thing only: I didn't have a vocation'. This, she notes, was a temptation from the devil and she was right; for according to The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits of St Ignatius, it is characteristic of the evil spirit to come to 'persons who are earnestly purging away their sins, and who are progressing from good to better in the service of God [Thérèse] in such a way as to cause gnawing anxiety, to sadden, and to set up obstacles. In this way he unsettles them by false reasons aimed at preventing their progress'.¹³³ 'How can I possibly describe the anguish in my soul?' she says. The following explains the situation:

It appeared to me (and this is an absurdity which shows it was a temptation from the devil) that if I were to tell my Novice Mistress about these fears, she would prevent me from pronouncing my Vows. And still I wanted to do God's will and return to the world rather than remain in Carmel and do my own will. I made the Mistress come out of the choir and, filled with confusion, I told her the state of my soul. Fortunately, she saw things much clearer than I did, and she completely reassured me. The act of humility I had just performed put the devil to flight since he had perhaps thought that I would not dare admit my temptation. My doubts left me completely as soon as I finished speaking; nevertheless, to make my act of humility even more perfect, I still wished to confide my strange temptation to our Mother Prioress, who simply laughed at me.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, in the morning of September 8, Thérèse writes, 'I felt as though I were flooded with a river of peace, and it was in this peace 'which surpasses all understanding' that I pronounced my Holy Vows'.¹³⁵ This peace confirms the presence of God's Spirit. However, I wonder why Thérèse wanted to make her act of humility 'even more perfect'? Perhaps it was just that — as she says. Or did she want further confirmation from a 'higher' superior? Or is she still 'climbing the ladder of perfection'? Of course, it is probably only natural that having experienced such a

¹³³ See 'Rules for the Discernment of Spirits' in George E. Ganss et al., ed., *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, 201.

¹³⁴ SS Manuscript A, 166. It is the weakness in the will that allows negative reasonings to be entertained. The Tradition attributes this weakness to the effects of Original Sin.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

severe temptation, she might seek a double-dose of reassurance. And perhaps it would have shown an extremely high degree of psycho-spiritual maturity for her to accept only the reassurance from her Novice Mistress. No matter; God / Jesus was being true to her as her Spiritual Director and taking her forward step by step towards a holiness that moves also in the direction of psychic maturity. Speaking of her *Director* a little earlier, she writes: 'He doesn't like pointing everything out at once to souls. He generally gives His light little by little'.¹³⁶

Jesus, John of the Cross and Thérèse

In the year of 1890 — the year of Thérèse's Religious Profession — she makes two important discoveries for her spiritual life: she discovers texts on the 'Suffering Servant' of Isaiah (which we have already noted), and she reads the works of John of the Cross. The Isaiah texts nourish her growing attraction to contemplate the Holy Face of Jesus in his Passion, and they sustain her through the years of her father's illness and subsequent death.¹³⁷ St John of the Cross, 'the "Doctor of the Nights"', was the young Carmelite's sole guide, the only helper God himself would admit in this period of interior turmoil and painful coming to birth which terminated with the retreat given by Father Alexis in 1891'.¹³⁸

(Father) Alexis Prou (1844-1914)

The next significant spiritual counsellor for Thérèse is Father Alexis Prou. He conducted a retreat at the Lisieux Carmel from 8 – 15 October 1891, one year after Thérèse's Profession. Ordinarily, for Thérèse, preached retreats were 'more painful'

¹³⁶ SS Manuscript A, 158.

¹³⁷ Thérèse told Mother Agnes on 9 July 1897: 'These words of Isaias: "Who has believed our report? ... There is no beauty in him, no comeliness, etc." [Is 53:1-2] have made the whole foundation of the devotion to the Holy Face, or, to express it better, the foundation of all my piety. I, too, have desired to be without beauty, alone in treading the winepress, unknown to everyone' (LC, 135).

¹³⁸ See Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 92f. Marie-Eugène comments further: 'St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, even more than the Reformer of Carmel [Teresa of Avila], needed the teaching of St John of the Cross. She needed the light of his experience to reassure her about her own, the light of his principles to guide her progress through unknown regions', 92.

than the ones she made alone.¹³⁹ But this particular retreat was different. She had prepared for it by making 'a preparatory novena with great fervor'. Thérèse does not take her spiritual life lightly; she is certainly neither indifferent nor careless. This Franciscan preacher had a reputation for being 'good to great sinners but not to religious souls'. However, 'God wanted to show me that He was the Director of my soul, and so He made use of this Father specifically'. At this period of time, Thérèse recalls, she was having great interior trials of all kinds, even to the point of asking herself whether heaven really existed. This particular temptation will reoccur. Now, as she waits 'to go to Confession', she is 'disposed to say nothing of her interior dispositions' because she does not know how to express them. 'But I had hardly entered the confessional when I felt my soul expand'. She describes it this way:

After speaking only a few words, *I was understood* in a marvellous way and my soul was like a book in which this priest read better than I did myself. He launched me full sail upon the waves of *confidence and love* which so strongly attracted me, but upon which I dared not advance. He told me that *my faults caused God no pain, and that holding as he did God's place*, he was telling me *in His name* that God was very much pleased with me.

Oh! How happy I was to hear those consoling words! Never had I heard that our faults *could not cause God any pain*, and this assurance filled me with joy, helping me to bear patiently with life's exile. I felt at the bottom of my heart that this was really so, for God is more tender than a mother ... My nature was such that fear made me recoil; with *love* not only did I advance, I actually *flew*.¹⁴⁰

There are several points here worthy of comment. The main one is that Thérèse, having once been assured by Father Pichon that she is not committing mortal sin, is still concerned about committing lesser sins (faults). Her conscience is still not free. She feels, 'at the bottom of her heart' called to go to God by 'the elevator of love and not by the stairway of fear',¹⁴¹ but she is afraid. Why? Because this is not the usual way of spirituality in nineteenth century French Catholicism, tarnished by Jansenism. Thérèse is worried; she is pulled in two directions at once — and that is a very

¹³⁹ That could mean that Thérèse's contemplative spirit perhaps found it unnecessary to listen to lectures that might not be helpful.

¹⁴⁰ See SS Manuscript A, 174.

¹⁴¹ See GC II, 1152. These two metaphors describe so well two different ways by which one might approach God. The 'stairway of fear' possibly relates to Jansenism's influence. 'The elevator of love' is Thérèse's chosen way. It is direct.

uncomfortable feeling and a spiritual trial. It is not clear from the text what particular 'degree' of fault she confesses and, as we saw earlier, *la faute* is capable of holding a wide range of interior offences. One would presume that, for Thérèse in this text, the 'fault' is a minor offence. That this is so is confirmed by the text immediately following in her autobiography. It is an 'involuntary' fault like the ones she committed at home at *Les Buissonnets* when Pauline was her 'mother'. Her mind connects to both her confession now and to Pauline's 'training' at home earlier. Of that earlier time and those involuntary faults, she writes, 'no word of reproach touched me as much as did one of your caresses'.¹⁴² Pauline is capable of giving both reproach and love. Thérèse responds to love.

Sister Marie of the Angels — Thérèse's Novice Mistress — testified at the Apostolic Process, 1915-1916, that 'The Servant of God had a great fear of the lightest faults, and this saying: 'No one knows whether he is worthy of love or hatred' caused her to shed tears one day, until she was consoled by the explanation given her'.¹⁴³ This is probably a reference to Father Prou's meeting with Thérèse where he consoled her and encouraged her to have great confidence in God. What sensitivity of conscience though and what 'suffering' of spirit for Thérèse in all this interior turmoil! One might have thought before reading Thérèse's autobiography that becoming a saint was 'plain sailing'. It is not so for Thérèse. Outwardly, she appears calm, serene and smiling. Inwardly, she has to discern the meaning of experiencing extraordinary graces of charity and severe doubts and temptations almost simultaneously. What did it do to her as a person?¹⁴⁴ What did this turbulence do to her soul? Did it make it stronger to

¹⁴² SS Manuscript A, 174.

¹⁴³ See GC II, 731, n. 8.

¹⁴⁴ A discussion this topic would take us far away from the issue at hand. However, it occurs to me that Thérèse could have at least experienced stress. 'The more recent transactional model [of stress analysis] views stress as a transaction between the person and their environment and incorporates both stimulus and response perspectives as part of a process. The model can be referred to as the process model and attempts to encapture a holistic, person-in-context perspective. It entails a much more complex view of stress than the simplistic partial focus of the stimulus and response models, and as a consequence it reflects more realistically the reality of stress in every day life'. One of the conclusions from the full presentation of this transactional model notes 'that it is not so much the objective external environment that influences health and illness; rather, its subjective reflection in the mind of the individual leads to a focus on the person in the stress process (see Tony Cassidy, *Stress, Cognition and Health* (London: Routledge, 1999), 8, 12). Yet Thérèse seems to have coped very well. In this context, Constance Fitzgerald asks: 'How do we contemplatives live with the burden of so much awareness without surrendering to the pressures for efficaciousness on the one hand, or a self-protecting refusal of

continue 'taking up arms' or did she become discouraged? The answer lies in these texts: At the time of her 'conversion', Thérèse wrote: 'He made me *strong* and courageous, arming me with His weapons. Since that night I have never been defeated in any combat, but rather walked from victory to victory'.¹⁴⁵ At her First Communion, 1884, Thérèse made three resolutions; one was 'never to be discouraged'. In 1893 she repeated it: 'I am not always faithful, but I never get discouraged'.¹⁴⁶ This attitude shows a very strong faith and one is reminded again of Albino Luciani's comment cited earlier: The autobiography is more like the story of a 'steel bar' than of a 'little flower'.¹⁴⁷

In 1895, in her *Act of Self-Offering*, Thérèse writes: 'At each moment this *Merciful Love* renews me, purifying my soul and leaving no trace of sin within it'.¹⁴⁸ In this period of 1895, this statement shows that Thérèse is not concerned so much about the negative impact of 'soiling her baptismal robe' as she is concerned with the more positive emphasis on God's merciful love. Thérèse has taken to heart the advice of all her spiritual directors, especially that of Jesus, and has begun to 'fly' in confidence and love into the arms of her Heavenly Father. The 'oceans of grace' that flooded her soul at her 'conversion' have won 'the battle'. Or have they? There is still the last eighteen months of her life to be lived out and, we wonder, what will happen then? The next chapter will decide. However, the statement 'leaving no trace of sin' cannot be literally true. What does it mean? It seems that the grace in Thérèse's soul includes a 'prevenient grace' that kept her from sinning.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Jesus alone was

reality on the other? And speaking specifically of Thérèse a little later, Fitzgerald writes: 'We may have here [in Thérèse's many desires impacting upon her all at one and as expressed by her in Manuscript B] a mark of the genuine mystic: the refusal to partialize awareness, the ability to become increasingly present, more and more conscious and aware, without going mad' (cf. Constance Fitzgerald, 'Contemplative Life As Charismatic Presence', *Contemplative Review* 11/4 (Winter 1978): 34-49).

¹⁴⁵ SS Manuscript A, 97.

¹⁴⁶ GC II, 801.

¹⁴⁷ See GC I, 6.

¹⁴⁸ SS Manuscript A, 181.

¹⁴⁹ Thérèse wrote in 1895: 'Jesus knew I was too feeble to be exposed to temptation; perhaps I would have allowed myself to be burned entirely by the *misleading light* had I seen it shining in my eyes ... I know that without Him, I could have fallen as low as St Mary Magdalene, and the profound words of Our Lord to Simon resound with a great sweetness in my soul. I know that "*he to whom less is forgiven, LOVES less*", but I also know that Jesus *has forgiven me more than St Mary Magdalene* since He forgave me *in advance* by preventing me from falling. Ah! I wish I could explain what I feel'. Then Thérèse composes a story to illustrate her point. It is of a father removing the stone from the road

without sin (cf. Jn 8:46; Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 2:6); Mary was preserved from sin.¹⁵⁰ Still, Thérèse's remark does bear out the dynamic relationship between grace and sin. The more she has of love, the less she has of the offence of ingratitude — which, perhaps, can be a sin against faith.

Thérèse needs spiritual direction in her journey to holiness. When this is humanly available, she welcomes it, especially when the direction is helpful. However, at all times, Thérèse's faith enables her to rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

D. Thérèse's Developing Missionary Vocation

On 17 October 1895, Mother Agnes of Jesus appoints Thérèse as spiritual sister to Maurice Bellière, a seminarian and future missionary.¹⁵¹ On 30 May 1896, Mother Marie de Gonzague assigns Thérèse to pray for a second spiritual brother: Father Roulland,¹⁵² of the Foreign Missions. Thérèse carries on a richly instructive and

*before his son is due to travel that way. She then states: 'Well, I am this child, the object of the foreseeing love of a Father who has not sent His Word to save the just, but sinners. He wants me to love Him because He has forgiven me not much but ALL. He has not expected me to love Him much like Mary Magdalene, but He has willed that I KNOW how He has loved me with a love of unspeakable foresight in order that now I may love Him unto folly!' (cf. SS Manuscript A, 83f). Here we see Thérèse's view of her real and, at the same time, potential sinfulness. I argue that 'sin' exercised great sway in the organization of her spirituality. It was 'the enemy' against which she fought with the courage of a Joan of Arc. According to Brendan Byrne, the overriding theme in Mark's Gospel, is Jesus' 'battle' to overcome the demonic and thereby the establish the Reign of God: '[The] rule of Satan is the negative background to the onset of the rule of God' (cf. Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Strathfield NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2008), 74. Thérèse 'assisted' Jesus in this overthrowing of Satan; yes, but she herself, also did 'battle' with the demonic.*

¹⁵⁰ The *Immaculate Conception* is a Catholic dogma that asserts that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was preserved by God from the stain of original sin at the time of her own conception. Thérèse's poem *Why I Love You, O Mary!* recalls the special privilege given to Mary in her Immaculate Conception (see PN 54, 215-220). This was Thérèse's last poem and it ends with the lines: 'You who came to smile at me in the morning of my life, Come smile at me again ... Mother ... It's evening now.'

¹⁵¹ Reverend Maurice Bellière (1874 – 1907). He was spiritual brother to Sister Thérèse. He was born at Caen and began his studies for the priesthood in October, 1894. On 15 October 1895, he wrote the Carmel of Lisieux asking that one of the nuns pray for his vocation. He left for Algiers to enter the novitiate of the White Fathers. He was ordained on 29 June 1901 [Thérèse died 1897].

¹⁵² Reverend Adolphe Roulland (1870 – 1934). He was spiritual brother to Thérèse. Born at Cahognolles (Calvados), he entered the Foreign Mission seminary at Paris. On 30 May 1896, he wrote the Carmel of Lisieux asking that one of the nuns pray for his vocation and Thérèse was assigned to this task. He was ordained a priest 28 June 1896, and he said his first Mass and met Thérèse at the convent on 3 July 1896. He sailed for China on 2 August 1896. He was recalled to France in 1909, and he testified at the diocesan Process [Stage 1 of the proceedings for Beatification].

spiritual written correspondence with these two missionaries. She writes eleven letters to l'abbé Bellière and he wrote ten to her; she writes seven letters to P. Roulland and he wrote eight to her. This large amount of correspondence takes place in a little less than two years and over a period of time when Thérèse's health is gradually deteriorating. Much of it overlaps the last eighteen months of her life.

In writing the concluding lines to her manuscript to Mother Agnes of Jesus in 1895, Thérèse asks rhetorically, 'How will this "story of a little white flower" come to an end?'¹⁵³ The next chapter will answer her query.

Summary

This chapter has indirectly underlined the point that Thérèse lived out in her person the thesis that 'sin is the refusal to obey the call to faith that is offered through grace'. It has also been indirectly attentive to questioning the application of this to others. Thérèse tried with all her might to avoid the 'least imperfection' and to direct all her energies to knowing, loving and serving God. Her faith is strong; it is infected minimally.

She gives concrete expression to her faith in so many ways: by the over-flowing gift of charity given at her 'conversion', by the 'coming together' of various elements that comprise her *petite voie*, and by her *Self-Offering to Merciful Love*.

In a similar way, by the extreme sensitivity of a conscience that pained at any degree of *faute*, by her determined effort, as well, to 'die to self love', and by her outward-looking mission to 'save souls', Thérèse's life demonstrates that *faith* cannot develop apart from engagement in reversing the human person's tendency to succumb too readily to immoderate pleasures.

This kind of living involves *suffering*. That this would be the case with every person who takes seriously the call to conversion is recognised. However, with Thérèse it

¹⁵³ SS Manuscript A, 181.

was also a gladly-undertaken and often unobservable *suffering* that was to prove the inward intensity of her love for Jesus and the ever-present virtue of faith. Even in suffering, Thérèse's faith is strong and peace reigns in the bottom of her heart.

At the conclusion of Manuscript A, Thérèse's image of God is of the God of unconditional love (for her). She, presumably, has an unconditional love for God also, but to a limited degree. By 'limited' I mean that it is as total as it can be at present. Of course, all human loving is 'limited'. However, if called upon to exceed this present limit, and if Thérèse can meet the demand, then her love for God will be unconditional indeed.

This chapter provided many examples of Thérèse's ability for creative writing by the use of metaphor, symbol and imagery: 'rivers or oceans of grace' fill her soul where Jesus, the Divine Gardener, is directing her to propose a *petite voie* that is every bit in keeping with the *little flower's* way of relating to God — not by the stairway of fear but by the elevator of love.¹⁵⁴ And even if Thérèse *experiences* Jesus 'asleep in [the] little boat' of her soul, her *faith* will know He is present.

It is not sufficient to *study* theology. The struggle to believe and to avoid sin has to be lived out in a personal way, and Thérèse had to do this with her own particular personality and make-up:

The psychology and personality of Thérèse played a central place in her theology and spirituality. ...The hallmark of Thérèse's spirituality is a pre-sexual child-like dependency and trust. Thérèse suffered early trauma by losses, and so much of her spirituality has features of preoedipal dependence and attachment. ...The psychological point is that one's life experience and maturing experiences do shape and color the way a person experiences God and gives expression to that felt relationship'.¹⁵⁵

Yes, of course: Thérèse was Thérèse — not someone else. She lived as authentic a life as was opened up to her. Balancing St Clair's thought, though, is Thérèse's *strength* in

¹⁵⁴ See GC II, 1152.

¹⁵⁵ Michael St Clair, *Human Relationship and the Experience of God: Object Relations and Religion* (Mahway NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 78.

pursuing her goal: it was the 'manly' strength advocated by the Carmelite Foundress, Teresa of Avila. Thérèse writes, citing Teresa:

Jesus, who saw fit to make Himself a child out of love for me, saw fit to have me come forth from the swaddling clothes and imperfections of childhood. He transformed me in such a way that I no longer recognized myself. Without this change I would have had to remain for years in the world. Saint Teresa, who said to her daughters: 'I want you to be women in nothing, but that in everything you may equal strong men', would not have wanted to acknowledge me as her child if the Lord had not clothed me in His divine strength, if He had not Himself armed me for war.¹⁵⁶

The next chapter will see how Thérèse maintains this *strength* when overtaken by a terminal illness and by the interior trial of 'darkness of faith'.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. GC II, 1016.

CHAPTER 5

Faith and Sin: Thérèse's Last Eighteen Months

*'I beg You, O my God! To be Yourself my Sanctity'*¹ (1895)

*'While I am strewing my flowers, I shall sing ... I shall sing even when I must gather my flowers in the midst of thorns.'*² (1896)

*'Never would I have believed it was possible to suffer so much! Never! Never! I cannot explain this except by the ardent desires I have had to save souls'³ ; ' I would still be happy to have it [suffering], if through it I could prevent or make reparation for one single sin against faith.'*⁴ (1897)

*'It is no longer a veil for me, it is a wall which reaches right up to the heavens and covers the starry firmament'*⁵ (1897)

*'Your Love has gone before me; it has grown with me, and now it is an abyss whose depths I cannot fathom.'*⁶ (1897)

Introduction

As in the previous two chapters, this chapter continues to develop — and now to its concluding point — an understanding and interpretation of Thérèse's writings through the dynamic relationship between faith and sin. This chapter will pinpoint the 'sin against faith' and hence pave the way for a specific application of the previous

¹ *Act of Oblation to Merciful Love*, 1st paragraph. See Appendix B.

² SS Manuscript B, 196.

³ LC, 205.

⁴ SS Manuscript C, 214.

⁵ SS Manuscript C, 214.

⁶ SS Manuscript C, 256.

discussions in the offer of a more life-giving alternate route to human living that will be suggested in Chapter 6.

In this chapter we see the confrontation between the divine life and the sinful life brought to conflagration point. Yet grace will triumph. All through her life Thérèse has responded to grace, as best she could. The many graces she received led her — and will continue to lead her until death — to love, to be loved, and to become one in union with Love Itself.⁷ In this light, 'sin', it can be said, 'is a refusal on our part to let ourselves be loved by God, to let God pour out on us the waves of infinite tenderness pent up within him. Sin, in the Theresian vision, paralyses the free outpouring of infinite Love'.⁸ Sin is the refusal to believe that God who is love (cf. 1 Jn 7-21) can, will, and wants to 'pour Godself' out. Thérèse's great insight is precisely this awareness. Of course, basic to an understanding of love and sin in Thérèse's writings is her audacious *faith*. 'Audacity of faith means that nothing will be allowed to reduce or turn aside the soul's response to God' [in love].⁹

⁷This is a description of Thérèse's last moments: 'Then, at the end, at the very end, peace, joy, fulfilment. It was as if that final assault of darkness and all the terror of non-existence had opened up a great new world that awaited the dawn of God's love, a world somehow large enough to hold it all. It was about five o'clock of the evening of 30 September 1897, a day of heavy rain, the day in which the agony of Thérèse had entered its final, most terrifying phase. A certain peace heralded the end and the community gathered around her bed. Her face changed, regaining its former glowing colour and she fixed her eyes on a point above the statue of the Virgin Mary, that had been placed in her little room, in a kind of ecstasy that lasted "the space of a *Credo*", a look of great joy and a strange majesty and dignity. She was being born into the infinite, into the life of the world, into the lives of all of us' (see Noel Dermot O'Donoghue, 'The Jonas Experience', in John Garvey, ed., *Modern Spirituality: An Anthology*: 89-99, at 97f. This incident is also recorded in *SS Epilogue*, 271.

⁸*An Echo of the Heart of God*, 88.

⁹Robert B. Slocum, *Audacity of Faith in St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 50. In this context, we are reminded of the difference and yet the necessary connection that exists between *eros* (worldly love) and *agape* (love grounded in and shaped by faith). 'Fundamentally, "love" is a single reality, but with different dimensions' that serve the whole person in his or her total living (see Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), # 8). When we follow the trajectory of *charity* in the life of Thérèse, we understand it to be her lived experience of the one reality of love. One can sin against love: 'Distain for love is distain for God and man [sic] alike: it is an attempt to do without God' (# 31, c). Thérèse's sensitive conscience is well attuned to this possibility. She therefore faithfully and freely adheres to following the path she discerns God is marking out for her, that is, to respond to His infinite love by loving others. *Agape* (love) is built on faith but, as stated, both *agape* and *eros* are one single entity. Some level of faith, therefore, underlies this but one entity. In this Encyclical Letter, Benedict XVI makes a fine distinction between love of God and love of neighbour. Though 'one is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbour or hate him [sic] altogether'. However, the one is not *the same* as the other. 'Saint John's words should rather be interpreted to mean that love of neighbour *is a path* that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God' (# 16). [My emphasis]. It was in following the path that Thérèse learned the 'science of love'.

In this final period of her life — she is dying from tuberculosis — Thérèse writes Manuscripts B and C, forty-five letters and notes, and six poems. Thérèse is particularly creative in this period and we will be very conscious of that fact when we read descriptions of her 'trial of faith' later. Also she continues to employ an amount of very descriptive imagery. But above all, here, as well as in all of her writings, Thérèse's concern is with God's revelation: faith, love, failure in love and the mercies of the Lord (grace) — *albeit* often under the cover of imagery. The writings she produces in these last eighteen months — especially her autobiography — are central to this dissertation insofar as it could be said that the focus of this group of writings is *faith, love and sin* — on faith and its loss; on love, its peak without a feeling of love and the death of love; and on sin, especially the sin against faith, and on sinners and Thérèse's relationship with sinners.

In June 1897, Thérèse once again takes up her pen in obedience to her Prioress, and this time it is Mother Marie Gonzague who has asked Thérèse to continue the story of her life. Thérèse recalls that in her previous manuscript she had come to sing the mercies the Lord with the former Prioress, her sister, Mother Agnes — the mercies the Lord 'had granted to the Blessed Virgin's *little flower* when she was in the springtime of her life'.¹⁰ Now she will again sing 'of the happiness of this little flower', though this time 'the timid glimmerings of dawn have given way to the burning heart of noon'.¹¹ We particularly note Thérèse's consistency in the use of the symbol *little flower*; it aids the seamless connection between Manuscripts A and C. This symbol — such an innocent description! — belies the strength of will this little flower has. And when we realize that she is still running (metaphorically) — we recall that she said her 'conversion' experience enabled her to 'run like a giant' — we are reminded also of other comments in this vein, for example: Céline's observation that Thérèse, even in her troubled childhood, was really strong, and Pope John Paul I's quizzical comment: 'Little flower? No. More like a bar of steel'. Where once she ran 'in the springtime of life', Thérèse is continuing now to run the race to the end, even be it in 'the burning heat of noon'. Though she has only four months to live and the

¹⁰ SS Manuscript C, 205.

¹¹ Ibid.

'burning heat of noon' is searing into her soul as well as her body, she has not lost her ability to describe her experiences under the cover of imagery and symbol.¹² Nor has she weakened in her resolve to obey the requests of her lawful superiors and continue to write.¹³

A. The Parallel between Jesus' Dying and Thérèse' Dying¹⁴

As she enters these last eighteen months, Thérèse image of God is of a God who loves her unconditionally. And she desires to respond in kind — unconditionally. This is the third of Patrick Sullivan's three basic operational images of God. One's unconditional response to God possibly admits of degrees. In this period of Thérèse's life she will respond to the 'last petal', as totally as is humanly possible and, in turn, she wishes to be 'consumed incessantly by Merciful Love'.¹⁵

In re-reading her *Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love* and considering again the mystical experience of the 'flame of love' which followed a few days later while she

¹²Her literary 'flair' might also be seen in the composition of her poem *An Unpetalled Rose*, 19 May 1897 (See Appendix D). 'As always in the writings of Thérèse, the power of the poem is in its evangelical authenticity. She incarnates the Sermon on the Mount. She lives at the level of the beatitudes' ... Thérèse wrote this poem for 'a badly depressed fellow invalid' (see *An Echo of the Heart of God*, 217). Linking Thérèse's 'living at the level of the beatitudes' to Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *DAS*, we note that John Paul II speaks of Thérèse's intimate knowledge of the Gospels: 'Thérèse is a teacher of the spiritual life with a doctrine both spiritual and profound, which she drew from the Gospel sources under the guidance of the divine Teacher and then imparted to her brothers and sisters in the Church with the greatest effectiveness', # 3; see also *SS Manuscript A*, 102, 179; *B* 193. Might we also say that her effectiveness was partly due to her ability to clothe her religious experience in image and symbol? There is a poetry here that can remove one from the sometimes dull tomes of theology.

¹³Besides Manuscripts B and C, plays and poems, Thérèse wrote many letters including ones to her 'spiritual brothers': l'abbé Maurice Bellière (1874-1907) and Père Adolphe Rolland (1870-1934). These letters 'were so many victories of love over her physical exhaustion' (cf. *GC II*, 1079). As we learnt in the previous chapter, Thérèse wrote 11 letters to Bellière and received 10 from him; to Roulland she wrote 7 and received 7 from him. With regard to the correspondence between Thérèse and Maurice Bellière, we read: 'Maurice is a man who is like us in many ways, with human limitations which we readily recognize and which perhaps we share. Thérèse, on the other hand, is a uniquely great and very famous saint imparting her spirit and her teaching to a friend who is very dear to her. In these letters she reals her extraordinary capacity for friendship to a degree not found elsewhere in her works. As a consequence, the book takes on a larger significance: In writing to Maurice, Thérèse also writes to us' (see Elaine Hallett, review of *Maurice & Thérèse: The Story of A Love*, by Bishop Ahern, in *New Oxford Review* 66/5 (May 1999), 46f.

¹⁴ See Chapter 1, fn.13 for the meaning of the Redemption.

¹⁵ See *Act of Self-Offering*, Appendix B. Also see, *Un Unpetalled Rose*, Appendix D.

was praying the Stations of the Cross — (and we emphasis 'while praying the *Stations of the Cross*' for the grace is associated with Christ's Redemptive act) — we can find a strong parallel between Jesus, his passion, his death for sinners and his love for humankind, and Thérèse, her sufferings, her longing to 'save souls' and her desire to 'die of love'. For what is uniquely true of Jesus is also true of Thérèse to a great degree. Another way of saying this is that the two big theological issues associated with Jesus' death are Thérèse's issues also: firstly, his loving obedience to the will of his Father — which the Father honoured by raising Jesus from the dead — and love for his disciples and the teaching to all his followers to 'love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 15:12). Secondly, there is the interpretation of Jesus' death as one that brings salvation (cf. Lk 24:6-8; 46-47) and as one that shows the depth of his love. The Gospels, in particular, speak to Thérèse about these concerns of Jesus.¹⁶ She grew in holiness by following the lights she gained from them in prayer.

It has been written that: 'The definitive mark of Thérèse's holiness lay ... in her perfect resemblance to Christ Jesus in his passion and death, a grace she had begged for'.¹⁷ The picture of 'Our Lord on the Cross' which Thérèse saw one Sunday soon after her 'conversion', was the beginning of a call to 'remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross and to receive the divine dew' which she knew she was to 'pour out on souls'.¹⁸ The end point of her path to imitate the Crucified is contained in these words: 'Our Lord died on the Cross in agony, and yet this is the most beautiful death of love ... To die of love is not to die in transports. I tell you frankly, it seems to me that this is what I am experiencing'.¹⁹

¹⁶ See: 'But it is especially the *Gospels* ... I am constantly discovering in them new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings' (SS Manuscript A, 179). Thérèse's spirituality was nourished by three main sources: firstly, the printed version of the lectures Abbé Arminjon preached at Chambéry Cathedral which were edited in 1881 under the title *Fin du Monde présent et Mystères de la vie future*; secondly, the works of St John of the Cross, and thirdly, 'especially' the Gospels.

¹⁷ Father François Girard, 'Introduction', in Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, xxxi.

¹⁸ SS Manuscript A, 99.

¹⁹ LC, 73.

Father Marie-Eugène recounts an interesting conversation that has a bearing on Thérèse's wish to die of love, and to imitate Jesus in his death.²⁰ He records the conversation he had with Mother François-Thérèse (Mother's Agnes' successor as Prioress when Agnes died 28 July 1951) stating that Thérèse was close to despair in the last weeks of her life.²¹

But Thérèse had forewarned them: 'Our Lord died in agony on the Cross ... Our Lord enjoyed all the delights of the Trinity when He was in the Garden of Olives, and still His agony was none the less cruel. It's a mystery, but I assure you that I understand something about it by what I'm experiencing myself'.²² For Thérèse, this is the death of love. Scripture tells us also that Jesus, in his dying, held together both: 'My God, my God why have you abandoned me' (Mt 27:46) and 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit' (Lk 23:46). Similarly, Thérèse's death was sheer agony and, at her very last, these are her recorded words: 'Oh! I love Him! ... My God ... I love you! ...'²³

²⁰ Before his ordination and subsequent entry to Carmel, Henri Grialou (1894-1967) had served in the 1914-1918 war. He attributes to Thérèse a powerful protection 'during his military campaigns in Argonne, Verdun and Chemin des Dames'. But that was not what drew him chiefly to Thérèse. He writes: 'All her exterior miracles, cures, etc., move me only superficially. I am chiefly impressed by the marvels she works in souls, because these are the ones that give glory to Jesus' (ibid.). (see Father François Girard, 'Introduction', xx, fn. 3). This briefest of descriptions provides background for Marie-Eugène's interest in Thérèse.

²¹ Marie-Eugène recalls: 'As we passed through the older part of the building she said to me, "There is the statue of the Sacred Heart where Mother Agnes came to pray on the afternoon of September 30 [1897, the day Thérèse died]. "What do you mean?" I asked. "No one ever told me about this". "Yes", she replied, "on the afternoon of September 30, Thérèse's temptations against faith were so violent that she was in total darkness. Several hours before her death the perspiration stood out on her forehead. She was agitated and begged them to sprinkle her with holy water. "How we ought to pray for the agonizing!" she said. She was close to despair. At this point Mother Agnes, seeing her sister in this condition, was bewildered. She knew well that Thérèse was a saint, but this looked to her more like the death of a sinner. So she went to pray before this statue of the Sacred Heart, of which she was very fond. She pleaded: "Oh Sacred Heart of Jesus, I beg you, do not let my little sister die in despair" (see Girard, 'Introduction', 55, n.31.).

²² LC, 55, 73, 75.

²³ LC, 206. This was not the kind of death of which St John of the Cross wrote for a 'soul' in the state of transforming union. 'Identification with Jesus crucified would normally be succeeded by participation in the triumph of his resurrection. [However, in Thérèse] this triumph had begun. The cross was a throne'. [As was the case with Jesus], Marie-Eugène sees that it is in Thérèse's 'passion' that 'the body of her doctrine was formed and her mission affirmed' (Marie-Eugène, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 108). Michael Fallon notes that, in the Gospel of John, the Messiah was one who would bring life. His throne would never fail. 'His line shall continue forever, and his throne [triumph] endures before me like the sun; (Ps 89:36)'. The wisdom of the Cross is that the Cross is the royal throne (see Michael Fallon, *The Gospel According to St John*, 228). The Cross is the Messiah's triumph.

With all this as background, we move on.

B. The Continuance of Thérèse's Desire — in her last eighteen months — to 'Save Souls'

Since the time of her 'conversion' where she discerned that she was to pour out 'the divine dew' from the Cross 'upon souls', the missionary vocation of Thérèse is lived with the one strong intent, namely, to accomplish that mission. To save souls means, in a perhaps timeworn phrase, to bring them to salvation. This could be rephrased: Thérèse's desire is to share in the mission of Jesus by nudging 'souls' move one step closer along the long continuum from non belief towards confessing strong *faith* in Jesus as the Christ.²⁴

Thérèse is interested in helping all people. In her *Act of Self-Surrender to Merciful Love* she prays: 'I want to console You for the ingratitude of the wicked ... I want to work for Your *Love alone* with the one purpose of pleasing You, consoling Your Sacred Heart, and saving souls who will love You eternally'.²⁵ This means all souls,

²⁴ Throughout this dissertation there has been an attempt to treat one's possible faith/trust responses to God or to an 'ultimate value' on a wide continuum of possibilities, noting that faithfulness to one's ideal is 'all' that is required in response. In the final analysis, however, Christian faith means faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ. In this regard John's Gospel 4:1-42 is relevant. This pericope provides an example of that kind of continuum of possibility: in a progressive dialogic interchange in this story, the woman responds to Jesus with increasing respect that moves into the area of faith: from polite social interchange (vv. 7-15) to 'Sir, I see you are a prophet' (vv. 16-24), to acknowledgment that she knows the Messiah is coming (v. 25), to Jesus' self-disclosure 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you' (v. 26) and finally, to other Samaritans who come to see and to believe for themselves: 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world' (vv. 27-42). Thérèse quotes from this story on at least five occasions in her writings (See *La Bible avec Thérèse of Lisieux*, 237f: GC II, 785, 803; Manuscript A, 100; Manuscript B, 189; PN 24, stanzas 10, 11; TP 8, 4r). Thérèse is very aware of the significant parallel between Jesus' words in this parable 'Give me a drink' and his words from the Cross 'I am thirsty' (Jn 19:28). She interprets Jesus' words, at their deepest spiritual level of meaning, as 'thirsting for souls' and she longs to allay his thirst. That is why *faith* is so basic to 'salvation'. Salvation 'for souls' is the goal for which both Jesus and Thérèse 'thirst'. Salvation is not possible without *faith* (on some level).

²⁵ See *Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love*, Appendix B. The following information is important: 'A frequently asked question is: Did Thérèse plan to save all souls? The answer is yes. There are two extant versions of the Offering. In the first paragraph of both, the French clearly means the salvation of all souls. The definitive version of the Offering reads: [I long] to work for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls on earth and by delivering those who suffer in purgatory. Translated literally, it would read: [I long] to work for the glory of Holy Church by saving *the souls who are on the earth* and by delivering those who suffer in purgatory' (see *An Echo of the Heart of God*, 243). Further, Thérèse is

for example: atheists and others whose belief levels fall somewhere on a long continuum from unbelief to belief; those sensing an invitation to forfeit a life of mediocre faith-ing to committing to a more sincere faith-ing (there is a little atheism in all of us!); and those with Christian faith and many of those without it, all of whom are trying to live honestly and authentically. Bernard Lonergan's states: 'Human authenticity is never some pure and serene and secure possession. It is ever a withdrawal from unauthenticity, and every successful withdrawal only brings to light the need to still further withdrawals'.²⁶ In other words, human authenticity can ever be improved, increased.

Thérèse's desire,²⁷ then, to save souls is directed towards *all* 'souls' at whatever level of 'faithing' or 'believing' is present, and who earnestly strive for authenticity in their lives. For Thérèse, this universalizing loving embrace is a share in Jesus' mission, a mission Jesus often proclaimed in the words: 'I have come to call not the righteous but sinners' (Mt 9:13) — another of Thérèse's favourite texts.²⁸

Strangely, the possibility of Thérèse's *posthumous* mission to continue this same 'work' became clearer to her the deeper she travelled in the 'land of nothingness' in her 'trial of faith'. From within that trial she said:

I feel that I'm about to enter into my rest. But I feel especially that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making God loved as I love him, of giving my little way to souls. If God answers my desires my heaven will be spent on earth until the end of the world. Yes, I want to spend my heaven in doing good

not excluding herself from 'ingratitude' and 'displeasing Jesus' for she states in this same prayer of *Self-Offering*: 'If through frailty I sometimes fall, may your *Divine Glance* purify my soul immediately, consuming all my imperfections, as fire transforms all things into itself ...' (255). The continuing commentary on the words 'I want to console You for the ingratitude of the wicked ...' [from the *Act of Self-Offering*] notes that 'Thérèse's apostolic orientation reveals her unerring knowledge of what truly does console the Saviour's Heart ['His heart buring with *Love*']. It reveals her life's aim to share in his labour and sacrifice *for the sake of every other human being*, for each of us' (cf. *An Echo from the Heart of God*, 261 [my emphasis]).

²⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 110.

²⁷ *Desire (le désir)* [she uses the word 211 times] is a very strong feature of Thérèse's spiritual life: she has 'immense desires' (cf. *SS Act of Self-Surrender to Merciful Love*; Manuscript B, 192). The intensity of her desire to love God 'drove out', so to speak, the inclination to sin. 'To save souls' was the missionary side of her desire to love God. It was love in action.

²⁸ See *SS Manuscript A*, 84; *SS Manuscript B*, 199; *Pri* 7, 75; *RP*, 2, 3rbis. Cited in *La Bible avec Thérèse of Lisieux*, 163f.

on earth ... I can't make heaven a feast of rejoicing: I can't rest as long as there are souls to be saved.²⁹

Three days earlier, on 14 July 1897, in her last letter to Père Roulland, Thérèse wrote:

Ah! Brother, I feel it, I shall be more useful to you in heaven than on earth, and it is with joy that I come to announce to you my coming entrance into that blessed city ... I really count on not remaining inactive in heaven. My desire is to work still for the Church and for souls. I am asking God for this and I am certain he will answer me.³⁰

Many there are to attest to the power of these words. 'The cult of St Thérèse of Lisieux has a history unequalled in recent centuries', writes Ida Görres.³¹

C. Thérèse's 'Trial of Faith'

What was this trial? There seem to be at least four parts to it. First, there is Thérèse's continuing but unfelt loving encounter with Jesus — this has been partly dealt with above. Second, the trial is given to her by Jesus: 'Thérèse interprets the night of nothingness as a gesture of God ... the night of nothingness has become a mystical antiphrasis'.³² Third, there is her *real* experience of the loss of faith; and four, we have

²⁹ LC, 102.

³⁰ GC II, 1141. For similar themes, see also: 'Yes, I am certain of it, after my entrance into life, *my dear little Brother's* sadness will be changed into a *peaceful joy* that no creature will be able to take from him. ... When I shall be in port, I shall teach you, dear little Brother of my soul, how you must sail the stormy sea of the world with the abandonment and the love of a child who knows his Father loves him and would be unable to leave him in the hour of danger' (GC II, 1152: Letter to l'abbé Bellière, 18 July 1897); '... and I, who am not your little sister for nothing, I promise to have you taste after my departure for eternal life the happiness one can find in feeling a friendly soul next to oneself' (GC II, 1163: Letter to l'abbé Bellière, 26 July 1897).

³¹ See Ida F. Görres, 'The Ascent', in *The Hidden Face*: 1-5 where Görres details aspects of the magnitude of Thérèse's posthumous mission; see also Elizabeth Ficocelli, *Shower of Heavenly Roses: Stories of the Intercession of St Thérèse of Lisieux* (New York: Crossroad, 2004); 'The figure of the "shower of roses" has served its turn, and served it well in winning over the many who have a taste for the romantic and pretty. But these "roses" are in fact graces, and grace is not carried easily: for complete fruition it requires a martyrdom of the soul' (see Henri Ghéon, *The Secret of the Little Flower*, 234).

³² See Waaijman, 'Mystagogic Research - The Personal Notes of Thérèse of Lisieux', in *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*: 907-911. An *antiphrasis* (from Greek and Latin: *anti*, opposite, and *phrasis*, diction) is a figure of speech, that is, a word used to mean the opposite of its usual sense, especially when intended ironically. Thérèse's night of nothingness is really the flame's light of love. Waaijman treats of the transformation in love and the transformation in glory which follows it. He writes: 'Now that Teresa has been cut off on all sides by the night of faith and her soul's point of gravity has shifted to him who has carved the night of nothingness into her soul, she has nothing left to

the perplexing question of how there can be a sense of *complete* loss of faith when only a *portion* of faith's beliefs seem to be shrouded, that is, there is no heaven, no afterlife. Further to that, there is the disturbing revelation in early 1897 that 'Diana Vaughan' was not, as she declared, a convert from Freemasonry but the assumed name for Leo Taxil, a roguish blasphemer.³³

lose. She has become light enough to be transformed into glory along the lines of love. "It seems to me now that nothing could prevent me from flying away, for I no longer have any great desires except that of loving to the point of dying of love". That is the transformation-in-glory', writes Waaijman, 911.

³³ Atheism, for Thérèse, was *the* sin against faith. She had first hand experience, in the Diana Vaughan debacle. 'Diana Vaughan was an American woman, born in 1864 and brought up by her father in the Palladian rite, a Masonic Luciferian spiritism. In 1889 she became high priestess of Palladianism and established herself in New York in 1891; soon she divided her time between the United States and Europe. In France, in 1893, she met two deserters from freemasonry, Dr Bataille and Léo Taxil, and a Catholic figure who painted an ecstatic picture of Diana: "What a shame that she isn't Catholic!" Diana declared that Satan was the great puppeteer of Freemasonry, and on 1 January 1894 the *Echo de Rome*, taking up the *Osservatore romano*, wrote: "Freemasonry is *satanic* at every point" (Jean-François Six, *The Light of Night*, 35). Léo Taxil pretended to be Diana, a convert to Catholicism. If the freemason Diana Vaughan was converted — and the Lisieux convent had been praying for this — Satan himself would be conquered. Thérèse was certain that she had had previous experience of this same struggle in her sickness at the age of ten and 'which appeared on the public scene [now] as a battle between the angel of God and Lucifer, the fallen angel'. She had also remarked that the devil had inspired her, on the eve of her Religious Profession that the life of a Carmelite was not for her. For Thérèse, the devil 'is at work in the soul but also in society; and she notes this more than even in the Diana Vaughan affair' (see Six, 39). [This is an example of the lived-out struggle between 'Divine Love here below in its grievous struggle against sin — a fight to the death between Love and sin's hatred']. 'Similarly, at Easter 1896, Thérèse is in the darkness; she no longer sees Heaven, just as at the moment of her profession she no longer saw her vocation. The Diana Vaughan affair shows her that there are beings profoundly plunged into even more profound darkness: the darkness in which one finds oneself when one openly fights God, as Lucifer did — if you like by rejecting God in principle, by refusing to recognize him, by removing him from one's existence. At Easter 1896 she understands 'that there are really souls who have no faith' (Six, 39f.). We can refer even more specifically to the Diana Vaughan affair. Thérèse had written and directed several *Pious Recreation* pieces for the community of which she was a member. In the last of these, *The Triumph of Humility* (June 1896), Thérèse makes extensive reference to the Diana Vaughan's case. At the time of writing, Thérèse did not know that Diana Vaughan was the fictitious creation of Leo Taxil, a notorious anti-Catholic propagandist; she was remembering, rather, his publicized 'conversion'. *The Triumph of Humility* provided Thérèse with an opportunity to examine the struggle between good and evil with the assistance of St Michael the Archangel, to celebrate the conversion of Diana Vaughan, and to portray that event as a victory over the demons. Its main theme echoes the sin of the fallen Lucifer, 'I will not serve.' It is important to highlight that its themes, particularly those of pride (self-will) and humility (littleness), acutely bear resemblance to her own interior struggles regarding sin and belief. Thérèse's play raises the nature of moral evil and places it within the context of a fundamental, interior struggle to acknowledge God's lordship, or conversely, to succumb to a false pride in which the Kingdom of God is obscured and opposed. For St Thérèse it might be said that wars and atrocities of every kind are macrocosmic signs of the microcosmic wars waged in the depths of the soul' (see John Russell, 'Theological Reflection' on *The Triumph of Humility*, trans. John Russell and Helen Bailey.) See also John Russell, 'Religious Plays of St Thérèse', in John Sullivan, ed., *Carmelite Studies: Experiencing St Thérèse Today* (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1990): 51f.

The follow-up to the Diana Vaughan story is unexpected. In the long-awaited press conference that took place on East-Monday night of 1897 in the Geographic Society's auditorium in Paris, Miss Diana Vaughan in the person of Leo Taxil walked on to the platform. He was proud of the hoax he had played on the public. Thérèse, too, had been fooled into believing the conversion story. A short time prior to

The 'night of faith' or 'the trial' covers all aspects and they overlap. It seems important that no one of these aspects of the one 'trial' be emphasised at the expense of the others.

Coinciding with the first incidence of hemoptyses — she understood it as '*the distant murmur that announced the Bridegroom's arrival*' — Thérèse enters the 'night of faith' at Easter 1896. Using her ability to express herself meaningfully and creatively in image and symbol, she describes it in these words:

At this time [prior to Easter 1896] I was enjoying such a living faith, such a clear *faith*, that the thought of heaven made up all my happiness, and I was unable to believe there were really [some] impious [*des impies*] people who had no faith [*n'ayant pas la foi*]. I believed they were actually speaking against their own inner convictions when they denied the existence of heaven, that beautiful heaven where God Himself wanted to be their Eternal Reward. During those very joyful days of the Easter season [1896], Jesus made me feel that there were really souls who have no faith, and who, through the abuse of grace, lost this precious treasure, the source of the only real and pure joys. He permitted my soul to be invaded by the thickest darkness, and that the thought of heaven, up until then so sweet to me, be no longer anything but the cause of struggle and torment. This trial was to last not a few days or a few weeks, it was not to be extinguished until the hour set by God Himself and this hour has not yet come. I would like to be able to express what I feel, but alas! I believe this is impossible. One would have to travel through this dark tunnel to understand its darkness. I will try to explain it by a comparison.³⁴

In this extract we notice several important points: the relationship between faith and its loss is caused by the abuse of grace; that the trial is permitted by Jesus; that the thickest darkness is associated with Thérèse's previous conviction that there *was* an afterlife; and we know that the trial lasts until the very last moment of her dying.

this 'revelation' of the real Diana Vaughan, Thérèse had been asked by Mother Agnes (who was very enthused about the story), to write a poem for Miss Vaughan. Thérèse, however, could not find the required inspiration. Instead, she wrote a letter and sent a photo of herself as Joan of Arc in prison (a photo taken, courtesy of her sister Céline, at the time of one of Thérèse's previous plays on the subject of Joan of Arc). Taxil received Thérèse's letter and photo, and wrote her a letter in return, using the name Diana Vaughan. When Taxil decided to stop his game of deceit, he chose to use Thérèse's photo — projected on to a large screen — perhaps as a diversion, in the hall where the speech was scheduled. It seems that Thérèse who usually kept the correspondence addressed to her, destroyed Taxil's letter, maybe in disgust! See also John Sullivan, 'Teaching from the Table of Sinners': 161-176. These pages 168-171 from Sullivan give detail of this case of Diana Vaughan - or Leo Taxil (1854-1907).

³⁴ SS Manuscript C, 211f. The French edition uses the phrase '*des impies*' not '*les impies*'. This does not alter the overall sense of the meaning of the word 'impious'. The English translation never implies that Thérèse thought *all* souls were impious. She meant 'some' were and the English picks up that meaning.

Thérèse describes this 'trial', not so much as *like* being in a 'dark tunnel' as almost a symbol of her actual state: she is *it* — so much is she enclosed by the tunnel below and the fog above. Actually, the tunnel seems to be a still more severe version of the one she described in 1890 as 'a subterranean passage where it is neither cold nor hot, where the sun does not shine, and in which the rain or the wind does not visit'.³⁵ However, she then goes on to describe it in metaphor, in a comparison, in an image. She likens it to being born in a country now covered in 'thick fog' and where the brilliance of the sun is never seen but where, too — she has heard from her elders — these marvels did once occur and that, perhaps, they might occur again one day. But these sightings of the sun and therefore, the possibility of its re-appearance, are not hers to experience. If she once knew them (Thérèse is speaking in metaphor), if she had once experienced the sense of God's presence — all is now gone completely. Her mind is focused on the present, and is unable to access past memories of delight. Now all this, according to Thérèse, is not only an exact representation of *her* state of soul but it is also 'a reality, for the King of the Fatherland of the bright sun actually came and lived for thirty-three years in the land of darkness'.³⁶ It is the *King's* reality too. And, thinking of the King rather than of herself, she adds: 'Alas! The darkness did not understand that this Divine King was the Light of the world'.

She is describing in symbol and image the state of her soul and, at the same time, I suggest, describing the state of souls *actually* in the state of sin — even though Jesus has redeemed the world from sin and death and the grace of intimacy with God is never withheld. She continues:

Your child, however, O Lord, has understood Your divine light, and she begs pardon for her brothers [and sisters]. She is resigned to eat the bread of sorrow as long as You desire it; she does not wish to rise up from this table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating until the day set by You.³⁷

³⁵ GC I, 652.

³⁶ This seems to be saying that prior to Jesus' death and resurrection, the world was in metaphorical darkness, that is, in sin.

³⁷ SS Manuscript C, 212.

Thérèse sits with those in sin, the sin of 'no faith'. In a sense, and in a significant, selfless missionary act, she carries their sin, their despair.³⁸ This is the 'land of darkness', the 'table of bitterness'. The imagery is significant. The soul's state is 'filled' with 'bitterness' when it rejects God absolutely. The 'darkness' and the 'bitterness' represent this soul of which we are speaking. (We can talk only in images when describing spiritual realities). The darkness reflects the sin. The bitterness expresses the 'desolation' felt by an individual soul in sin; or the 'desolation' that would be felt if the individual was able to self-reflect. (This 'desolation' sources a description of today's culture as, in part, 'desolate'). Scripture also uses similar imagery.³⁹

This leads to a question: is the 'sin against faith' the same as the one John's Gospel names as failure to believe?⁴⁰ And is this failure to believe also the 'sin against the Holy Spirit'? (cf. Mk 3:22-30; Mt 12:31-32; 1 Jn 4:16-17). The sin against the Holy Spirit is the persistent rejecting of the convincing ministry of the Holy Spirit who bears witness to the true identity of Jesus Christ. John's Gospel's 'failure to believe' is the choosing to turn away from the light [of truth] and choosing to remain forever in

³⁸ Caroline Myss has suggested that Mother Teresa, who also suffered from the darkness of unbelief, might actually have been carrying the despair of those among whom she ministered. She carried *their* despair in being poor, hungry and unsheltered. Similarly, Thérèse of Lisieux, whom Myss also recalls in her reference, carried the 'sin' of others (see Caroline Myss, *Entering the Castle: Exploring Your Mystical Experience of God* [Audio 9-CD Set - Lecture], 5/9. This insight is particularly helpful in understanding Jesus' redemptive act: he carried our burdens; he carried our sin (Cf. 1 Cor 15:3).

³⁹ For example, John's Gospel uses the imagery of light and darkness in connecting darkness with sin and light with faith: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' (Jn 1:5). For John, *light* [Jesus] overcomes the darkness [sin]; for Thérèse, God's *merciful love* [shown in Jesus] overcomes it [the darkness]. Matthew's Gospel points to some similar interpretation when it explains that if you cannot see the infinite value of God, you are in darkness: 'If the eye in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!' (Mt 6:23).

⁴⁰ The word 'believe' occurs ninety-eight times in the Gospel of John. 'At the conclusion of the Cana scene (Jn 2:1-11) we are told that Jesus' disciples "believed in him"'. The theme of 'belief' is central to John's understanding of the proper response one is called to have to Jesus'. 'At the conclusion of [John's] gospel he tells us that his purpose in writing is that "you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name"' (20:31). In the Prologue [John the evangelist] announced that the Baptist came as a witness to testify to the light, "so that all might believe through him" (1:7). The Johannine author goes on to declare that the gift of becoming children of God is given by the Word to "all who believe in his name" (1:12). In his conversation with Nathanael (Jn 1:50), Jesus also spoke of believing. Perhaps it is this following text that inspired Thérèse's words about the King of light coming to the darkness: 'Those who believe in [Jesus] are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.' (Jn 3:18-19). (see Michael Fallon, 'Index / 'belief' and its references', in *The Gospel According to John*, 384).

unbelief [darkness]. Thérèse's 'sin against faith' (committed by the *impies*) is the extreme rejection of faith.⁴¹

Jean-François Six states that 'the impious' [*les impies*] — 'those without faith' — are not feeble and lukewarm souls ... but ... those beings who decide, in full awareness and in profound freedom, to reject God'. But, he asks, is it really possible to reject God? 'Yes, Thérèse tell us; she assures us that she has received from Jesus this understanding of the darkness as it is experienced by these beings who say no'.⁴² This, according to Six, 'is the sin against the Holy Spirit; the obstinate rejection of light'.⁴³ And again he states: 'the fundamental sin is not to believe in love — the love of God and others; to condemn Jesus without knowing him or to betray him after having known him'.⁴⁴

Thérèse's 'Trial of Faith' (continued)

Thérèse returns to her image. She maintains the hope, she writes, of going 'one day far from the sad and dark country' not only because she had heard others speak of its previous sunny existence but also because she, herself, feels 'real longings for this most beautiful country'. We notice the superimposed images of 'dark country' and 'beautiful country'. The former is her present understanding of an afterlife while the

⁴¹ See also 'Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost', *ST* II.II, 14. Thomas Aquinas deals with this issue under four headings: 1) Is blasphemy or the sin against the Holy Ghost the same as the sin committed through certain malice?; 2) The Species of this sin; 3) Can it be forgiven?; and 4) Is it possible to begin by sinning against the Holy Ghost before committing other sins? See *ST*:

www.newadvent.org/summa/3014.htm. Copyright 2008 by Kevin Knight. [Accessed 12/06/08]. There does not seem to be a definitive answer. Much depends on the understanding of terms, for example, blasphemy, malice, impenitence, habit, good, evil, free will. 'Considered in itself, the sin is unpardonable; but God can pardon it' (Art. 3. Reply to Objection 3) — 'Unpardonable', maybe, because of the lack of desire for repentance. 'So great is the downfall of this sin', says Augustine, 'that it cannot submit to the humiliation of asking for pardon', *ibid*. Nevertheless, Thérèse seems trustful that her prayers 'at the table of sinners' will be efficacious: 'May all those who were not enlightened by the bright flame of faith one day see it shine', she writes (*SS* Manuscript C, 212).

⁴² See Six, *Light of the Night*, 27. Six later adds another citation from the *Grand Larousse* concerning the impious: "'There is in him [sic] something of the spirit which one attributes to Satan; he is the enemy of God; one can be impious even when one believes, if the diabolical spirit with which one is inspired tramples beliefs under foot". So impiety goes far beyond anticlericalism and denotes a resolute fight against all beliefs. Thérèse knows this impiety, among other things through an event which stamped her life'[her once-removed encounter with Diana Vaughan / Leo Taxil] (cf. Six, 34f).

⁴³ Six, 27.

⁴⁴ Six, 28. An important nuanced version of this is, as we have seen previously, that sin is the refusal to allow oneself to be loved by Jesus. This certainly was not Thérèse's kind of spirituality.

latter represents her former hope for the Homeland of heaven. But after this slight shaft of hope, her torment redoubles: 'It seems to me that the darkness, borrowing the voice of sinners, says mockingly to me:

You are dreaming about the light, about a fatherland embalmed in the sweetest perfumes; you are dreaming about the *eternal* possession of the Creator of all these marvels; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog that surrounds you! Advance, advance; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for but a night still more profound, the night of nothingness.⁴⁵

So difficult and painful is this experience of the 'night of nothingness' in her soul that Thérèse desists from describing it further for fear she might blaspheme.⁴⁶ From *outside* of it, so to speak, Love, as she somehow still believes, knows no limits. But from *inside*, all is different:

There was not just a world ruled by uncaring and relentless power — power that was even farther off than hatred or hostility — a power antagonistic to an all-good Creator. No, what Thérèse (with all true explorers of this spiritual realm) had to face was the disappearance of all good godhead into this uncaring godhead. It is the encounter with final despair. It is the dying of the spirit. And to meet this *really* and with no ray of light from a better world, to know *for certain* that thus it is: this is indeed the final test.⁴⁷

Thérèse really experienced this 'no ray of light from a better world'. At the same time, she was selflessly absorbed, it seems, by the 'woundedness of fallen human nature'. Michelle Jones describes this well:

In her last months, Thérèse's heart was completely broken open and the full drama of the woundedness of fallen human nature — which includes, most drastically, the possibility of unbelief — absorbed into the very core of her being. Thérèse's ready sympathy with those who commit suicide — an act commonly interpreted in her times as one of utter despair, and thus the ultimate sign of unbelief — demonstrates the radical extent of her absorption of human woundedness. 'If I had not had any faith', she reportedly declares almost one week before her death, 'I would have committed suicide without an instant's hesitation ...' So Thérèse now knew definitively that any attempt

⁴⁵ SS Manuscript C, 212f.

⁴⁶ SS Manuscript C, 213.

⁴⁷ O'Donoghue, 'The Jonas Experience': 88-99.

to differentiate between the 'good' and the 'evil' or the 'us' and the 'them' was 'complete absurdity'.⁴⁸

Thérèse experienced it; people *without* faith did exist. And what is more, she, herself, now seems to be one of them. *Her* faith is threatened. *She* is tempted not to believe in the existence of heaven where God is. It is now at this point that we can answer a query raised previously. Speaking of Thérèse and others in like position who might deny but one aspect of the Catholic belief, for example, eternal life, Joseph Ratzinger writes: 'What is at stake is the whole structure [of one's faith]; it is a question of all or nothing. That is the only remaining alternative; nowhere does there seem anything to cling to in this sudden fall. Wherever one looks, only the bottomless abyss of nothingness can be seen', he writes.⁴⁹ While Thérèse's trial might have centred on the article of the creed which states: 'I believe in life everlasting', 'it is', according to Ratzinger, 'all or nothing' that one is tempted to deny.⁵⁰ For Thérèse, 'the "night of nothingness" strictly means that there is "nothing": neither God, nor heaven, nor the beyond'.⁵¹ On the other hand, Conrad de Meester who has made a thorough study of Thérèse's writings, states:

⁴⁸ See Michelle Jones, 'From Mother to Sister', 41f. citing *LC*, 196, and Miriam Vaughan, 'Solidarity With Unbelievers', in *The Way Supplement*(1997): 106-113 at 112.

⁴⁹ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 'Belief in the World of Today', in *Introduction to Christianity*, new rev. edn., trans. J. R. Foster, new preface, trans. Michael M. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990 / 2004), 43. Ratzinger states of Thérèse: 'That lovable Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, who looks so naïve and unproblematical ... her mind is beset by every possible argument against the faith; the sense of believing seems to have vanished; she feels that she is now "in sinners' shoes"', 42. In another place and in a remark unrelated to Thérèse, Ratzinger states: 'Even atheism's dismissal of the subject of God is only apparent, that in reality it represents a form of man's [sic] concern with the question of God, a form that can express a particular passion about this question and not infrequently does', 104. Does not that statement of Ratzinger's sound like Thérèse's words: 'I was unable to believe that there were really impious people who had no faith. I believed they were actually speaking against their own inner convictions ...'? Thérèse goes on to say that: 'Jesus made me feel that there were really souls who have not faith, and who, through the abuse of grace, lost this previous treasure, the source of the only real and pure joys'. However, Ratzinger does not extend his thought as far as that.

⁵⁰ The Chaplain of the Lisieux was Father Louis-Augusts Youf. He was Thérèse's ordinary confessor all through her religious life. It was Youf, it seems, who suggested that she carry a copy of the Creed on her person when she told him of her doubts. Certainly it was he who told her not to dwell on her temptations against the faith. (cf. *LC*, 58). Ida Görres suggests that 'possibly a simple conversation with some understanding priest, a fearless discussion, attainment of a high point of view, development of greater exactness in her ideas, might have dispelled a good many spectres' of the 'arguments of the worst materialists' (see Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 356). My view is, however, that this suffering was offered to Thérèse; it was a mystical gift.

⁵¹ Six, *Light of the Night*, 173.

We might be tempted to think that 'the thick fog' which hid heaven from her view also obscured any thought of Jesus' divine mission, and even of God's existence, but no. In her autobiography, Thérèse described her temptations as against heaven alone. She testified unmistakably to Mother Agnes that her struggles had to do with heaven (in the sense of our ultimate destination). She felt that such temptations were peculiar to her alone and could not be explained logically. She described her situation as 'strange and incomprehensible'.⁵²

This 'total night' seems like the 'whole structure' of Thérèse's faith is lost. It isn't; but it *seems* like it is. Without taking one *iota* from this situation — and we recognise it as an honest account of the actual facts of Thérèse's life at this time — we are confronted here with something of a paradox. Can an atheist still pray? An unbeliever? Thérèse can. It requires faith to pray. Thérèse, therefore, cannot really *be* an atheist, but, paradoxically, she feels like she is. When one is in that state of 'nothingness', words of consolation from others, so well meaning, are, perhaps, to no avail.⁵³ 'She begs pardon for her brothers [and sisters]'. Yes, she and they together — all are sinners, but *she* can pray: 'Have pity on us, O Lord, for we are poor sinners!' To pray in this way is not possible for a person without faith — 'Throughout her trial, Thérèse clung tenaciously to the faith in which she had been so carefully instructed as a child', says Miller.⁵⁴ John Reid writes about unbelief: 'The frank and honest confession of this capacity for unbelief in the believer should teach him [sic] his closeness, his solidarity even, with those who openly and gladly profess their unbelief'.⁵⁵ Thérèse is in this position; she is, perhaps, in the triple-role of being tempted to unbelief herself, identifying with unbelievers, and being their intercessor at the same time. Thérèse adds: 'she is resigned to eat the bread of sorrow [this distress that You, Jesus, must feel at knowing people do not believe in you] as long as You desire it.' She will not 'rise up from this table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating until the day set by You'.⁵⁶ And, as she said earlier, 'this hour has not yet come'. She is sitting at this table of bitterness, one with the others who have no faith, and yes, she really experiences the

⁵² Conrad de Meester, *With Empty Hands*, 79.

⁵³ This is not a state of clinical depression. One has only to notice the many literary works Thérèse produces in these eighteen months to realize this. Further, in these months she does everything possible to conceal her sickness and her anguish of soul (see Görres, *The Hidden Face*: 358-361).

⁵⁴ Miller, *The Trial of Faith of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 50.

⁵⁵ See Reid, *Man Without God*, 118.

⁵⁶ SS Manuscript C, 212.

desolation, but yet, she continues in prayer. Her heart has reached new depths of openness to the seeming endless length of continuum from unbelief to belief, to faith to holiness.⁵⁷ (In parenthesis, we cite C. S. Lewis who captures the paradox of this situation in his *The Screwtape Letters* in which the senior devil says to the junior devil:

Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys).⁵⁸

In using the symbol 'table filled with bitterness', is not Thérèse conscious of another table referred to in the Gospels, the one where '[Jesus] eats with tax collectors and sinners? (cf. Mt 9:11-13). Was that table also filled with bitterness? No, perhaps not; for those 'so called' sinners welcome Jesus' company or so it seems, and he welcomes them — even 'calls' them. Whereas, at 'the table filled with bitterness' and 'soiled' by unbelievers, the table where Thérèse now is, here sit people of a different frame of mind — the table has been *soiled by them*. One gets the impression that these people are *continuing* to soil the table.

O Jesus! if it is needful that the table soiled by them be purified by a soul who loves You, then I desire to eat this bread of trial at this table until it pleases You to bring me into You bright Kingdom. The only grace I ask of You is that I never offend You!⁵⁹

⁵⁷ In relation to holiness, Jean Lafrance writes: 'We must be convinced that all are invited to the eternal wedding banquet of which Christ speaks in the Gospel. We have the duty of aiming for that and our most serious sin is possibly to limit our hope to a small holiness suited to our size and created in our workshops' (see Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, 172). Thérèse says much the same thing, though she expresses it in the negative: 'Those souls are rare who don't measure the divine power according to their own narrow minds' (SS Manuscript C, 209).

⁵⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co., 1942), 47.

⁵⁹ SS Manuscript C, 212. Speaking of 'The Call of Levi' (Mk 2:13-17), Brendan Byrne makes the point that because one of the sinners (Levi) has been called by Jesus to join his band of disciples, it is 'not really possible to draw a rigid line between disciples and "sinners"' (see Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom*, 59). Jesus is pleased to be associated with these 'tax collectors and sinners' and he brings to them his '*Compassionate Presence*' of healing and forgiveness. Thérèse sees herself in somewhat a parallel situation — she is a sinner (though unlike Jesus who is sinless — but who has, nevertheless, 'taken on' the sinfulness of humankind). As well, as *compassionate companion* Thérèse represents Jesus at the 'table of bitterness' at which she sits. With Thérèse, it is difficult to separate: Thérèse, a sinner, sitting among sinners, and representing Jesus at the same time. There is similarity and dissimilarity between the gospel narrative and Thérèse's experience.

It is surely something of an incomprehensibility that there can co-exist in Thérèse many seeming opposites: her knowledge that she is a sinner and her desire to make reparation for sinners; her statement: 'If you only knew how the thought of going soon to heaven leaves me calm'⁶⁰ and her experience that the fog that penetrates her soul envelops all image of heaven — 'the *eternal* possession of the Creator';⁶¹ the loss of faith, and yet to have faith — 'If I had not had any faith, I would have committed suicide';⁶² and all this together with her dying physical condition.⁶³ However, it is perhaps easier to hold all these together in one's mind than it is to describe them on paper where one needs to discuss them separately. Analysis seems to disallow synthesis. Thérèse prays:

Ah! may Jesus pardon me if I have caused Him any pain, but He knows very well that while I do not have *the joy of faith*, I am trying to carry out its works at least. I believe I have made more acts of faith in this past year than all through my whole life ... I tell Him I am ready to shed my blood to the last drop to profess my faith in the existence of heaven. I tell Him, too, I am happy not to enjoy this beautiful heaven on this earth so that He will open it for all eternity to poor unbelievers.⁶⁴

From the deep regions of her heart Thérèse suffers this trial — all the incomprehensibilities that she is now experiencing — for each and every unbeliever who willingly and knowingly chooses to reject grace: 'O my God! ... if my suffering was really unknown to You, which is impossible, I would still be happy to have it, if through it I could prevent or make reparation for one single sin against *faith*'.⁶⁵

D. The Sin Against Faith

It is the knowing abuse of grace that pinpoints the sin. From our previous discussion on grace in this dissertation, we reasoned that since God wills the salvation of all

⁶⁰ *LC*, 183. Thérèse does add: 'However, I'm very happy, but I can't say that I'm experiencing a living joy and transports of happiness, no!'

⁶¹ *SS* Manuscript C, 213.

⁶² *LC*, 196.

⁶³ See Guy Gaucher, *The Passion of Thérèse of Lisieux 4 April - 30 September 1897* for a detailed account of Thérèse's final illness.

⁶⁴ *SS* Manuscript C, 213f.

⁶⁵ *SS* Manuscript C, 214.

people, grace is given to all. The gift of grace, then, can be abused and when this occurs, it is sinful. How does this 'play itself out' in today's world? How do people today *abuse* grace? The answer to the question depends on each one's state of conscience. Many devout people today are surely aware of *grace* given and of the possibility of *abusing* it; for the more 'light' there is in the soul the clearer is seen the 'dust or imperfections' that produce darkness. Not even a speck of dust (sin / imperfection) is small for those who live in God's love. Not even the peaceful coexistence of the 'old self' and the 't/True self' is possible in a life of total union with God.⁶⁶ It must be the God self alone.

A related point can be raised. Thérèse's insight 'all is a grace',⁶⁷ would constantly require of her, and others like her, a clear discernment and a stable conscience. In the past Thérèse had suffered from scrupulosity; but that 'weakness' now seems replaced, through constant vigilance, by a maturity grounded in truth: 'Ah! ... Jesus, ... enlighten me, for You know I am seeking only the truth.'⁶⁸

Yet might we ask: is not the *abuse* of grace at the heart of today's 'profound desolation haunting the roots of our post-modern culture'?⁶⁹ The denial of God and loss of a sense of sin certainly seem to be realities today. However, do they necessarily involve abuse of grace? We simply cannot answer that question for we do not know whether the 'denial' is final or merely passing; we do not know the state of conscience of each individual person. Nevertheless, 'unless religion finds a rich language for compelling new insights, it will not appeal to the restlessness of contemporary man'⁷⁰ and the *malaise* will continue.

Borrowing a phrase from *Evangelium vitae* we can say that Thérèse really experienced her version of what today can be called the 'culture of death'.⁷¹ For

⁶⁶ See Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, 165.

⁶⁷ *LC*, 57.

⁶⁸ *SS* Manuscript B, 197.

⁶⁹ See Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux', 264.

⁷⁰ See Reid, *Man Without God*, 70.

⁷¹ See John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, 1995, # 24. This encyclical letter concerns the value and inviolability of human life: 'The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message', # 1; 'The Gospel of life, proclaimed in the beginning when man [sic] was created in the image of God for a

example, she has sympathy with those who suicide, for she experiences first hand the pull towards it. She 'identifies' with the extreme case of unbelief in her time and, until recently, in Catholic life. For a suicide, no funeral was allowed in a Church or burial in consecrated ground. Suicide was seen as an act of despair, the ultimate rejection of God, as perhaps *the* sin of unbelief.⁷² Albert Nolan referred to it as 'suppressed despair'; and this is what Thérèse now experiences.⁷³ (Of course, 'grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide'.)⁷⁴ Thérèse would surely identify similarly today with people suffering other aspects of a 'culture of death' or the 'profound desolation' haunting our world.⁷⁵ violence, terrorism, starvation, loss of human rights and family breakdown. And this causes us to question whether these 'acts' are 'sins against faith'. They are surely sins against 'life' which, we believe, is God's gift: 'Precisely because life is sacred, the taking of even one human life is a momentous event'.⁷⁶

There have been many definitions of sin attempted in this dissertation and there are many more, undoubtedly, that are not here. Yet all of them are trying to get to the *essence* of the 'sin against faith', especially for today. Does this sin exist? If so, what is it? 'Sin' is a word, that used in common parlance, means a transgression of divine or moral law. Especially in its common usage, sin is more an offence against the moral law than against the divine law. 'I think for committed persons the main problem is not sin as malice but sin as sickness', writes Thomas Green reflecting on Romans 7, and the 'two laws' we find in ourselves, 'the flesh' and 'the spirit'. The good attracts; but one is weak in acting upon it. 'But thanks be to God, for the victory is achieved, is

destiny of full and perfect life (cf. Gen 2:7; Wis 9:2-3), is contradicted by the painful experience of death which enters the world and casts its shadow of meaninglessness over man's entire existence. Death came into the world as a result of the devil's envy (cf. Gen 3:1, 4-5) and the sin of our first parents (cf. Gen 2:17, 3:17-19). And death entered it in a violent way, through the killing of Abel by his brother Cain: 'And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him' (Gen 4:8), # 7). See also Thomas Fuechtmann et. al., (ed.). *A Consistent Ethic of Life: Joseph Cardinal Bernardin* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1988). [Accessed 19/06/08].

⁷² Private Notes.

⁷³ See Chapter 1, 8.

⁷⁴ CCC, # 2282.

⁷⁵ See Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux': 261-279.

⁷⁶ *A Consistent Ethic of Life*, 3.

already won in Christ Jesus'.⁷⁷ However, the divine law contained in Divine Revelation does not exist for people without faith. For people with some faith, the divine law exists, but perhaps can be 'shelved' for the time being. In Catholic theology, 'sin' is an offence against the goodness of God and so any point on the continuum from belief to unbelief, sin is a form of idolatry. For those who do not believe in God or the divine law, to violate the moral law is an offence against one's humanity; for those who believe in God, sin is the preference of one's will to God's will; for Christians, sin is refusal to believe in Jesus whose example makes clear the extent to which his followers are invited to keep the divine law: 'And being found in human form, he [Jesus] humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross' (Phil 2:8).

To sin 'against faith' is a personal responsibility involving personal freedom. 'Without freedom there would be no sin. Equally, without freedom there would be no compassion, no generosity, no heroism, no love. Freedom is at the very heart of what it means to be a person'.⁷⁸ While we can speak of 'cultural sin', 'sinful structures' or 'social sin',⁷⁹ sin is really the result of a personal decision; it cannot be merely vaguely and nebulously public. On the other hand, 'sin is never a purely individual matter: it always has a social, communal dimension to it'.⁸⁰ The 'sin against faith' today, then, might be when one allows the 'desolation' in our culture — from nuclear warfare, the practice of abortion, euthanasia, suicide, ethnic conflicts, immoral genetic practices or capital punishment — to enter one's heart and take root there; when one 'gives up' on *hope*. And of course, the end point of loss of hope is despair. If we define 'desolation' as a 'people's complete lack of connection to their own deepest hungers',⁸¹ then the 'sin against faith' today is the sin against one's humanity; it is the denial of the transcendent dimension in the human person. This transcendent dimension is surely in denial in what some media outlets name as the 'New Sins' for today: cruelty, adultery,

⁷⁷ See Thomas H. Green, *A Vacation with the Lord: A Personal, Directed Retreat* (Notre Dame IN: Ave Maria Press, 1986), 61f.

⁷⁸ See Fallon, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introductory Commentary*, 101.

⁷⁹ 'Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to divine goodness. "Structures of sin" are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a 'social sin' (cf. CCC, # 1869).

⁸⁰ Frank O'Loughlin, *The Future of the Sacrament of Penance* (Strathfield NEW: St Pauls Publications, 2007), 163.

⁸¹ See Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux', *TS* 61/2 (2000): 261-279.

bigotry, dishonesty, hypocrisy, greed and selfishness as it is in the listed traditional Capital Sins of pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth.⁸² It is in denial in horror films, sexual perversion, the circulation of harmful drugs and the like. The abuse of grace can be described as the denial of the transcendent in the human person, which is ultimately the denial of God — and this brings with it its own sense of desolation.

Thérèse was well aware that *her* world, too, seemed very far from the one promised by faith:

Before her entry into Carmel, Thérèse had a keen interest in world and ecclesiastical events. She was in touch with current ideological and political issues through her uncle, Isidore Guérin, and his skills in journalism. Thérèse also had an avid interest in science and its discoveries. Through these various sources, Thérèse came to be aware of the rising tide of liberalism, Freemasonry and atheism in the modern world. She also came to be aware of a frightening polarization that was beginning to surface in the Catholic Church. ... [she was also aware] 'that there was a problem in the Catholic priesthood of her day'.⁸³

Today, experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death seem to contradict the Good News; faith is shaken and one is tempted to doubt.⁸⁴ However, at the same time, Thérèse's understanding of the Mercy of God leads us to believe that God does not judge others as we do. Thérèse's deep understanding of grace — 'all is a grace'—

⁸² See *The Catholic Leader* 22 June 2008, 6 for a report of an article by Father Giovanni Cucci which highlights *The New York Times'* version of the seven deadly sins alive and well today.

⁸³ Miller, *The Trial of Faith of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 2f. Miller also notes the significant influence for Thérèse of Arminjon's homilies on the 'end time': 'He gave her a broad view of history in the Christian perspective, taught her the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead on the last day. He explained the "signs" of the end and inspired in her a great desire to help those who would, in fact, live in the time of the Anti-Christ', 104; 'This "world view" helped Thérèse to understand the apostasy from the Faith which had marred her homeland since the days of the French Revolution. Thérèse, it must be noted, gives no evidence of apocalyptic tendencies in her thoughts. She never declared that her times were in fact, the end time, or that she was living during the time of the Anti-Christ. Rather, she came to understand that as the world proceeds closer to its conclusion, the faith, violently attacked and opposed, would be abandoned by many Christians', 101.

⁸⁴ Adapted from CCC, # 164. Also see historical evidence from the nineteenth century in texts such as: 'What worried this Christian couple was to see the widespread increase of irreligion. The Pope was a prisoner at Rome and subjected to the insults of the Freemason clique in power. Mme. Martin, who on September 5, 1871, had written: "I firmly believe in the speedy triumph and reestablishment of the Holy Father in his territories", knew the agony of disillusion as year after year went by. She notes anti-clerical incidents at Alençon', in Stéphane-Joseph Piat, *The Story of a Family: The Home of St Thérèse of Lisieux (The Little Flower)*, 112.

brought her to a 'dark knowing' in her heart about God's saving love for all humanity while not being able to explain it by the use of theological concepts.

E. Why did Thérèse Experience the 'Trial of Faith'?

One struggles to know *why* Thérèse was visited with this trial that centres on a disbelief in life after death — Thérèse, who all her life, had longed for the Homeland of Heaven and to reach it by dying a death of love. P. Marie-Eugène seems to have the answer. He states that Thérèse's *Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love* 'evokes a twofold response on the part of God. The first response was the wound of Love, received several days later on Friday 14 June 1895'. We have already noted this. However, the second response on the part of God, according to Marie-Eugène, seems to be 'the temptations against faith which were to assail' [Thérèse]. 'This trial', Marie-Eugène continues: 'held in check the sensible outpourings of Love, but its principal effect was to make her [Thérèse] share in the drama of divine Love here below, in its grievous struggle against sin. It was the interior drama of Gethsemane and Calvary, a fight to the death between Love and sin's hatred'.⁸⁵ Here, we perhaps have a core statement in the context of this dissertation.

One can explain this only from within the community of faith — those outside of this community might see it differently. This was a central element in Thérèse's 'trial of faith': she experienced 'a fight to the death between Love and sin's hatred'. She endured it herself and she felt Jesus told her there were others who sinned in this way. In my opinion, Thérèse's trial mirrors the actual state of a soul without faith.⁸⁶ 'Through her desolations of mind and heart she shared the agony of atheism'.⁸⁷ Alister McGrath writes that the period of the Victorian era, 1870-1900 [Thérèse 1873-1897], is widely regarded as undergoing major changes that 'can be seen as ultimately

⁸⁵ Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 107. Contemplation on the passion of Christ would open out the meaning of this drama.

⁸⁶ Again, though, contemplation on the passion of Christ and its parallel in Thérèse would depth this understanding. Jesus died because his word was not recognised; some people refused to believe in him. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is living faith. However, as it has been said previously, the journey to Christian faith is perhaps not intended for all by God.

⁸⁷ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Help My Unbelief* (Dublin: Veritas, 1986), 22.

subverting the values and beliefs of its earlier phases'.⁸⁸ Thérèse felt this loss of faith. According to Simon Tugwell, the most striking thing about Thérèse's 'trial of faith' is that she saw it 'as a way of identifying herself totally with unbelievers and sinners'.⁸⁹ Miller states: 'Thérèse accepted the "trial of faith" as a gift which offered her an opportunity to make expiation and reparation for sins committed against the Faith'.⁹⁰ Further, Thérèse's 'trial of faith' is surely intensified by her physical sufferings. O'Donoghue writes: 'the night of mere non-existence, *la nuit du néant*: this is not a pious cliché ... it tells of an experience which no man or woman can undergo without the kind of horror and dismay which has strong physical repercussions'.⁹¹ Somehow one reflects the other; and together they mirror 'the fight to the death between Love and sin's hatred', the interior drama of Gethsemane and Calvary. Earlier in 1892, Thérèse had written: 'It is because Jesus has so incomprehensible a love for us that He wills that we have a share with Him in the salvation of souls. He wills to do nothing without us'.⁹² Thérèse was now joining Him in the great drama between good and evil. The title 'Assistant Gardener' seems quite inappropriate now. 'Compassionate companion' is a far more suitable symbol.

⁸⁸ See Alister McGrath, 'A Culture in Crisis: The Loss of Faith', in *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (London: Rider, 2004), 142. In 1884, Leo XIII's Encyclical Letter *Humanum Genus* denounced the association of Freemasonry. Referring to the twofold kingdoms, of God and of Satan, and to the two cities' of St Augustine, the Pope wrote: 'at every period of time each has been in conflict with the other, with a variety and multiplicity of weapons and of warfare, although not always with equal ardour and assault. At this period, however, the partisans of evil seem to be coming together, and to be struggling with united vehemence, led on or assisted by that strongly organized and widespread association called the Freemasons', # 2. Leo XIII was the Pope to whom Thérèse made her request that he grant her permission to enter Carmel at fifteen (20 November 1887). The Pope's response was 'You will enter if God wills it'. Thérèse would have been well aware of the 'dangers' facing the Church in her day. No. 2335 of the Code of Canon Law regarding Freemasonry 1917-1983 states that 'those who join a Masonic sect or other societies of the same sort, which plot against the Church or against legitimate civil authority, incur *ipso facto* an excommunication simply reserved to the Holy See'. The New Code of Canon Law (1983) does not mention Freemasonry. That it does not mention it is not meant to imply that the previous ruling is rescinded. The key point regarding whether a Catholic may join a Masonic Lodge is the *provable* plotting against the Church. The issue is complex and the responses varied, especially in the United States of America.

⁸⁹ Simon Tugwell, 'St Thérèse of Lisieux', *Doctrine and Life* (July-August), 1983: 335-345 at 343.

⁹⁰ Miller, *The Trial of Faith of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 195.

⁹¹ O'Donoghue, 'The Jonas Experience', 88f.

⁹² GC II, 753.

The Obedience of Faith

Baptism initiates us into this drama — the interior drama of Calvary. And as we have previously seen, this drama was undertaken in obedience out of love. Vatican II's document on Divine Revelation states that 'out of the abundance of His love [God] speaks to us as friends and lives among us so that he may invite and take us into fellowship with Godself'.⁹³ Our response to this drama constitutes the 'the obedience of faith' from our point of view. We recall that at Baptism *promises* were made and 'fidelity to promises made to God is a sign of the respect owed to the divine majesty and of love for a faithful God'.⁹⁴ It is a response 'by which a person entrusts one's whole self freely to God'.⁹⁵ If Christian obedience implies positive engagement and personal commitment from the whole person, rather than simply submission — and it does — then the great commandment to which one must listen and with which one must engage is 'to love'. However, if we can speak of the *obedience of faith*, we can also note the possibility of *disobedience* of faith, the refusal to accept the grace that continues to prod one ever closer from one point to another along the continuum of unbelief to belief. For people genuinely living this great commandment in any of its many possible degrees, then, for those people 'the sin against faith' is minimal or minimised. Thérèse's 'trial' brings all this once again to our minds.

F. The Trajectory of *Charity* Reaches its Goal

Faith without love is meaningless. *Agape* is the flowering of faith and in Thérèse that is, indeed, flowering in full bloom. *Co-existent* with this 'trial of faith' is Thérèse's heart burning with love: 'my *vocation*, at last I have found it ... MY VOCATION IS LOVE!'⁹⁶ and her final insight into the great virtue of *caritas*: When one is 'drawn' to loving God, one brings other 'souls' to the Divine - human relationship as well:

⁹³ See *Documents of Vatican II*. I also notice a more pastoral language used in the *CCCC* than that that was used in the *CCC*.

⁹⁴ See *CCC*, # 2101.

⁹⁵ *DV*, # 5.

⁹⁶ *SS Manuscript B*, 194.

For simple souls there must be no complicated way; as I am of their number, one morning during my thanksgiving, Jesus gave me a simple means of accomplishing my mission.

He made me understand these words of the Cantic of Canticles: '*DRAW ME, WE SHALL RUN after you in the odor of your ointments.* O Jesus, it is not even necessary to say: '*When drawing me, draw the souls whom I love!*' This simple statement: 'Draw me' suffices; I understand, Lord, that when a soul allow herself to be captivated by *the odor of your ointments*, she cannot run alone, all the souls whom she loves follow in her train; this is done without constraint, without effort, it is a natural consequence of her attraction for You.⁹⁷

And here Thérèse breaks off into another of her very descriptive passages in order to better express her intention:

Just as a torrent, throwing itself with impetuosity into the ocean, drags after it everything it encounters in its passage, in the same way, O Jesus, the soul who plunges into the shoreless ocean of Your Love, draws with her all the treasures she possesses. Lord, You know it, I have no other treasures than the souls it has pleased You to unite to mine;

And it is as if even this poetic cry cannot express her real intention, she continues:

it is You who entrusted these treasures to me, and so I dare to borrow the words You addressed to the heavenly Father, the last night which saw You on our earth as a traveller and a mortal. Jesus. I do not know when my exile will be ended; more than one night will still see me singing Your Mercies in this exile, but for me will finally come *the last night*, and then I want to be able to say to You, O my God:⁹⁸

And now follows a long text quoted from memory from John's Gospel 17:4ff which begins and ends this way:

*I have glorified you one earth; I have finished the work you gave me to do ... And I have made known your name to them, and will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them*⁹⁹.

⁹⁷ SS Manuscript C, 254.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ SS Manuscript C, 255.

However, love of God and the *prayerful* concern for her neighbour was not Thérèse's only concern. In her third manuscript written to explain her experience of community life (her earlier document had concentrated to a large extent on her experience of family life), she records examples of *practical* love of neighbour.¹⁰⁰ For example, Ida Görres makes a very compelling point that Thérèse's days in the infirmary were, apart from her ill health and interior darkness, a trial in themselves. Her blood sisters shared her company on many an occasion and plied her with all kinds of questions, some of which were totally irrelevant, for example, 'Would you be happy if you were told you would die in a few days at the latest? You would prefer this to being told that you will suffer more and more for months and years?' To which Thérèse replied: 'Oh! No, I wouldn't be at all happier. What makes me happy is only to do the will of God'.¹⁰¹ Mother Agnes says that she was telling Thérèse that she (Thérèse) was made to suffer much, that her soul was tempered for it. Thérèse replied: 'Ah! to suffer in my soul, yes, I can suffer much ... But as to suffering of body, I'm like a little child, very little. I'm without any thought, I suffer from minute to minute'.¹⁰² And to a question that did she have a premonition of an approaching death, Thérèse replied: 'No, God gives me no premonition of an approaching death, but of much greater sufferings ... But I don't torment myself, I don't want to think of anything but the present moment'.¹⁰³ Commenting on this kind of inquisition, Görres writes:

¹⁰⁰ This is the incident of a Sister who has the ability of displeasing Thérèse in everything, in her way, her words, her character; 'everything seems *very disagreeable* to me', Thérèse writes. But she prays for this sister, takes care to render her all services possible, and gives her a most friendly smile when tempted instead to answer her back in a disagreeable manner. So strong were Thérèse's feelings of displeasure that, when at recreation and having the occasion to communicate with this Sister, Thérèse used to run away like a deserter whenever the struggles became too violent. So well did Thérèse *practise* this virtue of practical charity and 'master' its execution that, eventually, the sister in question thought that Thérèse was especially attracted to her (see SS Manuscript C, 222f.). Thérèse also notices now in her sickness and her life in the infirmary, how the 'infirmarians practise' in her regard what she has just written about *charité*: 'They don't hesitate to take two thousand paces when twenty would suffice'. She notices, too, how when she is taken out into the field for fresh air, the sisters think it is their charitable duty to distract her from what they think is the onerous chore of writing. Thérèse is thereby completely distracted and cannot maintain her train of thought and so must close 'this famous copybook' [Manuscript C]. But, as she says, she has been able to contemplate charity in action! However, in one of her humorous remarks, she adds: 'as far as my mind is concerned I admit it is paralysed in the presence of such devotedness, and my pen has lost its lightness. In order for me to translate my thoughts, I have to be *like the solitary sparrow*, and this is rarely my lot! (See SS Manuscript C, 227).

¹⁰¹ LC, 175.

¹⁰² LC, 170

¹⁰³ LC, 165.

The period from May to 30 September [1897] was one prolonged process of dying And this whole process ... took place with uncanny clarity, as if under a microscope, and in the full glare of a probing lamp ... For while Thérèse wearisomely died, the three sisters who tended her stood around, already absolutely convinced that this dying girl was a saint; they were resolved not to lose a single word or gesture of hers, for their own benefit and ours ... It was to corroborate this conviction that they daily asked the sick girl innumerable questions that penetrated to the deepest and most secret depths of her soul and her faith.¹⁰⁴

'May we say', writes Görres, 'that these last months were the most difficult and most dangerous in Thérèse's truly burdened life?'¹⁰⁵ In these months Thérèse truly lived a high standard of practical charity. With what imperturbable grace, wit and intelligence she managed to ward off many of the questions and suppositions that came showering down on her', Görres observes.¹⁰⁶

Bringing this exposition on *caritas* to a close — as if in the *coda* to a great symphony — Thérèse writes:

You know, O my God, I have never desired anything but to *love* You, and I am ambitious for no other glory. Your Love has gone before me, and it has grown with me, and now it is an abyss whose depths I cannot fathom. Love attracts love, and, my Jesus, my love leaps toward Yours; it would like to fill the abyss which attracts it, but alas! It is not even like a drop of dew lost in the ocean! For me to love You as You love me, I would have to borrow Your own Love, and then only would I be at rest. O my Jesus, it is perhaps an illusion but it seems to me that You cannot fill a soul with more love than the love with which You have filled mine; it is for treason that I dare to ask You '*to love those whom you have given me with the love with which you loved me*'.¹⁰⁷

G. Imagery used in this Discussion

We have met the like of this before — Thérèse's ability to express theological issues in image and metaphor. In Manuscript A, Thérèse assigned the tall flowers and the small violets to Jesus' garden, but this did not quite satisfy her; the 'poor savage' and the unbaptised — do they not belong in Jesus' garden too? She reasons: what matter

¹⁰⁴ Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 302f.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 365.

¹⁰⁷ See SS Manuscript C: 254-256.

if they do not belong? After all, Jesus descends ever lower to them than he does to the ones in his garden. In these two situations we have Jesus the Tiller of individual souls and Jesus/Thérèse the All-inclusive one. A little later, we see Thérèse as the Assistant Gardener, helping to teach children the love God has for them. And now still later again, as Thérèse sits at the 'table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating', we see her, in a sense and because of her mission, *replacing* Jesus there — yes, perhaps, she and they are outside his garden as wild flowers were (in a cross-over of images) — but Thérèse seems keen to represent Jesus at this table just the same. But, we ask, how can 'poor sinners' be 'outside' when 'Jesus' is present? They cannot be. Thérèse's 'Jesus role' now is not as *gardener*, *gatherer* or *assistant*, but as *compassionate companion*. Earlier, she had perhaps envisaged Jesus as the one who tills the soil in individual souls. Earlier, she might have stretched her imaginative gifts to include *all* in Jesus' garden or to assist the gardener in other ways. Thérèse does not have those roles now. Here, she anticipates the role of a missionary in today's world: to be among others as a compassionate presence. Here, in her darkness, Thérèse sits at this table as one who, herself, requires the very compassion she wishes for others. She has even discovered a deeper misery than moral misery — her own deficiency of being.¹⁰⁸ The 'weakness' of which she so often wrote is realized now in the profundity of its existential meaning. Thérèse truly knew the meaning of *humility*: 'Yes, it seems to me I never sought anything but the truth; yes, I have understood humility of heart ... It seems to me I'm humble'.¹⁰⁹ Thérèse really knew that she is not God; she is a creature. All she has, has been given to her — 'all is a grace' and without it, she is nothing — even though she experiences the opposite of all this, that is, the 'nothingness' of being 'without grace'.

Two Postscripts

We know that we can deal with this subject of the 'sin against faith' only from an objective point of view, and that we cannot know the workings of the individual conscience. While a person's conscience might be in error through ignorance (lack of

¹⁰⁸ See Lafrance, *My Vocation is Love*, 44.

¹⁰⁹ *LC*, 205.

knowledge about something in a being capable of knowing),¹¹⁰ there is also invincible ignorance — when a person is unable to be rid of the ignorance even when the circumstance presents as possible and obligatory. This kind of ignorance carries no guilt. Nevertheless, the subject of 'unbelief' in today's world invites examination, and Thérèse seems well placed to be part of the conversation.¹¹¹ However, in Thérèse, the benchmark is high.¹¹² Others of us, maybe — while we perhaps are aware when we err in big matters — can be unconscious of erring in finer implications of the divine and moral law.¹¹³ Thérèse lives at a higher level of consciousness than perhaps most of us do. James Fowler writes:

¹¹⁰ GS # 16.

¹¹¹ Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta might be another contributor to the conversation. Thérèse and Teresa have much in common — 'both women view themselves as God's instruments: a cardboard box [Mother Teresa], an insignificant flower [Thérèse]; both are motivated by the cry of Jesus 'I Thirst'; both suffered a trial of faith; both attest to the power of evil and to suffering from devilish torments; both 'testify to a divine indwelling through Jesus that makes true friendship possible'; both hid their suffering beneath a smile; the name 'Teresa' is the Spanish form of 'Thérèse'; Teresa chose that name; it indicates her devotion to Thérèse who was canonised when Teresa was fifteen (see Mary C. Carroll, 'With Love from Calcutta and Lisieux: Letters of Mother Teresa and St Thérèse', in *Review for Religious* 64/3 (2005): 281-295. See also Jacques Gauthier, *I Thirst: Saint Térése of Lisieux and Mother Teresa of Calcutta: A striking Commonality in the Spiritual Foundation of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta*, trans. Alexandra Plettenberg-Serban (Staten Island, New York: Society of St Paul, 2005; and *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the 'Saint of Calcutta'*. (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

¹¹² This is not an accurate statement. Rather, the benchmark is 'to descend'. But the extent of Thérèse's descent — to the point of Jesus' *kenosis* — is surely an indication of the 'height' of her holiness.

¹¹³ The CCC, # 2094 notes some ways of sinning against *charity*: 'One can sin against God's love in various ways:

Indifference neglects or refuses to reflect on divine charity; it fails to consider its prevenient goodness and denies its power.

Ingratitude fails or refuses to acknowledge divine charity and to return him love for love.

Lukewarmness is hesitation or negligence in responding to divine love; it can imply refusal to give oneself over to the prompting of charity.

Acedia or spiritual sloth goes so far as to refuse the joy that comes from God and to be repelled by divine goodness.

Hatred of God comes from pride. It is contrary to love of God, whose goodness it denies, and whom it presumes to curse as the one who forbids sins and inflicts punishments'.

The CCC, # 2088 also lists 'various ways of sinning against *faith*

Voluntary doubt about the faith disregards or refuses to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief. *Involuntary doubt* refers to hesitation in believing, difficulty in overcoming objections connected with the faith, or also anxiety aroused by its obscurity. If deliberately cultivated, doubt can lead to spiritual blindness'.

The CCC # 2089 continues:

Incredulity is the neglect of revealed truth or the wilful refusal to assent to it. *Heresy* is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same; *apostasy* is the total repudiation of the Christian faith; *schism* is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.' (Also see Thesis Conclusions, 286).

It is my conviction that persons who come to embody Universalizing faith are drawn into those patterns of commitment and leadership by the providence of God and the exigencies of history. It is as though they are selected by the great Blacksmith of history, heated in the fires of turmoil and trouble and then hammered into usable shape on the hard anvil of conflict and struggle.¹¹⁴

For all that, however, Thérèse also knew that in pardoning the sinner, 'Jesus did not pardon abstractly'. 'The only one who can pardon the torturer is the one who has been tortured'.¹¹⁵ Both Jesus and Thérèse know the depth of the abyss. Thérèse also knows the God of infinite love, mercy and compassion, and it is this that she brings to sinners. 'God can be invoked only where pardon creates a newness of relations, those that Thérèse exalted throughout her life', writes Bernard Bro.¹¹⁶

The second of these short sections deals with the issue of the close connection between belief and unbelief. Joseph Ratzinger is one among others sensitive to the question of unbelief. He writes: 'Just as the believer knows himself [sic] to be constantly threatened by unbelief, which he must experience as a continual temptation, so for the unbeliever faith remains a temptation and a threat to his apparently permanently closed world'. 'In short', he concludes, 'there is no escape from the dilemma of being a man [human]'.¹¹⁷ Jan-François Six writes: 'There is no person of faith who can forget that in him or her there is always an unbeliever who believes'.¹¹⁸ John Reid writes: 'While faith is absolutely necessary for salvation and bestows a most stable certitude, no one can be sure of holding on to it, and the believer's supreme trial is to ask himself [sic] if he truly believes'.¹¹⁹ So if the theme of the struggle between belief and unbelief is part of the human story, then in Jesus, the one who takes this human condition on to himself and deals with it even to its bitter end, one sees the human drama lived to the fullest. And Thérèse? She too deals with the issue 'full on'. 'Sitting at the table of bitterness', she expresses her solidarity with sinful humanity, and in her love relationship with Jesus, she joins him — the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world — in bearing his cross.

¹¹⁴ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 202.

¹¹⁵ See Bro, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*, 146.

¹¹⁶ Bro, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*, 147.

¹¹⁷ Ratzinger, 'Belief in the World of Today', in *Introduction to Christianity*, 45.

¹¹⁸ Six, *Light of the Night*, 174.

¹¹⁹ See Reid, *Man Without God*, 6.

Thus Thérèse — all the more since she knows that she is going to die — participates fully in the human condition with its dizzy precariousness. But if up to Easter 1896 this precariousness is full of meaning because it will issue soon in eternal life, the situation changes completely after Easter: faith no longer comes first to bring its light and to give meaning to the night of this life. Thérèse's position is that of those for whom the night of this life opens up, with death, on total night. This confronts her like a wall which gets in the way of all clarity.¹²⁰

Facing this wall, Thérèse knows what it is like for others who face their 'walls', be they internal or external to the person. As a saint of the *petite voie* she knows that 'little' does not mean 'safe' and 'easy'. Her *petite voie* demands faith, trust and confidence, and she certainly knows that this confidence can sometimes be sorely tried. Nevertheless, Thérèse advocates that a soul 'raise itself to God by the ELEVATOR of love and not to climb the rough *stairway* of fear'.¹²¹ This is a way 'that is very straight, very short, and totally new'.¹²² Even during her 'trial of faith' Thérèse maintained this approach.

Re-understanding the 'Sin against Faith'

In summary it would seem that that the subject of *atheists* (people) today is so complex that only on the surface can it be compared with the *impious* (people) of Thérèse's day. The understanding of this contemporary phenomenon is much more nuanced than it seems to have been a century or so ago. 'Even as regards the condemnation of atheism, we venture to say that today it is not so rare to find among theologians more delicacy of approach in dealing with this problem than was the case in time past; ... we note a desire to seek some attenuating factor in the judgment of concrete cases'.¹²³ Lombardi asks: 'Is this straining after mercy a sign of weakness or of progress in the Christian soul today?'¹²⁴ With Thérèse, the issue of 'sin against faith' and 'God's merciful love' 'sit' side-by-side at table. The fact though that Thérèse raises the issue of unbelief has positive results: in the first place, it raises an issue that is not sufficiently 'theologized' as yet; its presence demands that it be taken seriously; it

¹²⁰ Six, *Light of the Night*, 34.

¹²¹ See *GC* II, 1152.

¹²² *SS* Manuscript C, 207.

¹²³ See Riccardo Lombardi, *The Salvation of the Unbeliever*, trans. Dorothy M. White (London: Burns & Oates, 1956), 167f.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

alerts 'the faithful' to the existence of the co-existence of faith and doubt; it gives new incentive to the meaning to 'the obedience of faith'; it invites a closer look at 'venial sin';¹²⁵ it opens a window of inclusivity on the subject of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, and finally, it causes us to note that Thérèse's final word is of mercy and trust.

F. Thérèse and the Holy Face of Jesus

In the spiritual journey of the soul to God, God communicates to the person within the ordinary human circumstances of one's life. With Thérèse, this means that God 'spoke' to her in multiple ways: in her relationship with her mother and Rose Taillé, through the strong bonds she developed with her father and each of her sisters, especially Pauline, through the fragmentation of those relationships, though the devotions at the time as practised in the Martin home, through her relationship with Mother Gonzague,

¹²⁵ As Rahner notes: 'Unfriendliness towards our neighbour, a lack of devotion in our prayers, a little impatience — these are 'lapses of everyday life' and are certainly 'in this sense objectively venial sins'. 'It cannot be denied, however, that it is a one-sidedness in catholic moral theology and confessional practice to regard each of the individual events of our moral activity on their own almost in an atomised fashion. We often overlook in this way the total structure of our moral position, our ultimate attitude towards God, and our basic religious condition ... the one whole man [sic] lives out of a basic outlook which is either directed towards God or is turned away from God' (see Karl Rahner, 'Justified and Sinner at the Same Time', in *TI VI: Concerning Vatican Council II*, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969): 218-230. [A related issue can be that of 'fundamental conscience'. One must not confuse 'fundamental conscience' — the fundamental orientation of conscience towards the good and the true — with 'fundamental option' — a theory of morals according to which each person gradually develops in a basic orientation of his or her life, either for or against God' ... And one must not separate the fundamental option from concrete kinds of behaviour; to do so is 'to contradict the substantial integrity or personal unity of the moral agent in his or her body and soul' (see also *VS*, # 65, 67, 69; Brian Lewis, 'The Primacy of Conscience', *AEJT* 6 (February 2006)). A fundamental option is taken by those people who, in the teaching of Vatican Council II, seek the truth about the good' with sincerity of heart and whose actions follow this search (cf. (cf. *VS*, # 62). 'It is the "heart" converted to the Lord and to the love of what is good which is really the source of *true* judgments of conscience' (*VS* # 64)]. Rahner concludes his instruction: 'The Catholic Christian ... should accept his justice, which in fact divinises him [sic], as an unmerited gift of God's incalculable favour. If he wants to express this by saying that he is always and of himself a poor sinner and always someone justified by God's grace as long as he does not close himself to this grace of God by disbelief and lack of love, then he is quite at liberty to do so. Even Catholics like St Thérèse of the Child Jesus have done this. When they dared to stand before the countenance of God, they came of and for themselves with empty hands and confessed themselves like St Augustine to be sinners. In this consciousness of their own sinfulness they discovered in themselves that miracle which means that God fills our hands with his glory and makes our heart overflow with love and faith. Anyone who confesses that of himself he is a sinner, experiences precisely in this that grace of God which really and truly makes him a saint and a just man [sic]. Then God absolves him from all sin so that he is really and in truth, to the last root of his being, a holy, just and blessed child of God', 230.

her Prioress, and latterly, through her 'trial'. Hermeneutically, it can be said that many of these situations centred on the 'face'. In previous chapters we have seen examples of this. For example, noted in the writings of Constance Fitzgerald and Mary Frohlich¹²⁶ the suggestion that Thérèse found in the Holy Face of Jesus, battered and sorrowful, a focus for her piety.

It has also been suggested that the gaze between a daughter and her mother is particularly reciprocal of attachment and meaning, and that a daughter's maternal instincts begin here. With respect to Thérèse in this regard, she whose 'motherly' instincts are shown first of all to birds¹²⁷ and animals¹²⁸, then to sinners,¹²⁹ and then to the Church¹³⁰, it has been suggested that as she sits among sinners at the table of bitterness, she does so as their sister rather than their mother. However, at this point, I suggest, Thérèse is both sister and mother. She is their sister because, like them, she is a sinner. What is more, she is the worst of sinners, one who almost despairs of God's love, one who considers suicide if the medication were not taken away from within her grasp.¹³¹ She is their mother because, in her role as a female vicarious sufferer, she joins the mission of Jesus and makes reparation for their sin. However, in these last eighteen months, the symbol of Thérèse that might be more enduring than either sister or mother is that of 'daughter' — Thérèse is a daughter of the Church: 'In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be *Love*' (Lines also written within the last eighteen months of her life, that is, co-existent with her 'trial of faith').¹³² 'Mary' too,

¹²⁶ The Holy Face became a symbolic node that nourished many of the most profound themes in Thérèse's spirituality: the deep, childlike hunger for Jesus' intimate presence; the sense of the "veil" that hides the face of the Beloved; the identification with the passion, and with Jesus' own hiddenness; the eagerness to love Jesus in the smallest detail of life, as Veronica had done' (see Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor for the Third Millennium?', at 30f.).

¹²⁷ SS Manuscript A, 113.

¹²⁸ Thérèse had a dog named Tom and rabbits (see LC 1, 237f, fn. 4; see also GC I, 564f, fn. 4: 'Once inside the cloister, the faithful Tom raised his ears, then, looking in all directions as if to get his bearings, he sprang on his little mistress [Thérèse was in the cloister yard], leaping up at her face and making a thousand bounds in all directions. She was obliged to lift her large veil and hide Tom under it, for he could not control his joy ... She was forced to tear herself away from all this, so great was her emotion'; and a 'little ravishing lamb, all in curls' (GC I, 395).

¹²⁹ For example, in August 1892 she had written: 'Our mission as Carmelites is to form evangelical workers who will save thousands of souls whose mothers we shall be'. She adds, 'I find that our share is really beautiful, what have we to envy in priests [who work on the missions]. See GC II, 753.

¹³⁰ SS Manuscript B, 194.

¹³¹ See LC, 196.

¹³² SS Manuscript B, 194.

for Thérèse, 'is more Mother than Queen'.¹³³ There is a powerful and rich theology behind the consideration of one's place in the Church that is not in the least intended to be immature and childishly maternalistic. The mission of Jesus is entrusted to his community of believers, the Church. In her even widening sense of her mission, 'what Thérèse desires and seeks to achieve is a love even greater than mother-love ... Her transformation imagines a universe of love'.¹³⁴ Finally, and in a less spiritual sense, Thérèse remains Pauline's child (daughter) even when her deep wisdom surpasses that of her 'little mother'.¹³⁵

For Thérèse, contemplative and Carmelite, it was to the Face of God she ultimately directed her gaze. Had she not, we tentatively suggested earlier, gazed into that Face in her Near Death Experience at aged two months when, again tentatively suggested, she received her vocation to holiness? 'This presence to God is in reality a contemplative presence, for contemplation consists primarily in being with God and gazing upon him'.¹³⁶ Devotion to the Holy Face for Thérèse meant looking at God. Thérèse saw Jesus and sought his face in the prophecies of Isaiah, in the Holy Face where he was sorrowful. Her devotion to the Holy Face was simply a form of devotion to the Person, for the face represents the person: "His face is my light, my devotion".¹³⁷ 'However tender her devotion to the Child Jesus might be, it could not

¹³³ LC, 161. Tina Beattie's comment is relevant here. She writes: 'One of the losses of the Second Vatican Council was the abandonment of the rich maternal symbolism associated with Holy Mother Church, and its substitution by the more rational, less mystical concept of the pilgrim people of God. The challenge we face today is to recover the mystical beauty and maternal potency of the pre-conciliar rite, but in such a way that the Church responds to the legitimate questions posed by women who experience a widening gulf between the identities and roles we perform in our daily lives, and the identities and roles we are offered in the Church. So, there is work to be done on both sides' (see Tina Beattie, 'Femininity within the Trinity', *The Tablet* (29 March 2008): 12-13). Thérèse, Doctor of the Church, is well placed to contribute to this conversation.

¹³⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux*, 12.

¹³⁵ See, for example, LC, 180, 4; See also: 'Little Mother, it's you who prepared me for my first communion; prepare me now for my death'; LC, 57.

¹³⁶ Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 39. 'In this context of gazing on the face of God, Marie-Eugène relates another near eye-witness account that is worth recording here. He states: 'One day in a conversation with Sr Geneviève [Céline] — I often spoke with her and obviously tried to learn all her secrets — she said to me: 'My sister and no devotions'. 'Really? She had no devotions?' 'No, for example she did not share the popular devotion to the Sacred Heart.' 'Why not?' 'Because they turned it into a devotion, when it is really a form of worship, the worship of Love. Her own comprehension went far beyond the usual practices, First Fridays and so forth.' 'But what about the Holy Face?' 'Oh, she said devotion to the Holy Face was not a "devotion". When you love someone and you gaze at them, you look at their face, not their back, or their shoulders', 39f.

¹³⁷ See LC, 134-135; PN 20, 109: 'Your Face is my only Homeland', stanza 3.

be compared to that she had for the Holy Face ... That Holy Face was the meditation book whence she gained the knowledge of love ... It was when meditating on the Holy Face that she studied humility'.¹³⁸ Thérèse sought to be dissolved in God. 'This dissolution in God is the Face of God in the beloved. This is what the soul longs for: Therefore whoever is a Bride has but one desire, one aspiration — namely that her face may continually be joined to your Face in the kiss of charity'.¹³⁹

Constance Fitzgerald has suggested that in the very last months of her life, Thérèse was able to surrender her 'attachment' to the Face of Jesus. However, following the thought of the authors of *An Echo from the Heart of God* and *Under the Torrent of His Love*, it may be more accurate to state that Thérèse was 'attached' to Jesus rather than to the Holy Face. Marie-Eugène writes: Thérèse 'saw God through his human form because there she found the reflection of divinity, together with traces of his suffering'. He continues: 'Contemplation consists, then, in looking at God, regarding his face, regarding God himself. It is a simple (or immediate) gaze on Truth (*simplex intuitus veritatis*). Thérèse looked at his face that she might see his sentiments and ways, might know his taste and conform to it. This was not for the sake of self-fulfillment but in order to give him pleasure'.¹⁴⁰ In another place, Marie-Eugène writes:

We understand how Thérèse's gaze was fixed on the Face of Christ in his passion, and how the Holy Face became her 'homeland eternal', her Kingdom of love, the star which guided her steps. Thérèse was happy to eat the bread of sorrow for sinners with the suffering Jesus, and wished never to leave him until she could share his death in the shadows of Calvary'.¹⁴¹

Fitzgerald also notes that Thérèse's 'endmost suffering would focus on the faceless Face, the face of God-Hidden ... her life necessitates it; her death demands it. ... One

¹³⁸ Cited in Stéphane-Joseph Piat, *The Story of a Family: The Home of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 406. See also part of Sister Agnes of Jesus' testimony at the diocesan inquiry into the life and virtues of Thérèse in Christopher O'Mahoney, ed., and trans. *St Thérèse of Lisieux by those who knew her: Testimonies from the process of beatification*, 45.

¹³⁹ See Waaijman, 'Transformation in Love', in *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations Methods*, 473, citing William of St Thierry, *On the Song of Songs*, 131.

¹⁴⁰ See Marie-Eugène, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 40.

¹⁴¹ Marie-Eugène, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 108.

last time, she faces the severing of the mother-bond in the loss of her very self and fears *ultimate* abandonment by the Beloved One'.¹⁴²

In all, one might say that Thérèse's spiritual journey has, indeed, something to do with the motif of 'face'. Ida Görres names it 'The Hidden Face'. From her book of that name, we find these words:

Before His Face ... there ... vanished, gently and imperceptibly, the apparently so stout and absolute barrier between the 'sinner' out in the world — who are sinners because they do all possible wicked and forbidden things — and the devout souls who characterize themselves as sinners only 'out of humility'. Before His Face Thérèse found again the old, so often buried truth that man [sic] *is* a sinner and can never be more than a pardoned sinner, no matter what he [or she] does or does not do.¹⁴³

The struggle between faith and sin is a human struggle. Thérèse dealt with it 'writ large' on the screen of life showing detail after detail. As she gazed on the Face of Christ, Thérèse did not see a physical shape; I wager that she saw beyond the 'face' to the Face of God. And here, again, Thérèse did not see a 'face' in a physical sense. The Face of God was for her, as it is for all of us, unseen. Yet in a sense, Thérèse 'saw' the Risen Christ and, as Lafrance notes, when one has 'seen' the Risen Christ in sufficient depth, and while one might still be disturbed by issues coming from atheism, one can no longer doubt, for now such a person lives from an encounter with the risen Jesus.¹⁴⁴ The Acts of the Apostles draws out the necessity for such an encounter, for 'there is no other name under heaven given to mortals by which we much be saved' (Acts 4:12) than the name of Jesus. Thérèse used her 'trial' to take her beyond the experience of good faith and good will into areas of unbelief, and from there to a deeper faith. Lafrance's words well apply to Thérèse's experience:

By experiencing his [sic] limitations, he learns to live at his own boundaries where God calls him to continual conversion. This limit is the point of contact where the evil spirit attacks him to paralyse him in his trust.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Fitzgerald, 'The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux', 13.

¹⁴³ Görres, *The Hidden Face*, 276f.

¹⁴⁴ See Lafrance, *Preferring God*, 104.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

This was Thérèse's experience in her 'trial of faith'. Having known previously the love and mercy of God, she was able to 'hold on' in trust and confidence amidst, as we know, the most terrible of physical and spiritual torments.

Summary

It is possibly true to say that it was because Thérèse lived obedience to God in the fullest way possible throughout her short twenty-four years by the interaction of faith and sin in her life, that she was led into the 'night of faith'. In a sense, there was nowhere else to go. It was now 'God alone'. This 'night' had both a darkness and a radiance that is so worthy of reflection. Yes, the darkness represents sin; but it is also the place where the mystic encounters God.¹⁴⁶

The mystical journey, as John of the Cross masterfully describes it, can be summed up as a process by which a human being becomes increasingly transparent to God. It is the living-out of the Paschal Mystery in one's life. Gradually one learns to 'die to self' and 'live for God'. This is transformation in love and can occur in this life; transformation in glory belongs to the life after this one. We have noted Thérèse's transformation in love by following the trajectory of *charity* — the gift received at her 'conversion' and henceforth taken and developed. There is perhaps a glimpse of Thérèse's transformation in glory in the account of her ecstatic expression at the moment of her death.¹⁴⁷

In life, Thérèse's contemplation of the Face of Jesus was made explicit in the *Act of Consecration* and *Poem 'My Heaven on Earth!'* With further insight, we read into these literary pieces not only a natural development of her human experiences that can be represented hermeneutically as 'face related', but also her spirituality that grew from, maybe, a popular devotion of the time to the contemplative gaze on the face of God and the suffering face of Jesus. In this devotion as well as in other ways like her

¹⁴⁶ See Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁷ See *Epilogue* in SS, 271.

own suffering, Thérèse shared in Jesus' salvific mission — the mission to save souls, to deliver them from sin and bring them to a loving faith.

Thérèse's 'trial' or 'night of faith' [*épreuve*] was at least threefold: there was total darkness in her own soul and, consequently, she experienced the anguish of unbelief and the desolation of sin.¹⁴⁸ She was tempted to doubt the existence of heaven, and her terminal illness must have in some way contributed to the suffering she experienced. For Thérèse, 'the night of nothingness' strictly means that there is 'nothing': neither God, nor heaven nor the beyond.¹⁴⁹ Yet from within this, there breaks forth a valiant faith and there emerges an 'at-one-ness' not only with God but also with sinners (unbelievers). Actually, Thérèse would have had no word that offers meaning to peoples' lives, unless she, too, had been touched doubt and glimpsed the abyss.¹⁵⁰

It was through engaging fully in *her* life's circumstances that Therese attained to holiness. Her *petite voie* is none other than an expression of her God-centred life. Her *Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love* indicates the extent to which this 'little way' took her:

In order to live in one single act of perfect Love, I OFFER MYSELF AS A VICTIM OF HOLOCAUST TO YOUR MERCIFUL LOVE, asking You to consume me incessantly, allowing the waves of *infinite tenderness* shut up within You to overflow into my soul, and that thus I may become a *martyr* of Your Love, O my God!¹⁵¹

It is a point of significance that her *Self-Oblation* was religiously and culturally subversive. Its theology is contrary to the then accepted understanding of God as a God of Justice. Furthermore; the *Act* did not support any reliance on merit to earn divine approval.

¹⁴⁸ The darkness within her soul mirrored the darkness of a life without the light that comes from God.

¹⁴⁹ Six, *Light of the Night*, 173.

¹⁵⁰ It is difficult to describe the 'abyss' experience of another person. Thérèse touched this deep point in at least two ways: her relationship with God was so strong that the fathomless abyss of God's love was one way of describing it. In her trial of faith she experienced great darkness of spirit - like an underground tunnel or even deeper still, like an abyss. One interpretation does not cancel out the other one. In some way both interpretations might be *beyond* conceptualisation and the word *abyss* is an attempt at verbal description.

¹⁵¹ See Appendix B.

In the last eighteen months of her life, Thérèse composed the most significant part of her literary output. How was it — and she raises the question herself because she considers it a question that others might ask — that she could sing of the Lord's goodness (his *mercies*) amidst the 'trial of faith' that troubled her sorely? She answered her own question: 'When I sing of the happiness of heaven and of the eternal possession of God, I feel no joy in this, for I sing simply what I WANT TO BELIEVE'.¹⁵² Much earlier (1890), after asking Jesus to lead her, she describes the route by which He led her: 'Then Jesus took me by the hand, and He made me enter a subterranean passage where it is neither cold nor hot, where the sun does not shine, and in which the rain or the wind does not visit, a subterranean passage where I see nothing but the half-veiled light, the light which is diffused by the lowered eyes of my Beloved!'¹⁵³ Thérèse was no stranger to spiritual aridity and trial.

Thérèse deals with complex theological issues in symbol, metaphor and image. Through her creative language of 'garden' and 'table' she is able to suggest an expanded understanding of 'sin against faith' enabling us to interpret it as sinning against the Holy Spirit, sinning against the light, not believing in love, or as denial of the transcendent dimension in one's person. Here, Thérèse anticipates the Church's deepening awareness that *grace* — 'everything is a grace' she had said¹⁵⁴ — is at work even amongst those who sit at the table of sinners, those who have lost their way, those who do not believe in God or Christ, but who 'sincerely follow all that is right'.¹⁵⁵ (Of course, the unbeliever who sincerely follows all that is right, he or she does not experience the 'agony of atheism'!¹⁵⁶). Thérèse's use of image and symbol bring a level of suggestiveness and depth often denied to concepts

Further, her religious experience is shown through these very means. It is through them that we probe the *significance* of these experiences that lead to her holiness. It is

¹⁵² SS Manuscript C, 214.

¹⁵³ GC I, 651f.

¹⁵⁴ LC, 57.

¹⁵⁵ See 'Good Friday Intercessions', in Gerard MacGinty, general editor, *Glenstal Bible Missal for Sundays and Sacraments* (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983), 216.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. fn. 87 above.

also through them that we explore the particular meaning of the definition: 'sin is the refusal to obey the call to faith that is offered by grace'.

This chapter has brought into the light the incomprehensible realization that rooted in the depths of the human being and faculties is chaos — a deficiency of being. Yet together with this there lies also the promise of the letter to the Romans — that the human person is ontologically transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit received in baptism.¹⁵⁷ Thérèse's life and writings holds these together in the emphasis she gives to both the grievousness of sin and the mercy of God. Furthermore, her writings give encouragement to 'little souls', in that the human heart under grace is able to live these seeming complexities in simplicity of spirit. In this, her writings also give clarity to one's understanding of holiness. Further, they reveal that the human experience is to be valued, for human experience is the place where God's Spirit is at work leading one away from sin and unauthenticity to authenticity, love and faith.

¹⁵⁷ Lest the phrase 'ontologically transformed' leaves a question in the mind of the reader, it is necessary to return to an earlier description of *analogy* in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Applying that description in this present context, we realize that 'ontologically transformed' can mean that this is the case *only* within the limitations of human nature.

CHAPTER 6

Faith and Sin: Existential Considerations

*'You know I am seeking only the truth';¹
'Oceans of grace ... flooded my soul'²*

"All human beings desire to know" [Aristotle], and truth is the proper object of this desire'³

Whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations, [it is] as a sort of secret presence of God⁴

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled (Mt 5:6)

Introduction

One among many varieties of judgments regarding post-modern culture is this one:

For several centuries now, secularism has been defining and constructing the world. It is a world in which the theological is either discredited or turned into a harmless leisure-time activity of private commitment.⁵

Bearing this assessment of secularism in mind, and a similar one — that there is 'a profound desolation haunting the roots of our post-modern culture'⁶ — this chapter aims at offering a solution to halting this trend — a return to fundamental ultimate values and / Christian beliefs. It also aims at a contemporary contextualisation — by implication — of material used previously in this dissertation by suggesting that all people — even those not within the Catholic tradition — can be 'faithful' and avoid

¹ SS Manuscript B, 197.

² SS Manuscript A, 181.

³ John Paul II, *FR*, # 25.

⁴ *AG*, # 9.

⁵ See John Milbank et al., 'Introduction', *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1.

⁶ See Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux', 264.

sin by seeking the truth. While it is acknowledged that sections of today's culture seem unfavourable to this 'pilgrimage' — 'We are not making our pilgrimage [through life] aright unless our thought is on pilgrimage, too',⁷ — the chapter, nevertheless, takes Thérèse's one simple statement: 'I am seeking only the truth',⁸ and offers it as a way forward, a way possible for all to follow. The search, as *GS* states, is actually *required* of all people:

Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey ... Through loyalty to conscience, Christians are joined to others in the search for truth ...⁹

All people are called to be free and authentic human beings objectifying in their persons and from within the belief tradition to which each belongs, the virtue and power of *truth*. Thérèse's dictum — 'Seek only the truth' — certainly applies to Roman Catholicism whose centre is shifting from Europe and North America to countries like Africa, India, and South America, and to locations where the 'truth' is called to be expressed through symbols different, perhaps, from those which have come to be expected in most of the western world's Catholicism. *Grace* is always propelling the human person to make choices that favour *truth*.

In *her* search for the truth, Thérèse sought to avoid evil (sin), and intensely desired to live from within a loving Catholic / Christian faith as she knew it in nineteenth century France. Yet, mystic as she was and identified with Jesus' redemptive mission to save and to bring all peoples to the knowledge of the truth / Truth, her spirituality grew to cosmic dimensions dissolving all boundaries and encompassing all.

This chapter engages the hermeneutical triad of understanding, interpretation, application but with emphasis on the triad's third component, application. It offers to

⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 26.

⁸ SS Manuscript B, 197.

⁹ *GS*, # 16. See Austin Flannery, Gen. Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Document of Vatican Council II: Constitutions Decrees Declarations*. A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language (Northport NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1996). See also Chapter 2 of this dissertation 'Objective and Subjective Sin / Vincible and Invincible Ignorance', 85; Chapter 5 fn.125 re 'fundamental conscience' and 'fundamental option'.

today's postmodernism the *modus operandi*, 'seek the truth', as application of the dynamic relationship between faith and sin discussed in previous chapters — particularised in the life and writings of Thérèse of Lisieux. The chapter acknowledges that the search for truth is often complex, and it highlights this difficulty by offering *examples* of how, with the aid of spiritual discernment, one might engage in the search. The chapter has several sections summarised under headings of *truth* and *grace*; and while the examples selected reference Thérèse in some way, they can be applied analogically to situations beyond the catholic / Theresian world.

Spiritual Discernment

With the aid of spiritual discernment, an honest search for truth can lead to an awareness of the false self's role in self-deception, and thus to hearing more clearly the call to self-transcending love. When one puts this insight into operation in daily living — and when many people do likewise — then there is hope that the wider culture will build on values that promote self-transcendence. Coupled with a grace given to all, the search for truth is not only a reasonable approach to reclaiming the joy of life, but is also a way of leading one to deeper religious faith, conversion of heart and fuller appreciation of one's own religious tradition or — in words applicable not only to those within a religious tradition but also those outside — to a life of greater authenticity.

The Terms Explained

The statement that there is 'a profound desolation haunting the roots of our post-modern culture'¹⁰ calls to mind the terms *consolation* and *desolation* as used by St Ignatius of Loyola. Within the Christian tradition, these two terms are especially associated with the *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* in his *Spiritual Exercises*.¹¹ Ignatius drew up these rules from reflection on his own experience.

¹⁰ See Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux', 264.

¹¹ See Louis J. Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises: based on studies in the language of the Autograph* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951): 141-156. 'Discernment is an ancient practice of reading the signs of the Spirit in human experience, of seeking the call of God in one's human freedom and

Ignatius composed these rules for persons beginning the spiritual journey so that they might understand ‘to some extent the different movements produced in the soul and ... recognizing those that are good — to admit them — and those that are bad — to reject them’.¹² For those persons ‘progressing to greater perfection’, Ignatius drew attention to distinguishing the actions of the good angel in the soul — ‘delicate, gentle, delightful’ — from that of the bad angel — ‘violent, noisy, disturbing’. Ignatius wrote that on the other hand, in ‘souls that are going from bad to worse’, the action of the spirit is just the reverse: the good spirit enters with ‘noise and commotion’ to draw attention to its presence, while the bad spirit enters silently ‘as one coming into his own house when the doors are open’.¹³ While these rules can be helpful in understanding the direction one’s spiritual path might be taking, God can enter a person’s soul more directly at any time, providing to the soul ‘consolation without cause’.¹⁴ *Consolation and desolation* are not necessarily *felt* states, but they are *discerned* states or movements in the soul.

Yet, well before Ignatius, St Paul had pinpointed the need to choose between the Spirit of God (cf. Gal 5: 22) and the opposite spirit which Paul names as ‘flesh’ or ‘the world’ (cf Gal 5:19). The spiritual life consists in developing the faculty of making choices according to the Spirit of God, that is, in Ignatian terms, when one is either working *with* grace or *against* it. It is the human person who makes these choices and as we saw, earlier, Thérèse places much emphasis on her ability *to choose*.¹⁵

As noted, life on a wider screen — including unbelievers — might also benefit from engagement in this process of discernment, if only from the point of searching for the

decisions ... The relevance today of this ancient skill is quite simply because of a central crisis of contemporary culture in the area of the spiritual’ (see Michael-Paul Gallagher, ‘Traditions of Spiritual Discernment’, A speech delivered originally at the International Conference on New Religions and the New Europe (London: 25-28 March 1993): <http://www.dci.dk/?artikel=204> [Accessed 01/12/06].

¹² Ibid., 141.

¹³ Ibid. 149.

¹⁴ Ibid. 147.

¹⁵ Albert Nolan clears away a problem one might have with Pauline terminology that refers to *sarx*. *Sarx* is the ego, or what this dissertation has preferred to name as the ‘false self’. Nolan then has a section entitled ‘The True Self’ (cf. ‘The Flesh’ and ‘The True Self’, in *Jesus Today A Spirituality of Radical Freedom*: 106-110). This dissertation, following Cynthia Bourgeault, agrees that ‘the true self’ is what Nolan’s claims: that is, the ‘sidelining of one’s ego’ and the aiming at all that is true, noble, good, etc. But that ‘true self’, too, must be transcended in order to find the True Self. Thérèse gradually lost her ‘false self’ or ‘ego’ and began to live from her ‘true self’. Progressively, then, and with the help of grace, she became transformed into the Christ Self (the True Self). Discernment is way of noting these movements in one’s soul.

truth when people use all of their gifts of mind and spirit to make decisions. For example, political leaders might thus personally discern the values inherent in all matters before them — not least those of great concern on the national and international scene. For while in positions of leadership, policies, positions on issues, and ideologies are important and have their place:

A political leader must [also] be able to respond to ever-changing and unprecedented situations. We should vote for a person whom we believe has the qualities — the virtues, the character — to decide wisely in situations where policies, positions, and ideologies will be of little help.¹⁶

Surely many politicians already make decisions from the point of 'truth'. But Christian discernment would also add a dimension of interiority. In parliamentary argument, for example, the person in debate would recognise what was 'operating' in his or her spirit as well as using all other resources of mind and research to arrive at a worthy and tenable position. It would also be possible for an unbeliever to participate in this 'interior' process.

Reference to the political landscape raises another issue, not to be discussed in detail here: the questionable advisability of a strong determination to maintain rejection of allowing 'religion' in politics and preference for positivist reason instead.¹⁷ However,

¹⁶ Daniel Taylor and Mark McClosky, 'How to Pick a President: Why Virtue Trumps Policy', *Christianity Today* (12 June 2008): http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=55724 [Accessed 13/06/2008]. 'Virtue' in the Greek sense of virtues, advisable for strong personhood, is not exactly the Christian meaning of 'virtue'. The latter also includes *discernment* — a careful listening to the Spirit given to each person in *grace*.

¹⁷ Positivism is a system of philosophical and religious doctrines elaborated by Auguste Comte (1798-1857). As a philosophical system or method, positivism denies the validity of metaphysical speculations, and maintains that the data of sense experience are the only object and the supreme criterion of human knowledge; as a religious system, it denies the existence of a personal God and takes humanity, 'the great being', as the object of its veneration and cult. The following passage is taken from a speech which the French President Nicolas Sarkozy delivered on the occasion of his being inducted as an Honorary Canon of the Basilica of St John Lateran in Rome, 20 December 2007. It is an interesting response to the discussion of religion and politics: 'In a lay Republic, a political figure such as myself cannot make decisions on the basis of religious considerations. It's nevertheless important that the reflections and the consciences of public figures be especially illuminated by opinions which make reference to norms and convictions that lie beyond immediate contingencies ... It's for this reason that I profoundly wish for the emergence of a healthy *laïcité*, meaning a *laïcité* that, while protecting freedom of thought, the freedom to believe or not, does not consider religions a danger but rather something positive' (John L. Allen, trans. Federico Lombardi (?), <http://ncrcafe.org> [Accessed 10/09/2008]. On 12 September 2008 Pope Benedict, on the occasion of his visit to France, said during the encounter with Sarkozy and other officials of the French government: "...It is fundamental, on the

whether overtly it is or is not allowed, it is silently present in the 'grace' given to each person. Still, political leaders who are *more* disposed to listen to the 'good spirit' can make decisions more in tune with the Absolute Truth than do political leaders who ignore or refuse that grace — for example, those who act only out of expediency. This means that because of discernment, a process that combines intellect and affectivity — both already 'graced'¹⁸ — the 'good spirit' is discerned by a careful listening to all aspects of the human person.

Further to this spiritual discernment discussion, the words *consolation* / *desolation* as metaphors can be applied to 'out there' generalities in the culture. For example, it can be said that the 'nobility of the human spirit' reflected in art, in science, in movements for the betterment of peoples, in respect and care for the earth, and in many other ways, mirrors the working of 'the good spirit' and therefore a spirit of consolation in the culture. On the other hand, 'wars and rumours of wars', loss of hope and heaviness in a collective mentality are possibly apparent evidence of 'the bad spirit' and therefore of the spirit of desolation — the 'profound desolation haunting the roots of our post-modern culture'.

However, using these specific terms of spiritual discernment can pose two difficulties of which I am aware. The first is the terms' questionable applicability to the interpretation of a subject's *personal* spiritual experience the description of which is now accessible only through texts. Nevertheless, I am using instances of personal experience in this chapter as *examples* of the difficulty in truth-finding and in so doing, may be discussing rather than discerning it.

The second difficulty is again that Ignatius meant the terms to be applied solely in a one-to-one context whereas this chapter uses them at times in a *general* collective

one hand, to insist upon the distinction between the political realm and that of religion in order to preserve both the religious freedom of citizens and the responsibility of the state toward them. On the other hand, [it is important] to become more aware of the irreplaceable role of religion for the formation of consciences and the contribution which it can bring to – among other things – the creation of a basic ethical consensus within society" (Reported by John L. Allen, 'Benedict makes a case for healthy "secularism"', *NCR*: <http://www.ncronline3.org>) [Accessed 12 September 2008].

¹⁸ This statement follows Rahner's view that 'grace' is not a superstructure but an integral part of being human.

situation which consists of many sub-sections each of which might have a culture differing one from the others. However, these sub-groups are made up of individual persons. This dissertation has stated that sin is a personal responsibility and that decisions regarding it can be influenced by the culture in which one lives. The culture in a collective sense cannot be responsible for its virtues and its ills; rather that responsibility belongs to the individuals within the culture who make personal decisions which, nevertheless, influence the wider group. There is a reciprocal influence between people and their culture. (In Chapter 2, we saw that personal decisions may, or may not be sinfully culpable even if morally guilty). Discernment is necessary in all these cases on a personal level. The collective level merely receives the accumulated virtues and ills of individuals. And so, yes, the words *consolation* and *desolation* when used as metaphors can describe the state of the collective at any given time.

There is another consideration. While the reality of God is accessible to all (grace), one can be aided in developing the gift by the environment in which one finds oneself. Taking an example from Thérèse's life, we note Thérèse was raised in a most Christian family where the cumulated unaffected goodness of her parents and siblings influenced her thought formation, her character and her desires for 'the good'. On the other hand, today's daily press throws up before us situations similar to a one where a child raised in poverty and suffering abuse turns to drugs and violence later on in life. Having had very little support, it now becomes difficult for such a person to foster the gift of grace that aids discernment of the truth / Truth. Environment and / or 'conditioning' is certainly a factor to be noted is the observable resulting action.

Using the *consolation* / *desolation* motif of spiritual discernment as a backdrop, then, this chapter addresses the two realities of *truth* and *grace*, each of which requires discernment at a personal level. Discovering the truth requires discernment on the national and international level as well — in political leaders who make decisions and in ordinary individuals, as collectively they contribute to and sway political opinion. Grace is at work in all genuine human endeavours to enable truth / Truth to prevail.

A. Definitions of *Truth-Seeking*¹⁹

Truth as a metaphysical quality is difficult to define; no one definition seems completely adequate. *Truth* as a Person can not be defined either, for this Truth can only be contemplated. Marie-Eugène writes that 'Contemplation consists in regarding God himself. It is a simple gaze on Truth (*simplex intuitus veritatis*).²⁰ Nevertheless, searching for the truth is a realistic and rewarding exercise and / or experience, and a sign of the 'good spirit'.

Thérèse writes that, unlike Pilate, she knows *truth*. For her, it is not a definition, it is a Person: 'We possess *Truth*. We are keeping Jesus in our *hearts*!²¹ Nevertheless, truth (with a lower case 't') can also be discerned: 'Lord, speak then to my shepherdess [Mother Gonzague]. How do you expect her to *understand* the *truth* since she hears only falsehood around her?'²²

In Chapter 1, we noted that understanding, interpretation, and application take place through a circular movement from 'the whole' to 'the part' and back to 'the whole' again, in an ongoing circle of understanding, and when one returns to 'the whole' one understands it differently from before.²³ Weinsheimer's suggestion was also noted that Gadamer's 'circle' be replaced by a 'spiral':

¹⁹ The meaning of the word *truth* extends from honesty, good faith, and sincerity in general, to agreement with fact or reality in particular. The term has no single definition about which a majority of professional philosophers and scholars agree (see 'Truth', <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth> [Accessed 20-08-2008]). John Paul II writes that there are different faces of human truth. Yet, in spite of this, one may define the human person 'as *the one who seeks the truth*' (see John Paul II, Encyclical letter, *FR* # 28).

²⁰ Marie-Eugène, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 40.

²¹ *GC* II, 862.

²² *GC* II, 960.

²³ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. edn., trans. rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York NY: Crossroad, 1975, 1989), 291: '... [T]he movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole. Our task is to expand the unity of the understood meaning centrifugally. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed.' Hermeneutics, as a field of inquiry, is not new with Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). In his *Truth and Method* one may find a development from earliest times. Some theologians / philosophers in this line of development and discussed by Gadamer are: Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), Jürgen Habermas (1929 -) belong in this field [as do Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and David Tracy (1939-)].

The hermeneutic circle, in which truth is understood as the conclusive reconciliation of whole and part, might better be conceived as a hermeneutic spiral, in which truth keeps expanding. That is, the whole truth never *is* but always *to be* achieved.²⁴

This, I suggest, might apply both to religious and secular truth. One can always grow in one's understanding of t/Truth: 'truth keeps expanding'. The search for *truth* is always a sign of the spirit of consolation, for it is a sign that the 'good spirit' is at work, whether recognised or not.

B Thérèse and Truth

Thérèse, Truth and *Consolation of Spirit*

We have already referred to Thérèse's search for *truth*. Yet have we come even close to opening out what the actual experience of the search was for her — especially in the last eighteen months of her life when all sensible feeling of satisfaction and comfort left her and she had to face 'the night of nothingness', seemingly alone?²⁵ And yet her strong faith demanded of her that she continue to search. In her last months, she said:

I've never acted like Pilate, who refused to listen to the truth. I've always said to God: O my God, I really want to listen to You; I beg You to answer me when I say humbly: What is truth? Make me see things as they really are. Let nothing cause me to be deceived.²⁶

²⁴ Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 40.

²⁵ These words of Hans Urs Von Balthasar are worth citing as they elegantly describe Thérèse's situation as she struggles to come to *truth*: 'Thérèse of the Child Jesus seems like a person whom we can see summoning all his energies in order to wrestle against something whose form is only dimly outlined and whose hostility we scarcely perceive. Not until the last years, when she herself came to realize that she had conquered in the fight, does the face of the enemy become visible to us, and perhaps to her also: it is the great lie — lying in all the forms it can assume within Christendom, the veneer of truth overlaying deep deception, genuine spiritual poverty mingling with contemptible weakness, pious trash beside real art, sanctity and bigotry, all inextricably bound together. It was Thérèse's destiny to have to thread her way through all this; she was not only committed to being misunderstood both in life and death but often enough gave occasion for that misunderstanding. She had to fight against her time with the weapons of her time, fighting against pious trash with the aid of trashy pictures and words, throwing off her false skin without however being either willing or able to abandon her hereditary background' (Hans Urs Von Balthasar, 'Truth', in *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*), 3.

²⁶ LC 105.

And so, she clung to faith in God against all odds, and her experience can be likened to that of Jonas, Job, or Jesus-in-Gethsemane.²⁷ It was the experience of a final, fearful testing of her faith.

But even on a simply human level, Thérèse could face reality squarely: '*Illusions*, God gave me the grace *not to have a single one* when entering Carmel'.²⁸ Later, as she came to discern her *petite voie*, she would write: 'I must bear with myself such as I am with all my imperfections'.²⁹ In her last months when Mother Agnes (Pauline) told her she wanted to take her photograph to give to Mother Prioress (Mother Gonzague), Thérèse replied: 'Say rather that it's for yourself!' (to be truthful, you want it for yourself).³⁰ Again, when Pauline asked her to say a few edifying words to Dr de Cornière, Thérèse replied: 'Let Doctor de Cornière think what he wants ... I have a horror for [of] "pretense"'.³¹ When asked if she was tired of suffering, she answered: 'No! when I can't take it anymore, I can't take it, and that's it!'³² It is, perhaps, too easy to say that Thérèse's understanding of truth was of the fullness of truth met in Jesus Christ, for it certainly was: 'We possess *Truth*. *We are keeping Jesus in our hearts!*'³³ Jesus was Absolute Truth. But indeed *truth* covered all aspects of her life. She faced truth without prejudice, though it was only in her final struggle that she realized that what she had conquered was 'the great lie' — lying in all the forms it can assume as summarised by Hans Urs Von Balthasar.³⁴ Her 'purity discerned the essential and her generosity lived it perfectly', notes another author.³⁵

Thérèse and possible *Desolation of Spirit*

Yet saints are not ready-made, for they become saints in the course of their daily existence. Neither is truth ready-made; the saint-in-the-making is always discerning

²⁷ See O'Donoghue, 'The Jonas Experience': 88-99.

²⁸ SS Manuscript A, 149.

²⁹ SS Manuscript A, 207.

³⁰ LC, 58.

³¹ LC, 77.

³² LC, 198.

³³ GC II, 862.

³⁴ See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, 'Truth', in *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*, 3. See fn. 25 above.

³⁵ See Marie-Eugène, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 100.

the better course to follow in this daily round. This is not a stressful mental activity; it is rather an attentive listening to the voice of the Spirit.

To perceive the truth in a literary text is probably a combination of human intellectual effort and when it comes to scripture, an attentive listening to the Spirit as well. Literary texts are mainly understood through the lens of the reader's interpretation and those lenses can be blurred. As a sample of all this, the following section is offered where Hans Urs von Balthasar discusses a particular incident in Thérèse's life. This non-scriptural reading and discussion is really on multi-levels. There is the implication of searching for the truth in literary texts generally; there is the question of accuracy of translation; there is the issue of the truth in this particular text which is of a religious nature; and there is a delving into the topic of discernment from the particular aspect of movements within Thérèse's spirit.

In Balthasar's book *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*,³⁶ in a chapter entitled 'Shadows', the author makes two interesting observations, and here we discuss the first of these. Thérèse believed she was entrusted with the mission to make known to others her *petite voie*. Referring to an incident already discussed in this thesis (Chapter 3), Balthasar notes that at the age of ten, Thérèse 'became extremely ill of a disease which brought her to the verge of madness, if not to the edge of the grave'.³⁷ She became delirious, tossing about, and unable to recognize even her relatives. Her father had a novena of Masses offered for her in Paris, and on the Sunday during the novena Thérèse's illness reached its climax. Her sisters, Marie, Léonie, Céline, and Thérèse herself turned in despair to the statue of the Mother of God, storming her with prayers. She was cured by 'the ravishing smile of the Virgin Mary'.³⁸ We recall an observation made earlier that this sickness could have been the result of encephalitis resulting from undiagnosed infection of the brain by tuberculosis.³⁹ That apart, Balthasar's point is this: had Thérèse maintained her silence about the source of the

³⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*: 51-65. This chapter also forms part of *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, trans. Johannes Verlag et al (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992): 97-114. von Balthasar, *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission* also has a section entitled 'Truth': 3-12 which reappears in *Two Sisters in the Spirit*: 43-53.

³⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Thérèse of Lisieux: Story of a Mission*, 52ff.

³⁸ See SS, 66.

³⁹ See *St Thérèse of Lisieux: Essential Writings*, selected with an introduction by Mary Frohlich, 19f.

cure, she would not have unwittingly fallen into the role of a saint. Yet Marie questioned her to tell what she had seen, and then persuaded Thérèse to tell Pauline (already a nun in Carmel). In this way then, others began to view Thérèse as a saint and set her on a pedestal: she had seen the Virgin Mary! So Thérèse turned her life into a proof that the vision was genuine.

I interpret Balthasar to mean that for a time, Thérèse followed a method of spirituality where she concentrated on *her perfection*— more specific outward expressions of it, maybe — rather than on *God's love*. If true, then in the seeking of self, Thérèse was listening to a false spirit. This is the first of O'Sullivan's three basic operational images of God. In reflecting on this at a later time, Thérèse would begin to see evidence of the truth of her fallen condition as a creature before the Creator, that is, her *weakness* in lacking a mature and Spirit-filled vision; she would know her need of the gift of loving healing. Thérèse certainly *grew* in the appreciation she had for God's Merciful Love as the struggle within her to overcome any false spirituality was real. Yet, was she in a period of desolation at this time of her life? If Balthasar's views are correct, then to some extent, yes.

If Balthasar's interpretation is indeed correct, then this was a subtle temptation for Thérèse, and she would have benefited a great deal had she been able to explain her inner state of soul to an experienced spiritual guide. But even if one were available, is a ten-year-old child even capable of articulating the contesting 'voices' within her soul? Surely not; hence there is no sin here. Later, we gather that Thérèse found little outside help for her spiritual life, even in Carmel. The regular chaplain was Father Louis-Auguste Youf, and he was unable to counsel Thérèse in her temptations against the faith.⁴⁰ Father Almire Pichon, Marie's spiritual director and a friend of the Martin family, greatly helped her on one occasion (22 May 1888), when Thérèse was a postulant, by assuring her she had never committed a mortal sin.⁴¹ In his second observation, Balthasar questions this also.

⁴⁰ See *LC*, 58.

⁴¹ See *SS Manuscript A*, 149.

Here, Balthasar notes that Thérèse believed Father Pichon, for as a priest he was God's representative in the Sacrament of Penance, and so he had spoken an authoritative word. Henceforth, she did not speak of her 'sin' but rather of 'faults', 'imperfections', and 'infidelities'. According to Balthasar, 'Her sense of sin [as *her* sin] had been destroyed. The most fateful effect upon her mission was that at a vital moment she had been withdrawn from the community of sinners, divided off from them and 'banished' into a life-long exile of sanctity.'⁴² Balthasar claims that Thérèse was to make superhuman efforts to escape from this 'cage' but never completely succeeded, because she was 'fenced in by obedience'.⁴³ That seems to mean that Thérèse's way of life in Carmel reinforced an *image* of her holiness which Balthasar suggests was Thérèse's own self-perceived *sinlessness*. In fact, her faithful adherence to the Carmel's strict rule of prayer, silence and fasting ('fencing-in-obedience') did, indeed, cause some other sisters to consider Thérèse a saint — though for the wrong reason. Furthermore, to complicate matters even further, Thérèse herself *desires* to be a saint — and in her last months even implies that she is one: 'Gather up these petals, little sisters, they will help you to perform favours later on ... Don't lose one of them';⁴⁴ 'In heaven, I'll reward you for that'.⁴⁵ However, whatever the perfection of her actions, Thérèse became a saint principally by following the interior call of the Spirit, and not merely by the faithful observance of external actions.

We can raise a point for technical discernment here. If Balthasar is correct and Thérèse is aspiring to a false image of sanctity, then she is unable to respond freely according to the way God was leading her because of her false perceived sense of holiness. If this is true, then for a time, Thérèse must have been, for a time, listening to a 'false spirit'.

In recalling another sacramental encounter (15 October 1891) that took place two years after the one with Father Pichon, Thérèse writes these lines which would seem to confirm Balthasar's opinion, at least for an interim period of two years:

⁴² See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Thérèse of Lisieux: Story of a Mission*, 54f.

⁴³ Ibid. 57f.

⁴⁴ *LC*, 190.

⁴⁵ *LC*, 193.

He [Father Alexis Prou] launched me full sail upon the waves of *confidence and love* which so strongly attracted me, but upon which I dared not advance. He told me that *my faults caused God no pain, and that holding as he did God's place*, he was telling me *in His name* that God was very much pleased with me'.⁴⁶

What held Thérèse back from 'daring' to follow her attraction earlier? Was it fear of what others might think when this 'individual' interpretation of spirituality was not the norm? Was it timidity of spirit? If either of these is correct, then Thérèse experienced desolation of spirit. Was it, however, a sense of humility — *albeit* a false sense? Other questions can also be raised regarding the Thérèse / Father Pichon encounter: Did Father Pichon offer *misleading* counsel by stating a case which he considered true — that Thérèse had never committed a mortal sin? Was Thérèse thereby withdrawn from 'sitting at the table of sinners' *prior* to her last eighteen months?

Balthasar's interpretation is to be respected, but I disagree with it in part. Thérèse tells us that she derived great consolation from those words from the confessor⁴⁷ — 'consolation' here meaning that the words resonated as true within her. Further, she recounts that Pichon also assured her at this same time: 'Thank God for what He has done for you; had He abandoned you, instead of being a little angel, you would have become a little demon.' Is it true then, that Thérèse only later developed a mature sense of her state of soul? Yes perhaps, in the sense that she *grew* in realisation of her real position before God. To know one's sinful nature in a realistic way is a grace. It has little to do with being a liar, a thief, and a murderer, and has more to do with knowing one's relationship as a creature to the Uncreated.

One of the problems that beset Thérèse as she grew in the spiritual life was to discern 'the voices' within her. So was her conscience in the early stages of religious life (Pichon spoke these words in 1888) so delicate that she needed to hear his words of affirmation? Yes, perhaps so, for she also writes of this occasion: 'I had such a great fear of soiling my baptismal robe that such an assurance ... seemed to me to be

⁴⁶ SS Manuscript A, 174.

⁴⁷ See SS Manuscript A, 149f. These pages give an insight into Thérèse's early growth in the spiritual life.

coming from the mouth of Jesus Himself'.⁴⁸ Or was her sense of sin so great that she thought she was committing serious sin and the confessor needed to reassure her that she was not? And so was this an example of a conscience afflicted by scruples? There is perhaps some truth in all three. On the other hand, Father Pichon knew Thérèse, and therefore one would suspect he would have counselled her according to his knowledge gained not only from the Confessional, but also from meeting her socially. Or is the truth somewhere between Balthasar's interpretation and the words Father Pichon spoke to Thérèse?

Balthasar also claims that the plaster sanctity in which her companions encased Thérèse hampered the development of her real self. 'It would take a long time — until the beginning of her last illness, in fact', he writes, 'before she succeeded in tearing off this plaster mask, trampling it in pieces and becoming her true self again'.⁴⁹ It is also Balthasar's opinion that had it not taken her so long to find her real self, Thérèse's mission of teaching *The Way of Spiritual Childhood* (*petite voie*) might have come to her attention sooner. 'As it was, it was not until the last years of her life that she fully grasped what it was about'.⁵⁰ There is truth in this. Without doubt, had Thérèse been granted a longer life, her spirituality would have developed even further. The views of Balthasar are worth considering. If they are true, then 'desolation of spirit' was not unfamiliar to Thérèse. However long it took, and this is a matter of opinion, she was able to discern the 'false voice' within such desolation and free herself from its burden.

Our point here is to highlight the difficulty of finding *the* truth in any literary text. There is much legitimacy in the citation that 'the whole truth never *is* but always *to be achieved*'.⁵¹ Further, on the level of spiritual discernment, the point has been to highlight something of the process for Thérèse — so highly gifted, motivated, and sincere — in discerning the operations of the 'good spirit' and the 'evil spirit' in her soul.

⁴⁸ SS Manuscript A, 149f.

⁴⁹ See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*, 54.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 40. (Also cited in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, fn. 184).

The following section again deals with the issue of *searching* for spiritual truth via spiritual discernment and explains this further. The 'true self / false self' motif used here is not intended to affirm a duality in the human person. The human person is one whole *being*.

Thérèse and Marie: *Consolation* and *Desolation*

The following section shows something of 'consolation' (not necessarily consolations in prayer)⁵² in Thérèse, and maybe, 'desolation' in her sister, Marie.

On September 13, 1896, one year before Thérèse's death, Marie (Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart) wrote a note to Thérèse who was making a private retreat at the time. 'I am writing not because I have something to tell you but to get something from you, from you who are so close to God and [to whom God] confides His secrets ...write me a short note ... Ask Jesus to love me, too, as He does his little Thérèse'.⁵³ Thérèse responded with a letter dated September 13 — which now forms the first part of Manuscript B of *Story of a Soul*. With this letter, Thérèse enclosed another document that she had written also during her time of Retreat. This document forms the second part of Manuscript B, not printed in the *Letters*. Among other things, Thérèse writes: 'do not believe that I am swimming in consolations; oh, no! my consolation is to have none on earth. Without showing Himself, without making His voice heard, Jesus teaches me in secret ... the Science of Love.'⁵⁴

When Marie read Thérèse's letter and the enclosed document, she, Marie, wrote again to Thérèse: 'I have read your pages burning with love for Jesus. Your little godmother is *very happy* to possess this treasure ... I would like you to tell your little godmother

⁵² This is not easy to distinguish. One who is experiencing aridity in prayer as Thérèse is, and who, nevertheless, maintains trust in God's love, is in 'consolation', that is, the person is not listening to a 'false spirit'. If, on the other hand, a person, because he or she experiences much aridity in prayer, were to conclude that God does not love them, such a one would experience 'desolation of spirit', a desolation brought on by the person's listening to a 'false voice'. Thérèse's trust in God was such that she believed in it no matter what her feelings and 'voices' told her. This is a very high level of faith, trust and confidence in God.

⁵³ GC II, 991.

⁵⁴ GC II, 994.

in writing, if she can love Jesus as you do ... you are possessed by God'.⁵⁵ Again Thérèse replied and this time, her letter expresses a cry — 'I beg you' — for understanding. Marie has not understood her correctly, for she has interpreted Thérèse's many desires — as expressed in her document — as a sign of God's favour / consolation to Thérèse. Such a misinterpretation is very understandable, for Manuscript B is Thérèse's literary gem in which her spirit soars in description of her desire to be warrior, priest, apostle, doctor and martyr. It reaches a highpoint with her exclamation: 'My vocation is love! ... In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be *Love*'.⁵⁶ However, Thérèse explains that, at times, God grants such desires as consolations (felt satisfactions) to weak souls to encourage them. Yet, she clarifies that when 'one rests in them with complacency and when one believes they are *something great*' then they '*render one unjust*'. She continues, 'But when He does not give this *consolation*, it is a grace of *privilege*'. This explanation of some of the further ways of discernment however, is not given as a lesson to Marie, insightful as it surely is. Thérèse principally wants to explain to her sister the real reason for her [Thérèse's] being 'possessed by God' — as Marie describes it. Thérèse writes: 'Dear Sister, how can you say after this that my desires are the sign of my love? ... Ah! I really feel that it is not this at all that pleases God in my little soul; what pleases Him is *that He sees me loving my littleness and my poverty, the blind hope that I have in His mercy* ... This is my only treasure, dear Godmother, why would this treasure not be yours? ...'⁵⁷

This dialogue between Thérèse and her sister, Marie, can be interpreted in terms of Thérèse's consolation of spirit and maybe Marie's lack of it. Very simply, Thérèse's humanity, her 'true self' — not her 'false self' which she has already overcome to a large extent — still remains a limited self, as does that of every human person.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ GC II, 997.

⁵⁶ SS Manuscript B, 194.

⁵⁷ GC II, 999.

⁵⁸ Even when one has become — and at this stage in her life, Thérèse — the True Self or Christ Self, there is a problem in choosing words to accurately describe this state. God always remains distinct from the creature even though mystical language sometimes speaks of God and the soul becoming one. Further, this Self — even in the human person — remains a limited self capable of change, either for better or worse. However, this might not be quite accurate. Under certain conditions, for example, mystical experience, one is incapable of sinning (there is passive receptivity); when that experience ceases, then, perhaps, one is again capable. Marie-Eugène writes: 'In mystical experience the soul is

However, rather than becoming discouraged and disconsolate in experiencing this, she rejoices in it. Growing in truth, Thérèse's expanding image of God is of God who is true (loving, compassionate). Growing in truth, she grew not only in self-knowledge, but also in the acceptance of her real self and, if you will, her limited God Self.

This same passage from Thérèse's Manuscript C can also throw light on the meaning of Original Sin. On one hand, while only God knows the inner workings of Marie's soul during the course of this dialogue with her sister, Thérèse, perhaps we can detect a spirit of sadness and discouragement in Marie coming from a comparison of herself with Thérèse. Perhaps when she saw God's apparent preference for Thérèse, Marie felt somewhat like the Old Testament figure Cain when God preferred Abel's sacrifice to his.⁵⁹ Perhaps Marie felt deprived; perhaps to some degree she experienced sadness and anger. We do not know, but it is a possible interpretation, since Original Sin is felt as a sense of shame that 'one is not good enough'. In this context, sin has to do with the 'true self' that is tempted to be discouraged and desolate at its weakness. In passing, we recall the testimony of one of the witnesses from the process for beatification, Sister Geneviève of Saint Teresa: '[Thérèse's] fortitude was seen at its best in her temptation against the faith. She spoke to no one about this, lest she spread the temptation to them, and she endured it without the slightest sign of discouragement'.⁶⁰ For Marie [in our imagined interpretation] to choose to 'go down this path' to discouragement and desolation is moving in the area of the sin of unbelief, for it is the refusal to follow the 'path to life' that is offered through *grace*. To choose to go 'down this [false] path' amounts figuratively to opening the door and letting enter the sin that is knocking (Genesis 4:7). Jesus does not require any more of Marie than that she rest secure in Jesus' love for her — as an imperfect human person.

always certain of possessing a divine treasure. But this treasure is in a reliquary ... an extraordinary favour opens for a moment the reliquary, letting its treasure be seen' (see Marie-Eugène, *I am a Daughter of the Church: A Practical Synthesis of Carmelite Spirituality*, vol. II, trans. M. Verda Clare (Cork Ireland: The Mercier Press, 1956), 271.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 2 above, 82.

⁶⁰ See O'Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux by those who knew her: Testimonies from the process of beatification*, 142.

On the other hand, we can be grateful to Marie for pursuing this topic as she did. Thérèse *petite voie* teaches the acceptance of one's humanity that allows grace to flow for one to 'work away' at correcting the false self. The joyous acceptance of not being 'perfect' provides 'a pleasant place of shelter'⁶¹ for Jesus, and in this 'truth' is found the means to be 'possessed by God'.⁶²

C. The *Truth* in Books Written About Thérèse

We offer other example of seeking the truth in a literary text. This first one concerns the truth in books written about Thérèse. In his review, Cicero Bruce discusses the differences of interpretation given to the life of Thérèse by two competent authors, Bernard Bro and Kathryn Harrison.⁶³ Bruce writes:

To be sure, Bro and Harrison give us two vivid depictions of St Thérèse. Yet, attitudinally speaking, their accounts of the Christ-imitating, self-immolating woman of Lisieux have little in common. Harrison's was written for the Penguin Lives Series, the books of which are intended, as *Time* aptly describes them, 'to whet and then satisfy curiosity'. They are meant, in other words, to tell a good story. And tell a good story Harrison does. Bro's, on the other hand, which appeared originally in French in 1996, is a work composed for and in the light of eternity. Bro's book remains a needful corrective to what the author refers to as 'biographies of Thérèse that proceed no farther than descriptions of love on the psychological or psychoanalytical order'.⁶⁴

⁶¹ A reference taken up by Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (London: Arrow / Random, 1983), 11f. Thérèse uses the expression 'to bear in peace the trial of not pleasing yourself' (See *GC II*, 1038).

⁶² *GC II*, 999f.

⁶³ Cicero Bruce compares (1) Bernard Bro, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her family, Her God, Her Message*, (2003): 253 pages — Bernard Bro O.P. is a Doctor of Philosophy in France. His distinguished theological career has included the chair of dogmatic theology at Le Saulchoir and editorship of *La Vie Spirituelle*. He has written many books and articles — with (2) Kathryn Harrison, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: A Penguin Life* London: Viking/Penguin, 2003): 227 pages — Kathryn Harrison has authored the memoirs *The Kiss and Seeking Rapture*, and the novels *Thicker Than Water*, *Exposure*, *Poison*, *The Binding Chair*, *A Thousand Orange Tress* and *The Seal Wife*. Her essays have appeared in *The New Yorker* and *Harper's* magazine. She lives in Brooklyn, New York. Both books carry the publishing date of 2003 and so are recent publications. Bro's book is a translation of his 1996 *Thérèse of Lisieux: Sa famille, son Dieu, son message*.

⁶⁴ Cicero Bruce, review of *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*, by Bernard Bro and *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: A Penguin Life*, by Kathryn Harrison, in *New Oxford Book Reviews* (March 2005). <http://www.newoxfordreview.org/reviews>. [Accessed 7/7/08].

Monica Furlong's book is another, like Harrison's, that is written almost in the style of a novel.⁶⁵ This book, too, raises the question: what is the truth here? Furlong's interest is to demonstrate that Thérèse is certainly not the sweet, sugary and obedient girl some would have her to be but one who 'struggled from her earliest days to make sense of life, and who was prepared to pay any price in order to do so'.⁶⁶ Furlong uses the feminist hermeneutic of suspicion, and she sees Thérèse as one who is 'handicapped in Church and society for being a woman'⁶⁷ and therefore unable to reach her full potential.

Each of these three books is faithful to the accuracy of the historical facts. It is the interpretation of them that varies.⁶⁸ Hermeneutics of suspicion or of satisfying curiosity are bound to elicit interpretations different from one undelayed by a hermeneutic of holiness. Perhaps, too, and in a similar vein, we question the truth in some media reports that can give preference to sensationalism over fact.

D. Seeking the *Truth* within Realms of Meaning

Here, the discussion centres on Bernard Lonergan and his theory of meaning. This allows us to see, yet again, different ways of viewing 'the truth'. 'Lonergan identifies four distinct realms or worlds of meaning, which arise from different modes of conscious and intentional operation'.⁶⁹ There is the realm of common sense and the realm of theory. There is the realm of interiority, and there is the realm of transcendence corresponding to the human desire for complete intelligibility —

⁶⁵ See Monica Furlong, *Thérèse of Lisieux* (Essex: Virago Press, 1987).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁷ Furlong, *Thérèse of Lisieux*, 135. In fairness to Furlong who 'has been fascinated by Thérèse of Lisieux for years', we note that she also states: 'The truly remarkable thing about Thérèse, however, is that she took her own very human failings — her longing for love and attention and acclaim, her overweening spiritual ambition — exactly as they were in all their silliness and childishness, and began to work with them. Almost as if she were considering another person, not herself, she detached herself from the particular shame of such feelings by the process of owning them. Cruelly debarred by the accidents of her upbringing and the blindness of Church and society from leading the rich life her body and brains might have enjoyed, she took the scrap of life allowed to her and transformed it' (133f).

⁶⁸ Again, we recall Thérèse's reason for writing: to sing the mercies of the Lord. It therefore seems unfair to Thérèse to bypass that emphasis.

⁶⁹ See Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (Wilwaukee WS: Marquette University Press, 2005), 62. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 81-85.

unconditioned judgment and a good beyond all criticism. This last realm is one of fulfilment, peace and joy in which God is known and loved. It is a realm of religious experience and its expression, culminating in mystical prayer and ultimately union with God.⁷⁰

Leaving behind the immediate world of the infant — the world of immediate experience — there is the larger world where this world is mediated by meaning. This is the world 'intended by questions, organised by intelligence, described by imagination and language, and enriched by tradition'.⁷¹ The move from the world of immediate experience to the world mediated by meaning brings about a change in the life of the person. 'For one thing it alters the quality of self-consciousness'.⁷² For the adult, now there are two possibilities open to him / her: the realm of common sense and the realm of theory. The realm of common sense is the realm of persons and things in their relations to us', giving meaning to our lives.⁷³ Further, common sense according to Lonergan 'thinks and speaks, proposes and acts, with respect, not to the general, but to the particular and concrete'.⁷⁴ In the realm of common sense, one comes to know, to understand, 'not by applying some scientific method, but by a self-correcting process of learning'.⁷⁵ In this process of learning, 'insights gradually accumulate, coalesce, qualify and correct one another, until a point is reached where we are able to meet situations as they arise, size them up by adding a few more insights to the acquired store, and so deal with them in an appropriate fashion'.⁷⁶

Thérèse had 'common sense'. For example, she could decide when the time was opportune for her to bring up certain topics with the novices,⁷⁷ and she adequately and tactfully interacted with her blood sisters who were with her in the same convent, speaking with all in non-technical language. Yet was this really the only realm of meaning to which Thérèse belonged? The situations cited lead us answer in the

⁷⁰ See Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 62f. See also, Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 83, 106.

⁷¹ Lane, *The Experience of God*, 24.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 81.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁷ See the incident where Thérèse spoke frankly to Sister Martha regarding Sister Martha's fault of engaging in 'idle conversation' (SS Manuscript C, 235f.).

affirmative. On the other hand though, might she not have advanced in some way to the realm of theory as well?

In the realm of theory there is a far more precise choice of language that is required to describe the intrinsic properties of things: for example, mass, temperature or the electromagnetic field.⁷⁸ Of course, there will be common sense descriptions of these, but the language of their scientific realities will be theoretical.

Intelligence demands not just how things are in relation to us, but how things are in relation to one another; not just how to correctly use words, but their precise meaning; not just their meaning for this people in this place and time, but their meaning for all people everywhere.⁷⁹

Thérèse did not have facility in this realm. However, there is an example in a letter of 1890 that suggests her capacity for philosophical reasoning. Writing to Céline, she encloses a page of scripture quotations. Referring to one of them, Isaiah 52: 1-5, she asks 'what is time'?

Céline, its *such a long time ago* ... and already the soul of the prophet Isaias was immersed, just as our own soul is, in the HIDDEN BEAUTIES of Jesus ... Ah, Céline, when I read these things, I wonder what time really is? ... Time is only a mirage, a dream ... already God *sees us in glory*.⁸⁰

Further, might we not say that theology is also a theoretical discipline, as in for example, the works of Thomas Aquinas and his *QD de veritate*? Its language is often very technical. Yet, Thérèse gives ample examples of her searching inquiries regarding the meaning of, for example, 'grace' and the article of the Creed: 'I believe in ... the Resurrection of the body and life everlasting', and so she gives evidence of

⁷⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 82.

⁷⁹ Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 62.

⁸⁰ GC I, 630. See also, Jean Guitton, *The Spiritual Genius of St Thérèse*, 42. Guitton's account of Thérèse's comment 'what is time?' occurs in his broad discussion on Thérèse's further insights into 'The Unreality of Time and the Eternity of the Moment'. He writes: 'I [Guitton] have noticed that the question of the passage from eternity into time and from time into eternity is the most searching of all the problems that have been set to the mind'. Thérèse is capable of this kind of philosophical reasoning. Guitton then cites two stanzas of a longer poem written by Thérèse. These particular stanzas show Thérèse's further capacity for living the 'reality of the present moment': 'My life is an instant / An hour which passes by; / My life is a moment / Which I have no power to stay. / Thou know'st O my God / That I love thee here on earth / I have only today' (see *L'Eternel Aujourd'hui*, cited in Guitton, 47; See PN, 5, 51f).

the possibility of her being able to enter this realm, even if she is unable to express its contents in technical terms. Regarding her potential for entering the critical realm, Guitton notes:

The spirit of truth is remarkable in Thérèse ... She had no critical culture and therefore could not always distinguish for herself between what is authentic and what is not. But one conjectures that she had a critical faculty, which would, had it been cultivated, have made her intellect capable of going straight to truth and incapable of feeding images.⁸¹

The two realms of common sense and theory exist in some tension. 'Is common sense simply a form of ignorance to be replaced by science, or is science simply of pragmatic value, allowing us to control things without really penetrating to their reality?'⁸² The answers to these questions cannot be found in the development of a new theory, 'but by moving to a new realm of meaning, that of interiority.'⁸³

In all of this discussion on realms of meaning, two terms are significant for Lonergan: 'undifferentiated consciousness' and 'differentiated consciousness'. The former 'uses indiscriminately the procedures of common sense, and so its explanations, its self-knowledge, and its religion are rudimentary'; the latter appears when one turns attention to interiority, and having become self-aware, one is capable of making distinctions among the several realms of meaning and can shift from one to the other consciously.⁸⁴ The realm of interiority is

[U]ncovered through an act of introspection and self-appropriation, not as withdrawal from the world, but as a heightening of consciousness, an act of attending to the conscious subject as it engages in its intentional activities.⁸⁵

Lonergan claims that knowledge gained is not just an exterior appendage to one's person, for knowing involves the subjective 'I' (in whatever area it finds itself) and

⁸¹ Guitton, *The Spiritual Genius of St Thérèse*, 22.

⁸² Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 63.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁸⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 84.

⁸⁵ Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 63.

challenges it to decision re the true good — that is, moral self-transcendence.⁸⁶ ‘What am I doing when I am knowing? Why is doing that knowing? What do I know when I do it?’⁸⁷ When one poses these questions to oneself, states Lonergan, ‘one turns from the outer realms of common sense and theory to the appropriation of one’s own interiority, one’s subjectivity’.⁸⁸

Mastery of this interior realm can provide one with the resources needed to address critical epistemological and metaphysical questions, and heal the tensions between the realms of common sense and theory.⁸⁹

This self-appropriation is a vital step, for without it, any learning one might have acquired in the realms of common sense and theory remain lifeless items of knowledge.

One gets the impression that Thérèse was very capable of the self-appropriation of knowledge. This allowed her to ruminate upon metaphysical questions such as those concerning ‘divinity, the order of the universe, the destiny of mankind, and the lot of each individual’⁹⁰ and, having some notion of the answers given to such questions by the materialists of her day, she *chose* her own faith-perspective answer. Further, Thérèse’s great ability to self-reflect (evident in her autobiography) is notable. Yet for all this great ability, she was completely respectful of legitimate authority. There is evidence of this when on the completion of her autobiography and her handing it to Mother Agnes by whose command she had undertaken to write it, Thérèse remained quite peaceful while waiting for the latter’s comment / approval. As it turned out, this was months in coming, yet Thérèse continued to accept the fact that as Prioress, Mother Agnes would attend to the matter in ‘God’s good time’.

Because there is in the human person the desire to know without restriction, Lonergan claims that there is also an ‘opening out’ to the transcendent, to a further realm again. ‘Peace and joy, fruits of this fulfilment, can only be found by moving beyond the

⁸⁶ It seems to me that ‘moral self-transcendence’ is a methodological way of speaking of fruitful discernment. The choice between authenticity and inauthenticity is key in both.

⁸⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 83.

⁸⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 83.

⁸⁹ Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 63.

⁹⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 266.

realms of common sense, theory, and interiority and into the realm in which God is known and loved'.⁹¹ This transcendent realm corresponds to:

the human desire for complete intelligibility, unconditioned judgment and a good beyond all criticism. This draws us to a realm beyond those of common sense, of theory and of interiority into a realm of fulfilment, peace and joy in which God is known and loved. This is a realm of religious experience and its expression, culminating in mystical prayer and ultimately union with God.⁹²

This realm is surely available to all us 'ordinary mortals' at some level.⁹³

It seems that Thérèse, purified by the fire of Divine Love to an extraordinary degree and 'reaching the sustained self-transcendence of the virtuous',⁹⁴ and, as well, possessing a significant ability to reflect upon her life (24 years 9 months) and its meaning, enjoyed the state of a quite significantly developed differentiated consciousness enjoyed in unity. Lonergan's opinion is that fully differentiated consciousness is the fruit of an extremely prolonged development.⁹⁵ However, we have already seen that Thérèse's development began at a very early age, it was intensified by her own strength of will, and it 'peaked' in her *Self-Offering to Merciful Love*. This, and certainly the experience that followed while Thérèse was praying the *Stations of the Cross* is an example of an experience of 'consolation without cause'.⁹⁶ Perhaps it is difficult to describe the effects of the purifying Love of God upon the human soul, and most saints are content to agree with St John: 'God is love' (cf. 1 Jn 4:16). However, this is not an intellectually satisfying answer, because the words are meaningless to one without the corresponding religious experience. This dissertation has noted that, at the close of her life, Thérèse was in the state of transforming union or 'Mystical Marriage' in John of the Cross's terms. In Laurence Freeman's levels of consciousness, Thérèse was in the Sixth Level where 'one moves into the

⁹¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 83f.

⁹² Ormerod, *The Trinity*, 63. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 266.

⁹³ Lonergan writes: The question of God ... lies with man's [sic] horizon ... The atheist may pronounce it empty. The agnostic may urge that he [or she] finds the investigation inconclusive. The contemporary humanist will refuse to allow the question to arise. But their negations presuppose the spark in our clod, our native orientation to the divine' (see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 103).

⁹⁴ See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 35.

⁹⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 257.

⁹⁶ See LC, 77.

boundlessness of God in a journey of infinite expansion'.⁹⁷ According to Lonergan, God's gift of his love can be objectified in the realms of common sense, theory and interiority; but the emergence of the gift itself, known in the differentiated realm of transcendence intensifies, purifies and clarifies the gift as it was known earlier.⁹⁸ This was Thérèse's experience.

And yet with Thérèse, there is the paradox of her experiencing consolation of spirit — that is, maintaining peace of soul⁹⁹ — while at the same time suffering the desolation associated with lack of faith in the last eighteen months of her life. Both spirits reveal an aspect of truth: her peace of soul reveals she is living within God's love, and it also confirms that she shares in the life of Jesus in a special way by sharing his passion. The desolation she experiences mirrors cultural unbelief. This dissertation maintains that this 'desolation' was given to her as a special share in the Cross of Jesus. And as explained above, this 'desolation' was not the 'desolation' coming from listening to a false spirit. Rather, it was a 'desolation' reflecting the culture where 'sin against faith' was taking hold.

As stated previously, Thérèse's understanding of the 'sin against faith' applied to the militant and blasphemous atheist of the nineteenth century. The Catholic twenty-first century view is that because there are possibly many 'anonymous Christians among contemporary atheists',¹⁰⁰ 'the sin' is not so obviously present. Nevertheless, Thérèse's contribution to our century in this regard is in raising contemporary awareness of the possibility of disregarding truth which might eventually then lead to loss of Christian faith or belief in one's ultimate value. In a society where, for some people, an attitude of 'anything goes' and God is absent and not even missed, disregard for truth can even lead to global self-destruction.

⁹⁷ Freeman lists six levels of one's journey to union with God (see Chapter 2, fn. 98).

⁹⁸ See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 266.

⁹⁹ References are numerous. See, for example, SS Manuscript A 58, 78, 118, 135, 136, 148, 166, 167; Manuscript B 195, 199; Manuscript C 210, 226.

¹⁰⁰ See 'Atheism and Implicit Christianity', in Gerard A. McCool, ed., *A Rahner Reader*, 220.

Mini Conclusion

All the sections so far in this chapter have provided shafts of light on the topic of 'truth'. 'Truth is an experience of personal consciousness; in fact, it is an experience that constitutes consciousness, not an add-on experience'.¹⁰¹ It is always possible to enhance this experience, to grow in it, or to allow it to grow in us. To seek to do so places one in the spirit of consolation. On the other hand, to disregard truth is a sign of a false or evil spirit and an example of desolation of spirit. A disregard for the truth on a global scale can well be at the root of 'a profound desolation haunting ... our post-modern culture'.¹⁰²

We conclude this chapter with an *exposé* of the other reality mentioned in the Prologue to John's Gospel — grace: 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth' (Jn 1:14); and the second of the qualities of which the Council speaks in its document on the Missionary Activity of the Church: 'Whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations, [it is] as a sort of secret presence of God'.¹⁰³

E. Thérèse and Grace

When we happen upon something true, something that possesses an immediate certitude, though it cannot be methodically certified, then we already belong to and participate in the *Geschehen der Wahrheit*, the happening of truth. We belong to history.¹⁰⁴

The incident to be discussed here bears out the meaning of these words in a striking manner and in a Christian context. The incident is a further example of 'consolation without cause'. The Transcendent (grace) can break into any human life at any time and without warning:

¹⁰¹ See Laurence Freeman, 'A Letter from Laurence Freeman OSB', *Christian Meditation Newsletter* 29/2 (June 2005), 2.

¹⁰² See Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux', 264.

¹⁰³ AG, # 9.

¹⁰⁴ Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of 'Truth and Method'*, 15.

The central point is that the co-presence of God in the world communicated through the religious dimension of human experience, is neither a presence directly available only to a privileged few, nor a presence mediated simply through logical deduction, to the learned. Instead the reality of God in the world is a presence that is accessible to all; it is a gracious omnipresence in which every human being 'lives, moves and has her or his being' whether it is consciously recognised or not.¹⁰⁵

In Christian language, God's self-communication and co-presence — in this chapter, as *truth* — is through *grace*. The reality of God's presence is accessible to all people: sometimes it 'makes itself felt'.

Grace and an Example of 'Consolation without Cause'

One cold winter's night, Thérèse was leading the elderly, infirm and sometimes complaining Sister St Pierre to the refectory. The task was not appealing, yet in contrast to it, Thérèse 'suddenly ... heard off in the distance the harmonious sound of a musical instrument'. She pictures a well-lighted drawing room, brilliantly gilded, filled with elegantly dressed young ladies conversing together and conferring upon each other all sorts of compliments and other worldly remarks. 'Then my glance fell upon the poor invalid whom I was supporting. Instead of the beautiful strains of music I heard only her occasional complaints, and instead of the rich gildings I saw only the bricks of our austere cloister, hardly visible in the faintly glimmering light'. She then continues: 'I cannot express in words what happened in my soul: what I know is that the Lord illumined it with rays of *truth* which so surpassed the dark brilliance of earthly feasts that I could not believe my happiness'. Thérèse says she would not have exchanged the ten minutes employed in carrying out her humble office of charity to enjoy a thousand years of worldly feasts.¹⁰⁶ She had seen into the essence of being with a clarity that could only speak to her of truth. Yet, it was but one cameo of the history of her human spirit entering into the much longer history of its dialogue with God. Perhaps it was sufficient to sustain her through the long night of nothingness that awaited her spirit.

¹⁰⁵ Lane, *The Experience of God*, 29.

¹⁰⁶ SS Manuscript C, 248f.

This was a religious experience for Thérèse. In comparing it, for example, with a depth experience of an atheist being present at the birth of his child, we ask 'is there any difference' between the two experiences? Both are depth experiences and both affect their subjects significantly. In each 'a movement by the subject takes place, which brings that subject beyond the visible frontiers of the empirical world into a new invisible world mediated by meaning and depth'.¹⁰⁷ The answer to the question is that Thérèse recognises her experience as an experience of God — 'all is a grace' she says — while the atheist, while being similarly moved, does not or cannot relate his experience to the presence of God in the world.

Why does one person *recognise* God's co-presence in the world while another seemingly does not? Is it the result of conditioning? Yes, partly, because what is already present is nurtured and brought to maturity through personal co-operation. However, while this seems to be the usual norm, God is not constrained to work this way. God can intervene 'without cause' as in the above example of Thérèse and the aged and invalided nun. Further, why do some people, like Thérèse, belong to an environment that nurtures this while others grow up in a completely a-religious environment? To answer this we must return to Thérèse's own solution discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation: some people are like roses or lilies, others like daisies or violets, and others, again, like wild flowers and come from different natural environments; yet all are within the embrace of God.¹⁰⁸ Some of 'these flowers' even remove themselves from God's embrace. However, Thérèse sits with these particular

¹⁰⁷ Lane, *The Experience of God*, 26.

¹⁰⁸ Speaking of *grace* and contemplative prayer, Jean Lafrance states that 'in every life of contemplative prayer, grace comes first. But we also know that if God dwells in the heart of man [sic], God may be more or less well accepted there'. There is no problem with this statement. However, Lafrance then cites St Augustine's notion of the degrees of God's presence in the souls of saints: '[And] not only does the one who is everywhere not dwell in everyone, but he does not dwell in the same degree in the very ones in whom he makes his dwelling place. Hence the fact that among the saints, some are holier than others only because God takes up his dwelling more perfectly in them' (*Letter 187, ad Dardanum*) (See Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, 52f.). Augustine's view is troublesome if not clearly understood. The offer of *grace* is made to each person; but it can be 'more or less well accepted'. God's presence in the soul is in varying degrees according, it seems, to the person's desire to receive it. (This dissertation argues that the knowing refusal of grace — or of God's Self-communication — is sinful). *Grace* received and welcomed is 'rewarded' by an increase of grace. However, rather than speaking in terms of *grace* as a commodity, one does well to speak of *grace* in terms of relationship. Saints are 'possessed by God' because, seemingly, they desire to be so (cf. *GC* II, 997 where Marie writes to Thérèse: 'You are possessed by God ... absolutely possessed, just as the wicked are possessed by the devil'). But for all that, there still remains an element of mystery in relation to grace. Thérèse's response re different kinds of flowers, all loved by God, remains valid.

people in a situation that she can only describe as 'bitter'. Why? She is convinced that, while from a human point of view such people are perhaps guilty and their guilt calls forth God's justice, God's mercy clothes God's justice.¹⁰⁹ Thérèse's particular gift from God is *mercy*.

I understand ... that all souls cannot be the same, that it is necessary there be different types in order to honour each of God's perfections in a particular way. To me He has granted His *infinite Mercy*, and *through it* I contemplate and adore the other divine perfections! All of these perfections appear to be resplendent *with love*, even His Justice (And perhaps this even more so than the other) seems to me clothed in *love*.¹¹⁰

John Paul II, in his encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* writes in a similar vein: 'Love is 'greater' than justice: greater in the sense that it is primary and fundamental ... The primacy and superiority of love *vis-à-vis* justice — this is a mark of the whole of revelation — are *revealed precisely through mercy*'.¹¹¹ In again addressing the question of the believer and the non-believer, the *mercy* of God alone can take this issue beyond the point of logic.

Union with God

The life of Thérèse models what union with God might seem like: exceptionally loving towards all with whom she lives; a deep and sincere prayer life; and a surrender of her will to God's Will. Above all, she models the humility born of knowing that everything comes from God: 'everything is a grace'.¹¹² The effects of grace in one's soul can be described in various ways. Catholicism describes it this way: Jesus Christ is divine by nature, and the human person experiences the divine through grace. Grace is not to be understood as a quantity but as a quality, lifting one's life and one's relationships to the level of 'one with / in Christ'

Union with God (holiness) brings one into closer relationship with the Cross of Christ. The Cross hangs over this person in the sense that she is nothing and God is all. One's

¹⁰⁹ See SS Manuscript A, 180.

¹¹⁰ SS Manuscript A, 180.

¹¹¹ John Paul II, *DM*, # 4.

¹¹² *LC*, 57.

innate desire to seek self-fulfilment is eventually totally surrendered. Also surrendered are one's material ways of being bounded by the senses and one's natural judgements. For example, one's decisions regarding what is happiness and the way to achieve it are surrendered. Union with God means that all of one's life is a for-Godness as was the life of Jesus. Further:

Union with God also has enormous relevance for Christian life in the world. For in the measure that one is conscious of one's union with God, in the same measure is one freed from nature and the world, and especially from fear of the world. Union with God relativises the world, puts it in its true perspective as creature, and releases one from every fear that can paralyse the action of love. Only on this premise can a person be really free for the world, prophetic and critical in its regard, active in it and for it. Union with God by the dynamics of grace is not escapist, for the effect of grace is freedom from the world in order to be freely immersed in it.¹¹³

This is what we can refer to as the value of 'contemplation for the sake of others'.

Again, union with God makes a qualitative difference to all work. Where there is much emphasis on working for the good of one's neighbour, be that at home or abroad, Thérèse was of the opinion, following St John of the Cross, that one act of 'pure love' was superior to all action and was able to bring about the conversion of the world.¹¹⁴ This is an extraordinary claim for the efficacy of contemplative prayer. Union with God, a union in love, does not lead to gazing at oneself. It looks upwards and outwards: upwards to God, and outwards to the world. Even so, Thérèse felt the need to ask herself whether *pure love* was in her heart. As embodied spirits and never completely freed from the effects of Original Sin, there is always a tendency to put oneself first. The *complete* loss of self, in the sense of the surrender of one's will to

¹¹³ Roger Haight, 'Union with God', in *NDCD*, 459.

¹¹⁴ See St John of the Cross, 'Spiritual Canticle', stanza 29, no. 2, *Collected Works*, 523. John of the Cross explains: A soul 'lost to all things and won over to love, no longer occupies her spirit in anything else' [other than] 'attentiveness to God and continual love of Him'. Then referring to the Martha and Mary story in Lk 10: 39-41, John of the Cross notes that, yes, Martha was certainly loving, loving in action. And he further notes that 'until the soul reaches [the] state of union of love, she should practice love in both the active and contemplative life' [like Martha]. 'Yet once she arrives, she should not become involved in other works and exterior exercises that might be of the slightest hindrance to the attentiveness of love toward God, even though the work be of great service to God. *For a little of this pure love is more precious to God and the soul and more beneficial to the Church, even though it seems one is doing nothing, than all these other works put together.*' [My emphasis].

that of God, is on the level of heroism. Perhaps *complete* loss of self is not possible this side of the grave.¹¹⁵ Still, as the life of Thérèse demonstrates, grace received and cooperated with can bring one close to this abandonment to God.

The Wisdom of the Cross¹¹⁶

As this chapter draws to a close, we return to Thérèse's conversion experience at the age of fourteen and to an experience which closely followed – that of the holy card falling out of a prayer book. On that card was the image of the Crucified Christ, and it was to be an image that remained with Thérèse throughout her life.

She glued it onto a piece of paper on which she wrote some texts of the Gospel, arranged in the form of a dialogue. At the top, she copied the words of Jesus: 'I thirst ... Give me to drink' (Jn 19:28; 4:7). Below, she formulated this response, which summarizes a whole world of conviction and deep desire: 'Lord, Thou knowest well that I love Thee ... but have pity on me, for I am only a sinner!' (Jn 21:15; Lk 18:13).¹¹⁷

Thérèse reflected upon Jesus' death many times and she wished to join him in his mission of love to and for the human race. In the mystery of the Cross, Thérèse found the strength to live through her spiritual trial of faith and physical suffering.

The test of faith is the death of Jesus on the Cross — 'For the Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified...the power of God and the

¹¹⁵ Yes, one can raise the question: Is *complete* loss of self ever desirable this side or the other side of the grave? After all, the greater the union with God, the deeper is one's sense of self. Thérèse's desire was to die to all self-love in order that she be able to make a complete gift of her true self to God. It is my opinion that from the time of making her *Act of Self-Offering*, Thérèse's true self had become a transcended self, that is, the God Self in a truly participative manner and without loss of her humanity.

¹¹⁶ John Paul II in *Fides et ratio* notes Aquinas' threefold distinction regarding wisdom: philosophical wisdom, which is based on the capacity of the intellect, for all its limitations, to explain reality; theological wisdom, which explores the content of faith on the basis of Revelation; and infused wisdom which, as the gift of the Holy Spirit, enables judgement to be formed according to divine truth (see John Paul II, *FR*, # 44). The discussion in this dissertation's present chapter on searching for the truth with the help of spiritual discernment might be classified 'Philosophical wisdom'; Theological wisdom is the kind that Thérèse enjoyed as she meditated upon the Gospels. Thérèse was also gifted with infused wisdom enabling her to form judgements according to divine truth. The abundant presence of infused wisdom in Thérèse's life and writings is, I suggest, the principal reason for her being named 'Doctor of the Church'. [Aquinas was] 'profoundly convinced that "whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit"' (*FR* # 44).

¹¹⁷ De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 237.

wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1 22-24). (The test of faith is also to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus). Perhaps it is easier for contemporary people to believe in an 'absent' God in the heavens than to believe in the wisdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ on the Cross. 'It is here that every attempt to reduce the Father's saving plan to purely human logic is doomed to failure.'¹¹⁸ It is very difficult for men and women to 'grasp how death could be the source of life and love; and to grasp the truth of the mystery of God's saving plan that chooses precisely that which reason considers 'foolishness' and a 'scandal'. John Paul II continues: 'The wisdom of the wise is no longer enough for what God wants to accomplish; what is required is a decisive step towards welcoming something radically new.'¹¹⁹ Continuing in the language of the Greek philosophers, Paul writes to his audience to describe this new phenomenon: 'God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God' (1 Cor: 1: 28). The radically new is 'strength in weakness'. In Jesus' death on the Cross God reveals the mystery of saving love. Together with the Resurrection, this is a challenge to faith, to the concept of truth, and to the reasoning capacity of the human person.

Thérèse touched the profundity of this mystery to an extent that few perhaps have done, for from within it she fathomed the infinite mercy of God. Thérèse knew God as 'rich in mercy',¹²⁰ continually reaching out to all, saints and sinners alike. She had great confidence in this God. For Thérèse, the depth of mercy of God highlighted the depth of the mystery of sin. It also led to her understanding of grace.

¹¹⁸ FR, # 23.

¹¹⁹ FR, # 23.

¹²⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*. This encyclical constitutes an emphatic affirmation of God's love, and above all of God's mercy. John Paul, like Thérèse, is eager to distinguish between *mercy* and *justice*. Thérèse writes: 'To me He has granted His *infinite Mercy*, and *through it* I contemplate and adore the other divine perfections! All of these perfections appear to be resplendent *with love*, even His Justice (and perhaps this even more so than the others) seems to me clothed in *love* (SS Manuscript A, 180). John Paul writes: 'The primacy and superiority of love vis-à-vis justice — this is a mark of the whole of revelation — are *revealed precisely through mercy*. This seemed so obvious to the psalmists and prophets that the very term *justice* ended up by meaning the salvation [righteousness?] accomplished by the Lord and his mercy. *Mercy differs from justice, but is not in opposition to it* ... Love, by its very nature, excludes hatred and ill-will towards the one to whom he once gave the gift of himself' (cf. DM, III/4). When one considers the possibility of 'sin against faith', the question of justice vis-à-vis and mercy enters the conversation. As the above citation reveals, however, Thérèse places her confidence in the mercy of God.

Summary

The chapter has taken Thérèse's own insight, 'always to seek the truth', and applied it to living in the world today — in a manner that respects the dynamic relationship between *faith* and *sin*. It has, in the words of David Tracy, endeavoured to bring the meaning of Thérèse's text into our horizon.¹²¹ This chapter has now closed the hermeneutical triadic circle of understanding, interpretation, and application — or, preferably, *spiralled* to a point of satisfying rest. It did not use specific contemporary examples in making its case (these can date) but, by keeping Thérèse in the conversation, suggested that what it said can be applied analogously to today's *milieu*.

The chapter acknowledged that the search for *truth* is often complex in both sacred and secular spheres. And yet the *search* is recognized as the work of the 'good spirit'. A partner in the conversation, then, was the value of spiritual discernment as an aid to the process for decision making on the personal, national and international levels. The chapter dealt with the topic of *truth* from several aspects including the wisdom of the Cross, which reveals a *truth* the meaning of which can best be known through contemplation — a simple gaze on the Truth.

While Thérèse was an enclosed Carmelite nun of the nineteenth century, her words, 'the sin against faith', cause us today to pause and to consider in what ways and degrees we are doing violence to the truth. Is the desolation in our culture a sign of lack of hope, perhaps coming from loss of faith in God? Is the 'something toxic in the body politic'¹²² a sign of sin? Are these a sign that people are not listening to the voice of 'the good spirit'? The dissertation suggests the answer to each of these questions is 'yes'. These are signs of the refusal to obey the call that is offered through grace.

¹²¹ See David Tracy, 'Hermeneutical Reflections in the New Paradigm', in *Paradigm Changes in Theology*, 42.

¹²² There is a 'certain corrosiveness, a certain extreme scepticism about values ... reinforced by television, by the media, by popular idols and celebrities and so on ... I am conservative enough to worry about whether there's something toxic in the body politic' (see Simon Blackburn, 'Atheist scholar is ally (with reservations) in Benedict's fight against relativism', in *NCR* (16 May 2008). <http://ncrcafe.org.node/1824/print>. [Accessed 17/05/2008].

Today *grace* is understood in a much broader way than that which Thérèse was able to articulate — though she implicitly understood its depth of meaning beneath her own simple words, 'all is a grace'. Today we are aware, thanks to Vatican Council II, that God's presence is at work in everyone guiding all towards the truth. Because of this, the *search* for truth is entirely possible. Also highlighted in this chapter was Thérèse's belief that all of God's perfections — including God's justice — are resplendent with love. She named it *mercy*. Thérèse had a profound insight into God's merciful love flowing towards her at all times and in all situations and she named this experience as receiving the *mercies* of the Lord. This dissertation has suggested that for Thérèse, *mercies* is another named for grace.

The dissertation's specific religiously theoretical framework has been the Paschal Mystery. Given that this mystery encompasses the instruction given by Jesus to his disciples to 'teach all nations' (cf. Mt. 28:20), this chapter has highlighted two fundamental Christian teachings: that God's presence (grace) is at work in everyone and that all are exhorted to seek the truth.

The following chapter will bring the discussion in this and previous chapters to conclusion.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Research Question and Context

This dissertation aimed at exploring Thérèse's religious experiences relating to *faith* and *sin*. It sought to demonstrate that it was by the interaction of these two realities that she grew in holiness, and that this kind of interaction belongs to all human growth and maturity. For Thérèse and all Christians, growth in holiness comes within the breadth of the paschal mystery which recognises a value, among others, of not only belong to a believing community but also of a living-out of responsible citizenship within the wider society. Forty and more years ago Vatican Council II stated: 'particularly worthy of note among the signs of our times is the ever growing and inescapable sense of the solidarity of all peoples'.¹ Because this is even truer today, it is so necessary to understand what the call to faith really means.

The sections to follow state the thesis' general conclusions, its major contribution — an analysis of post nineteenth century atheism — the direction future research could take and the dissertation's summary statement.

¹ See Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: Documents of Vatican Council II, # 14.

General Conclusions

As a result of this thesis it is concluded that:

1 The 'oceans of graces' that Thérèse received prepared her for a life of holiness and a share in the mission of Jesus.² Thérèse referred to these graces as 'the mercies of the Lord'.³

2 Thérèse's intuition that 'all is a grace' predates and anticipates statements from Vatican Council II that refer to 'universal salvation', and sets the tone for sincere inter-religious dialogue today.

3 Thérèse became holy by careful attentiveness to grace that enabled her to engage in the dynamic relationship between faith and sin. It was *there*, in that engagement that she grew in personal relationship with Jesus and with the Trinity and that she came to appreciate 'all is grace' — all of creation is 'graced'. In this context, *holiness* has been a satisfactory working hermeneutic for the dissertation.

4 The human experience for all people involves participation in this same struggle — between one's true and false self, between good and evil, between faith, love and sin, and between seeking the truth and neglecting it. Thérèse's experience of near despair and temptations to thoughts of suicide places her in close relationship with those who suffer severe personal trauma today.

5 An aspect of my investigation pointed to Thérèse's cooperation with grace that created a freer self to be given away and to a psychospiritual maturity that added emphasis to her teaching on sin and faith. We can agree, then, that she is 'far from spiritual childhood'.⁴ Thérèse's doctorate gains weight when considered from the

² SS Manuscript A, 181.

³ SS Manuscript A, 13-16.

⁴ See Chapter 2. Cf. Joann Wolski Conn, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: Far fFrom Spiritual Childhood', *Spiritus* 6 (2006): 68=89.

point of view of her exceptional spiritual insight and holiness wedded to a psychological maturity indeed impressive for one by twenty-four years of age.

6 Thérèse's 'trial of faith' was a mystical gift; it gave her a deeper sharing in Christ's redemptive act. Speaking from within Roman Catholicism, P. Marie-Eugène names it, in relation to Thérèse, as her sharing 'in the drama of divine Love here below, in its grievous struggle against sin ... a fight to the death between Love and sin's hatred'⁵

7 In a particular way, Thérèse's 'trial of faith' mirrors the 'sin against faith' of which she wrote.⁶

8 Thérèse's reference to the 'sin against faith' throws wide open the topic of Atheism, which, in her time, was the blasphemous rejection of the notion of God. From the time of the Enlightenment there had been a rationalistic rejection of faith in the name of science and reason. In many cases, belief was replaced by the advance of the 'values' of the French Revolution and by new anti-religious movements often associated with materialism, nationalism, positivism, and republicanism. A marked militant ant-clericalism and atheism set the religious tone of the times.

9 Thérèse's prophetic voice directs one to an exploration of Atheism in today's context. That exploration leads to the conclusion that Thérèse's understanding of 'the sin against faith' cannot be transposed to today's world without modification.⁷

10 It is possible to sin against faith today by abusing the grace that enables one to recognise and to foster the transcendent dimension of one's humanity — be

⁵ Marie-Eugène of the Child Jesus, *Under the Torrent of His Love*, 107.

⁶ Perhaps this is best explained by a comparison: Mother Teresa of Calcutta's 'night of faith' bore obvious fruit in external acts of charity to the 'poorest of the poor'. Similarly, Thérèse's 'trial of faith' that I argue was linked to interior acts of denial of faith by unbelievers, won salvation for these very people. (We can presume this to be the case when one considers her proven extraordinary intercessory powers). (See also, Chapter 5, fn. 31).

⁷ This will be dealt with below.

that determined by religious faith or by belief in a value that one holds as ultimate — and/or by an uncritical allegiance to today's secularism

11 Thérèse frequently speaks through symbol and imagery, and these figures of speech often have to be reconstructed in order for them to disclose their exceptionally insightful theology.⁸

12 Thérèse's contemplative prayer highlights the value of even 'one act of pure love' for the sake of others.⁹ This prayer flows from a deep faith that she never abandons, even though tempted to do so. **In the whole area of salvation and the value of prayer for the sake of others, Thérèse spoke with a prophetic and authoritative voice** (unwittingly at first but in her last illness with more confidence).

Major Contribution: an Analysis of Post Nineteenth Century Atheism

The following section on modern atheism provides a basis for the major conclusion of the thesis: that Thérèse's references to 'sin against ... through the abuse of grace' (summarised here in this short phrase and fully cited on page 59f. of Chapter 2) cannot be applied to today's world without modification.¹⁰

⁸ Examples are helpful: Thérèse's theological outlook bridges two significant symbols: God as *gardener* and God as *compassionate companion*. Further, she recommends that one approach God not by the *stairway of fear* but by the *elevator of love*.

⁹ See SS Manuscript B, 197. According to Jean Lafrance: 'The crisis of faith in our time — ['our horizon' (David Tracy)] — is especially a crisis of the experiential knowledge of Christ in prayer, for we dispute the value of contemplative prayer for the sake of service to others (Jean Lafrance, *Abiding in God*, 90). Thomas Keating says that, in his view, 'St Thérèse is the key figure in the recovery of the contemplative dimension of the Gospel in our time' (Thomas Keating, *St Thérèse of Lisieux: A Transformation in Christ*, 6).

¹⁰ *Atheism*, from 'a' meaning 'without' or 'not', and 'theos' meaning 'god', can be described in two ways: Negative atheism and Positive atheism. From the standpoint of Negative atheism, 'an atheist is someone without a belief in God: he or she need not be someone who believes that God does not exist. *Agnosticism* is compatible with this definition'. In the second category of Positive atheism, 'an atheist is one who holds no belief in the existence of God or gods and who believes that there is no God or gods. *Agnosticism* is incompatible with this position'. (In this dissertation, the word 'God' is the God of Judeo-Christianity, the God revealed in Jesus Christ). Other terms can be used in a discussion of atheism: '*theism* has usually come to mean a belief in a personal God who takes an active interest in the world and who has given a special revelation to humans. So understood, theism stands in contrast to *deism*, the belief in a God that is based not on revelation but on evidence from nature. Negative atheism in a broad sense is then the absence of belief in any god or Gods, not just the absence of belief in a

Throughout the thesis reference has been made to significant sections of the Vatican Council II Documents relating to believers and unbelievers. The following, and in comparison with Thérèse's views, is a more detailed analysis of those relevant statements.

In August 1897, Thérèse said:

If you only knew what frightful thoughts obsess me! Pray very much for me in order that I do not listen to the devil who wants to persuade me about so many lies. It's the reasoning of the worst materialists¹¹ which is imposed upon my mind ... I offer up these very great pains to obtain the light of faith for poor unbelievers, for all those who separate themselves from the Church's beliefs.¹²

personal theistic God, and negative atheism in the narrow sense is the absence of belief in a theistic God. For positive atheism in the narrow sense to be successfully defended, two tasks must be accomplished. First, the reasons for believing in a theistic God must be refuted; in other words, negative atheism in the narrow sense must be established. Second, reasons for disbelieving in a theistic God must be given. These categories should not be allowed to mask the complexity and variety of positions that atheists can hold, for a given individual can take different atheistic positions with respect to different concepts of God' (cf. Michael Martin, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* at 'Cambridge Companion' ACU National / ACU Library and eBooks). This dissertation interprets Thérèse's understanding of 'the sin against faith' (or Atheism) to be primarily 'positive atheism in the narrow sense', that is, 'absence of belief in a theistic God and denial of God's existence'. Thérèse said that Jesus made her feel that it was 'abuse of grace' that led one to lose the 'precious gift' of faith (see SS Manuscript C, 211). This dissertation interprets Thérèse's words to mean that it was this 'abuse of grace' that led a 'soul' to fall into this kind of atheism but, as we have previously seen from discussion on 'grace' and it being given to all people, 'abuse of grace' could be the cause of falling into atheism of any degree.

¹¹ Ida Görres clarifies the situation: 'It is apparent that Thérèse's distress was not only emotional in origin ... that it sprang not only from the feeling that her certainty about Heaven had collapsed, from her feeling that she was approaching absolute annihilation, from her being unable any longer to feel that joyous anticipation of eternal bliss which she had once so taken for granted. These feelings she had, but in addition she was also the prey of *raisonnements*, ideas, arguments of the materialist. She was suffering from genuine intellectual temptation; her possession of the truth was threatened by active hostility, not only by passive shadowings ... In hours of insight, however, she understood that this terrible and, as she so often repeated 'incomprehensible' state was not a fault but a task, that she was required to participate in the sins of the world outside the convent walls, where violent attacks raged against the existence of the soul, against immortality and the "hereafter". She grasped that she was atoning not only by praying at a safe distance for those poor Godless souls, but by being right in the midst of them, sharing all their torments and their blindness, being one of them, and having to appeal to God's mercy' (cf. Ida Görres, *the Hidden Face*, 355-357).

¹² *LC*, 257f.

In that same month Thérèse said:

Oh! How necessary it is to pray for the dying! If you only knew! I believe the demon has asked God permission to tempt me with an extreme suffering, to make me fail in patience and faith.¹³

Thérèse touched the experience of unbelief, and so it can be said that she helped pave the way for the insights of Vatican Council II.¹⁴

The Role of Vatican Council II

Since Thérèse's nineteenth century, the Church has 'evolved from a position of mere condemnation to one of pastoral sympathy' towards unbelievers'.¹⁵ Taken together, three sections of the Vatican II Council Documents treat the question of unbelievers: *GS* # 22; *LG* # 16; and *AG* # 7. Section 19 of *Gaudium et Spes* mentions some fourteen different types of unbelief.¹⁶ Michael Paul Gallagher summarises these fourteen types into four; these are cited below and followed by comment. Throughout all the conversation which follows, we remember that whatever the category in which a person finds himself or herself, 'every person stands in an order willed by God, which is one of supernatural existence, redeemed by God's gracious and utterly gratuitous mercy'.¹⁷

¹³ *LC*, 168.

¹⁴ Thérèse touched the area of unbelief — we cannot analyse the *level* — and her experience led her also to touch positive atheism (Martin) in the narrow sense.

¹⁵ See Michael Paul Gallagher, *Help My Unbelief* (Dublin: Veritas, 1986), 24.

¹⁵ Cited in Gallagher, *Help My Unbelief*, 25.

¹⁶ See Gallagher, *Help My Unbelief*, 29.

¹⁷ See Reid, *Man Without God*, 103. Reid notes that Vatican Council II affirmed Karl Rahner's 'magnificently argued thesis of theism and anonymous, or implicit, Christianity' (102) and used Rahner's insights when working out the Catholic Church's position on atheism'. 'The Council's Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church', states Reid citing the Decree, 'affirms that all people, including unbelievers, can be saved, but adds that, for them as for everyone else, it is through faith that salvation is achieved, although in their case only God knows how faith works' (102). In solving this apparent paradox, the Council, using Rahner's thesis as a basis, enunciated three principles in relation to the Church and unbelievers: the universal salvific will of God, the necessity of faith, and the possibility of such faith as is necessary and sufficient to fulfil God's will. The Council did not address in practical terms how these principles can be implemented in actual life (see Reid 102-106); 'Our faith is that God, through the Spirit, offers saving grace to every human being and that this grace is a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ (paschal mystery)'. (See also, Tom Ryan, 'Holy Spirit, Hidden God: Mortal Life and the Non-Believer' in *ACR* 84/4 (2007): 444-458, at 453).

The four summarised statements are:

[The Unanswerability of Intellectual Claims]

1. There are more intellectual forms of denial of God, whether stemming from a scientific mentality that claims a monopoly of truth for its own methods, or from more agnostic attitudes which hold that the question of God can never be answered;

The Council document, *Gaudium et Spes*, adds that those who wilfully shut out God from their hearts and try to dodge religious questions are not following the dictates of their consciences; hence they are not free of blame.¹⁸ When this attitude is profound and real — 'in terms of grave infidelity to the dictate of conscience or a culpably false attitude toward existence'¹⁹ — there is negative atheism in the narrow sense as defined by Michael Martin.

This is the 'sin against faith' today, the sin which, Thérèse said, Jesus convinced her did exist.²⁰ However, speaking of professed atheists today cannot lead to this same conclusion; we cannot categorically assume that an original faith has been subsequently lost through 'the abuse of grace'. But even if these persons are in serious sin, Thérèse 'sits' alongside them as one among friends (Chapter 5).

[Insistence on Unqualified Individualism]

2. Then there are more humanist stances, which put so much emphasis on man's [sic] freedom as to make God seem an intruder or an enemy to human dignity;

¹⁸ See GS # 19.

¹⁹ See Reid, *Man Without God*, 107. For the original text, see Karl Rahner, *The Pastoral Approach to Atheism*, trans. Theodore L. Westow et al (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), in *Concilium*, v. 23: 18-19.

²⁰ See SS Manuscript C, 211: 'Jesus made me feel that there were really souls who have no faith, and who, through the abuse of grace, lost this precious treasure, the source of the only real and pure joys'.

According to Martin's analysis, unqualified emphasis on *individualism*²¹ is intrinsically atheistic in the negative sense, that is, 'someone without a belief in God though he or she need not be someone who believes that God does not exist'.²² Extreme individualism makes no contribution to belief. However, on the other hand, atheism can make a positive contribution. For example, atheist criticisms of the church are at their 'most compelling and persuasive' when they are directed against the failure of the institutional Church to witness to the essentials of the Christian Gospel'.²³

Thérèse's words: 'I was unable to believe there were really impious people who had no faith. I believed they were actually speaking against their own inner convictions ...' ²⁴ could be modified here to read: 'I was unable to believe there were impious people who had no faith; they surely would come to faith / belief / truth if they could turn their attention from centering it on themselves to some altruist value instead'. These are the people whom Thérèse will help in her role as Assistant Gardener (Chapter 4).

[*False Images of God*]

3. There are what one might call false gods and false images of God; so often what is rejected as God turns out to be a distortion of the revelation of God in the gospels;

²¹ Individualism is the tendency to magnify individual liberty as against external authority and individual activity, as against associated activity. The chief recognized forms of individualism are religious, ethical, and political. Religious individualism describes the attitudes of those persons who refuse to subscribe to definite creeds, or to submit to any external authority. Such are those who call themselves freethinkers, and those who profess belief in Christianity without giving their adherence to any particular denomination. 'Combined with the other authorities that people can now readily access, the individual as the authoritative / autonomous self is reinforced as arbitrator of validity. As the French sociologist of religion Danièle Hervieu-Léger observes, although people can construct different types of religious identities from the religious repertoire that contemporary culture makes available, the underlying values remain those of individual choice and autonomy. We should not mistake the "post-secular" quest for spirituality and religious identity as pro-Christian' (see James Hanvey, 'Making the Invisible Visible: the challenge to the Church in a secular culture', *The Pastoral Review* 3/4 (July/August 2007):8-13).

²² See Martin's definition of *atheism* above, fn. 11.

²³ See Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism*, 277. McGrath's conclusion is that atheism, today, finds itself in somewhat of a twilight zone [2004]. 'We shall have to wait and see', he writes, 'whether the twilight heralds the rising sun [of belief] or announces, in its setting, the darkness and cold of a deeper disbelief'. (279).

²⁴ SS Manuscript C, 211.

Here, it is possible 'for one to experience God transcendentally and to accept this experience, freely and positively, but to interpret it incorrectly and substitute some other value or concept for that of the living God'.²⁵ An individual remains an atheist on the level of conceptualization 'in that he [sic] has not reflectively recognized the God of pure theism or Biblical faith', but on the transcendental level he is 'morally orientated toward God and is blameless'; for, explains Reid, this person wants to remain open to the image of 'God' or the 'ultimate value' to which he or she holds 'even though this person may reject a concept of God formally objectified' — one which leaves him in a state of categorical unbelief.²⁶

Speaking of 'ultimate value', Reid notes, one may affirm as implicitly an act of faith the sincere adherence to the demands of moral conscience, 'only if the latter is understood and consented to as absolutely binding'.²⁷ This means that there must be the individual's deepest, courageous and total commitment to his or her ultimate value. These conditions require a very high standard of moral behaviour. If we were to apply these same conditions to the quality of our adherence to religious faith, we could surely feel a sense of relief in knowing that our God is merciful!

Thérèse's response is similar to her previous one: she was unable to believe that there were people who had no faith; surely they would believe if only they had a personal experience of God/Jesus and could then grow in relationship with God. Still, Thérèse will assist these too in her role as Assistant Gardener.

[***Passive Victims of Social Change***]

4. There is a whole group of unbelievers who are more the passive victims, or products of social change, than people who consciously choose to reject God or religion.

Returning to Martin's definition of Atheism,²⁸ the ones in this group of unbelievers are not positive atheists. Perhaps, they are negative atheists, that is, 'people without a belief in God though they need not be persons who believe that God does not exist'.

²⁵ Reid, *Man Without God*, 107.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 106.

²⁸ See fn.11 above.

Here again, Thérèse's reflection — she was 'unable to believe that there were impious people who had no faith'²⁹ — can apply. Her intuition here was partly correct, for our analysis shows that 'impious people who have no faith' in her understanding, are perhaps few indeed today. But we know that Jesus convinced Thérèse they these people *did* exist (in the nineteenth century). These 'passive victims' today could be the 'wild flowers' to whom Jesus descends even lower than he does to the cultivated flowers (Chapter 3).

Gallagher's Conclusion

In concluding his analysis, Gallagher notes that Vatican Council II therefore marked a breakthrough in official Church attitudes in its opening up to the realities of unbelief today. This realism, he writes, is seen in three principle achievements of the Council:³⁰

1. a new sense of the complexity of unbelief
2. a new level of sympathetic understanding of unbelievers
3. a desire for mutual dialogue between believers and atheists

Faith is Necessary for Salvation

But a complicated question still remains. It relates to the basic requirement for faith — affirmation of the reality of God, a declaration of unqualified assent to God's self-witness, however weak or inadequate may be the formulas in which this assent is expressed.³¹ Given the Church's teaching, then, that 'faith' is necessary in order to be saved, Riccardo Lombardi asks the question: 'Are adults who die unbelieving all equally damned?' 'Yes', he answers, 'if by unbelieving we mean without any faith in God, but in this case the fault is always that of the unbelievers alone' [*des impies*]; and 'no', he continues, 'if by unbelieving we only mean not believing explicitly what the Catholic Church teaches. In this case God will see whether a person has at least that

²⁹ See SS Manuscript C, 211.

³⁰ Cf. Gallagher, *Help My Unbelief*, 27f.

³¹ See Reid, *Man Without God*, 5.

faith which is practically possible for him in his actual circumstances'.³² These latter are the 'wild flowers' (Chapter 3).

John Reid answers a similar question by stating that while the unbeliever (atheist) cannot or will not believe in divine revelation, 'a clue is almost certainly provided in the repeated reference of the conciliar texts to the fidelity to conscience, the honest seeking for truth, and the vigorous sensitivity to the demands of moral awareness'. All these characterize the upright atheist who cannot be excluded from the path of salvation.³³ Reid concludes that perhaps 'no other single point is of such importance for the thoroughgoing confrontation of faith and unbelief' as providing an answer to the question: 'What must I do to be saved?'(Mt19:16).³⁴

Though Jesus tells the rich young man what he must do to be saved, we can never be *certain* of salvation. Karl Rahner puts the issue this way: 'Can the individual ... maintain with absolute certainty about himself [sic] that *he* is really someone justified and that, precisely because he is this, he is no longer a sinner? And he continues: 'according to the teaching of the Council of Trent there is no absolute individual certitude about salvation'. However, that does not mean to say that one must live 'in a trembling, cowardly fear of salvation, a fear which mistrusts God'. Rather, Rahner notes:

It means that one must look away from himself [sic] towards God's unspeakable grace. He should *trust* that, in the midst of the experience of his inner weakness and poverty, he always is nevertheless in all truth the much loved child of God born by the grace and mercy of God.³⁵

Rahner might not have held a high opinion of Thérèse, yet Thérèse and Rahner are speaking with one voice here.³⁶

³² See Riccardo Lombardi, *The Salvation of the Unbeliever*, trans. Dorothy M. White (London: Burns & Oates, 1956), 362.

³³ Reid, *Man Without God*, 105f.

³⁴ Ibid. See also, John Paul II, Encyclical letter, *VS*, # 6- # 24; Encyclical letter, *FR*, which asks and answers this very question by insisting on true relationship between theology and philosophy.

³⁵ Karl Rahner, 'Justified and Sinner at the Same Time', in *TI*, VI, 224.

³⁶ See Chapter 1, fn. 87.

Unbelief and Culture

An earlier topic in this dissertation — namely, the relationship between the culture of the present time and its influence on belief and unbelief — is also critical in this analysis of atheism today.

Gallagher, in his article 'From Social to Cultural Secularization' (1999) — written ten years after his *Help My Unbelief* — states that: 'Today, ... the key issue is no longer a "secular society"; indeed that very phrase now appears dated and "secular culture" seems a more accurate term for today's situation. This shift in vocabulary', he continues, 'represents a probing beyond the visible and measurable aspects of "society" to 'the more subtle and invisible zones understood as lived culture.' In conclusion to his article, he wrote: 'the deeper secularization seems to lie on the level of communal imagination rather than simply of [on] empirical trends'.³⁷

Where, then, we might ask, do Thérèse's statements re faith and unbelief fit? Is 'communal imagination' — accurate though the analysis might be — too nebulous a term against which to posit 'abuse of grace'? Is it not the *people* who willingly and knowingly succumb to the lived culture of the day who are guilty of abuse of grace? And yet these individual people are not totally guilty either as there is always a communal dimension to sin: 'sin is never a purely individual matter: it always has a social, communal dimension to it'.³⁸ Thérèse's words might apply here: 'I was unable to believe there were really impious people who had no faith. I believed they were speaking against their own inner convictions ... BUT ...'³⁹ Is there a 'but'? Karl Rahner's article 'What is Heresy?'⁴⁰ would seem to suggest that the denial of God [or of the transcendent or of the faithful adherence to one's 'ultimate value'] in a materialistic society — such as ours is today — is an expression of a heretical stance, and therefore sinful on the part of those who personally, knowingly and willingly

³⁷ Michael P. Gallagher, 'From Social to Cultural Secularization', *Louvain Studies* 24 (1999): 103-118 at 109, 118.

³⁸ Frank O'Loughlin, *The Future of the Sacrament of Penance* (Strathfield NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2007), 163.

³⁹ SS Manuscript C, 211.

⁴⁰ Rahner, 'What is Heresy?', in *TI V: Later Writings*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966): 468-512.

engage in it to a marked degree simply for pleasure. We can now finish Thérèse's previous incomplete statement: 'But Jesus made me feel that there were really impious souls who have no faith'.

James Hanvey's article (2007), states that 'often the project of secular culture is to make visible Christianity invisible'.⁴¹ The author distinguishes 'between "hard" or ideological secularism and "soft secularisation"'.⁴² He states that "hard" secularism 'is not difficult to identify: 'not only is it formally antipathetic to religion but programmatic in trying to eliminate it or at least marginalise it'. This is positive atheism in Martin's narrow sense and the 'sin against faith' for today. Thérèse's words apply specifically here: 'Jesus made me feel that there were really impious souls who have no faith, and who, through the abuse of grace lost this precious treasure'.⁴³ For Thérèse, *les impies* are those who blasphemously deny belief in the existence of God and who also believe that there is no God. These are the 'materialists' whose 'voices' sounded in her head. These are the ones who belong to today's 'hard secularisation'.

Hanvey describes "soft" secularisation as that which 'exhibits a secularist *habitus*'.⁴⁴ One of the dangers of this secularist *habitus* is *relativism*: it limits the 'epistemological claims to truth, especially "absolute truth"'.⁴⁵ Perhaps in 'soft' secularisation, people try to have things both ways 'to play false to their innermost consciences and still apply for salvation by categorically affirming the reality of God'.⁴⁶ Reid continues:

⁴¹ Hanvey, 'Making the Invisible Visible: the challenge to the Church in a secular culture', *The Pastoral Review* 3/4 (July / August 2007): 8-13.

⁴² Hanvey, 'Making the Invisible Visible', 8. A good example of relativism is the one Hanvey himself gives: 'Paradoxically, a strong contribution to [a secularist *habitus*] is the awareness of the inter-faith and multi-faith element of contemporary culture(s). This tends to a religious and spiritual eclecticism and the creation of the secular category of 'religion', itself part of the secularising process, which reinforces a perception of 'religion' as a 'life-style' option. Moreover, the multi-faith complexity of the public realm, practically as well as methodologically, limits the epistemological claims to truth, especially "absolute truth", that any one faith can make it socially and politically', 9.

⁴³ SS Manuscript C, 211.

⁴⁴ Hanvey, 'Making the Invisible Visible', 9. *Habitus* is a complex concept, but in its simplest usage could be understood as a set of acquired patterns of thought, behaviour, and taste. These patterns, or 'dispositions', are the result of internalization of culture or objective social structures through the experience of an individual or group.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Reid, *Man Without God*, 107.

Unbelief in this case consists of a profound disorder at the transcendental level of unique personal freedom and is accompanied by what may be an elaborate attempt at deception and self-deception and cannot be without more or less serious guilt.⁴⁷

Thérèse's words can apply here: 'I was unable to believe there were really impious people who had no faith. I believed they were actually speaking against their own inner convictions'⁴⁸ ... BUT is there implicit — and therefore, sinful — blasphemy here?

Yet Thérèse offers contemporary life a response in a symbolic action. She sits 'at the table of bitterness' with the worst of sinners. In Rahner's terms, these are 'those who freely reject through a gravely culpable disloyalty toward one's own conscience or a culpable wrong interpretation of existence (as "totally absurd", with no absolute meaning, etc.);'⁴⁹ in Michael Gallagher's terms, those who contribute 'on the level of communal imagination', ... to a 'deeper secularization' in today's world;⁵⁰ in James Hanvey's terms, those who exhibit 'hard secularisation'; and in Michael Martin's terms, those who are 'positive atheists in the narrow sense'. Surely that would imply that Thérèse would also 'sit' alongside those who engage in 'soft' secularisation (James Hanvey). The 'table' image brings together today's almost unmentionable word, 'sinners', with the remembrance of mercy. It is, therefore, in this image that Thérèse reconciles both 'hard' and 'soft' secularization.

Before closing this section and for reasons of completeness, we cite sections of the *Catechism* on 'sin against faith'⁵¹ that might apply to some Theresian experience. We note that the *Catechism* is not necessarily teaching from a *pastoral* approach:

We can sin against faith in a variety of ways: voluntary doubt, incredulity, heresy.

Voluntary doubt disregards or refuses to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107f.

⁴⁸ SS Manuscript C, 211.

⁴⁹ Karl Rahner, 'What Does Vatican II Teach about Atheism?' *Concilium*, 19.

⁵⁰ Gallagher, 'From Social to Cultural Secularization': 103-118.

⁵¹ Cf. CCC # 2088 and # 2089.

Involuntary doubt refers to hesitation in believing, difficulty in overcoming objections connected with the faith, or also anxiety aroused by its obscurity [Père Hyacinthe Loyson?].⁵²

If deliberately cultivated, doubt can lead to spiritual blindness.⁵³

Incredulity is the neglect of revealed truth or the wilful refusal to assent to it [Léo Taxil / Diana Vaughan?]⁵⁴

Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same; *apostasy* is the total repudiation of the Christian faith [Léo Taxil / Diana Vaughan?];

Schism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him [Léo Taxil / Diana Vaughan?].

We can also sin (against the first commandment) with sins against hope, namely, despair and presumption. 'Despair is contrary to God's goodness, to his justice — for the Lord is faithful to his promises — and to his mercy'⁵⁵ [Thérèse herself — in her *temptation* to despair and from which Mother Agnes prayed Thérèse might be spared⁵⁶].⁵⁷

Finally, we return to Gallagher's article. As we have already noticed, he suggests that the deeper secularization in today's culture 'seems to lie on the level of communal imagination rather than simply of [on] empirical trends'. He then offers a solution in a very significant line in terms of this dissertation. If this indeed is the case, he concludes, what is needed is a 'response that unites poetry and praxis', a response that will rescue 'the readiness for faith from prison of dullness and release wavelengths worthy of the Word'.⁵⁸ In the 'table' image where she sits — the holy and the unholy side-by-side — Thérèse well meets that need through the very symbol of her person — youthful, holy, and the lover of all of nature — joining with the perhaps worn, estranged and despairing sinner. And as we saw much earlier in discussing Jesus' garden, Thérèse reasons that God descends even lower to come to these 'unlovely flowers' than he does to come to the 'cultivated lilies and roses'. And so here in this

⁵² See *GC* II, 728.

⁵³ *CCC*, # 2088.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 5, fn., 33.

⁵⁵ *CCC*, # 2091.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 5, fn., 21.

⁵⁷ *CCC*, # 2092.

⁵⁸ See Gallagher, 'From Social to Cultural Secularization', 118.

instance and throughout her entire autobiography — in her self-revelation and in her gentle, unsophisticated and creative poetic style of writing — Thérèse unsuspectingly unites poetry and philosophy, theology and spirituality.

Future Directions

1 The whole area of 'the sin against faith' and 'the abuse of grace' is one that invites further exploration today. For example, future work might focus more attention on the perhaps forgotten truth that 'sin' does exist. This dissertation has proposed the foundation for this further exploration by positing that, by its misuse of all kinds of things too numerous to state, the 'desolate' culture of today reflects the 'sin against faith' and that its culpability, where applicable, is on both collective and personal levels.

2 The technical terms *orthodoxy* (about knowing the truth), *orthopoiesis* (adhering to the moral truth), and *orthopraxis* (doing the truth in practice) provide a summary description of *faith* (Chapter 2). These terms could be placed alongside the words of the Johannine Jesus, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' (Jn 14:6), for specific Christological reference and expansion in meaning.

3 Serious theological discourse might consider accepting personal professions of faith and creative images of salvation as valuable ways of faith education for adults. The analytical and scientific approach has served us well in the past. But, perhaps, we are somewhat tired of that approach now, and a return to 'divine depth' via personal professions of faith and creative images of salvation could reawaken our spiritual interest.

Summary Statement

Although Thérèse is not a trained theologian in the traditional sense, she has been acclaimed a Doctor of the Church in view of her major contribution in articulating a spirituality of faith for the modern age.

Many there are who claim there is a 'crisis of faith' today. Thérèse herself, and the era to which she belonged, knows a similar crisis. Both the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries show evidence of their being shaken by changing ideologies that prevent the proclamation of the gospel message from having its relevant and powerful impact. Speaking objectively — we cannot judge the subjective guilt of any one person — this dissertation lays the 'sin against faith' on those people who fail to enable the culture to mediate core Christian or ultimate values. This is the primary interpretation for today of the 'sin against faith'.

Thérèse's religious experience leads her to contemplate the Face of God on the suffering face of Jesus, the Holy Face, and thence to a particular, and I argue, mystical share in Jesus' redemptive act. In the last eighteen months of her life, she enters a 'trial of faith' that mirrors the profound unbelief of nineteenth century France. Having experienced 'conversion' at the level of *being* in her early years, she now enters even more deeply into the drama of salvation and its fight to the death between Love and sin's hatred. Thus, experiencing her own crisis of faith together with her strong and continuing desires to associate herself with Jesus' saving mission and to grow in holiness, she becomes a *compassionate companion* to others without faith.

Thérèse offers us images and symbols of salvation that continue to have impact on the particular challenges of our time. Her 'rhetoric of salvation' communicates an image of God who is merciful to an extent that far exceeds the limitations of the human intellect. In her unconditional self-surrender to God's merciful love, Thérèse knows that God's mercy is without measure.

APPENDIX A

Vive d'Amore (Living on Love!) (26 February 1895)

- 1 On the evening of Love, speaking without parable,
 Jesus said: 'If anyone wishes to love me
 All his life, let him keep my Word,
 My Father and I will come to visit him.
 And we will make his heart our dwelling.
 Coming to him, we shall love him always.
 We want him to remain, filled with peace,
 In our Love!....'
- 2 Living on Love is holding You Yourself.
 Uncreated Word, Word of my God,
 Ah! Divine Jesus, you know I love you.
 The Spirit of Love sets me aflame with his fire.
 In loving you I attract the Father.
 My weak heart holds him forever.
 O Trinity! You are Prisoner
 Of my Love!...
- 3 Living on Love is living on your life,
 Glorious King, delight of the elect.
 You live for me, hidden in a host.
 I want to hide myself for you, O Jesus!
 Lovers must have solitude,
 A heart-to-heart lasting night and day.
 Just one glance of yours makes my beatitude.
 I live on Love!...
- 4 Living on Love is not setting up one's tent
 At the top of Tabor.
 It's climbing Calvary with Jesus,
 It's looking at the Cross as a treasure!...
 In Heaven I'm to live on joy.
 Then trials will have fled forever,
 But in exile, in suffering I want
 To live on Love.

- 5 Living on Love is giving without limit
Without claiming any wages here below.
Ah! I give without counting, truly sure
That when one loves, one does not keep count!...
Overflowing with tenderness, I have given everything,
To his Divine Heart ... lightly I run.
I have nothing left but my only wealth:
 Living on Love.
- 6 Living on Love is banishing every fear,
Every memory of past faults.
I see no imprint of my sins.
In a moment love has burned everything.....
Divine Flame, O Very sweet Blaze!
I make my home in your hearth.
In your fire I gladly sing:
 'I live on Love!...'
- 7 Living on Love is keeping within oneself
A great treasure in an earthen vase.
My Beloved, my weakness is extreme.
Ah, I'm far from being an angel from heaven!...
But if I fall with each passing hour,
You come to my aid, lifting me up.
At each moment you give me your grace:
 I live on Love.
- 8 Living on Love is sailing unceasingly,
Sowing peace and joy in every heart.
Beloved Pilot, Charity impels me,
For I see you in my sister souls.
Charity is my only star.
In its brightness I sail straight ahead.
I've my motto written on my sail:
 'Living on Love.'
- 9 Living on Love, when Jesus is sleeping,
Is rest on stormy seas.
Oh! Lord, don't fear that I'll wake you.
I'm waiting in peace for Heaven's shore....
Faith will soon tear its veil.
My hope is to see you one day.
Charity swells and pushes my sail:
 I live on Love!...

- 10 Living on Love, O my Divine Master,
Is begging you to spread your Fire
In the holy, sacred soul of your Priest.
May he be purer than a seraphim in Heaven!...
Ah! Glorify your Immortal Church!
Jesus, do not be deaf to my sighs.
I, her child, sacrifice myself for her,
 I live on Love.
- 11 Living on Love is wiping your Face,
It's obtaining the pardon of sinners.
O God of Love! may they return to your grace,
And may they forever bless your Name.....
Even in my heart the blasphemy resounds.
To efface it, I always want to sing:
'I adore and love your Sacred Name.
 I live on Love!...'
- 12 Living on Love is imitating Mary,
Bathing your divine feet that she kisses, transported.
With tears, with precious perfume,
She dries them with her long hair...
Then standing up, she shatters the vase,
And in turn she anoints your Sweet Face.
As for me, the perfume with which I anoint your Face
 Is my Love!...
- 13 'Living on Love, what strange folly!'
The world says to me, 'Ah! Stop your singing,
Don't waste your perfumes, your life.
Learn to use them well...'
Loving you, Jesus, is such a fruitful loss!...
All my perfumes are yours forever.
I want to sing on leaving this world:
 I'm dying of Love!'
- 14 Dying of Love is a truly sweet martyrdom,
And that is the one I wish to suffer.
O Cherubim! Tune your lyre,
For I sense my exile is about to end!...
Flame of Love, consume me unceasingly.
Life of an instant, your burden is so heavy to me!
Divine Jesus, make my dream come true:
 To die of Love!...

15 Dying of Love is what I hope for.
 When I shall see my bonds broken,
 My God will be my Great Reward.
 I don't desire to possess other goods.
 I want to be set on fire with his Love.
 I want to see Him, to unite myself to Him forever.
 That is my Heaven... that is my destiny:
 Living on Love!!!.....

APPENDIX B

Act of Self-Offering to Merciful Love

(9-11 June 1896)

J.M.J.T.

Offering of myself as a Victim of Holocaust to God's Merciful Love

O My God! Most Blessed Trinity, I desire to *Love* You and make you *Loved*, to work for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls on earth and liberating those suffering in purgatory. I desire to accomplish Your will perfectly and to reach the degree of glory You have prepared for me in Your Kingdom. I desire, in a word, to be a saint, but I feel my helplessness and I beg You, O my God! To be Yourself my *Sanctity*!

Since You loved me so much as to give me Your only Son as my Savior and my Spouse, the infinite treasures of His merits are mine. I offer them to You with gladness, begging You to look upon me only in the Face of Jesus and in His heart burning with *Love*.

I offer You, too, all the merits of the saints (in heaven and on earth), their acts of Love, and those of the holy angels. Finally, I offer You, O Blessed Trinity! The Love and merits of the *Blessed Virgin, my dear Mother*. It is to her I abandon my offering, begging her to present it to You. Her Divine Son, my *Beloved Spouse*, told us in the days of His mortal life: '*Whatsoever you ask the Father in my name he will give it to you!*' I am certain, then, that You will grant my desires; I know, O my God! That *the more You want to give, the more You make us desire*. I feel in my heart immense desires and its is with confidence I ask You to come and take possession of my soul. Ah! I cannot receive Holy Communion as often as I desire, but, Lord, are You not *all-powerful*? Remain in me as in a tabernacle and never separate Yourself from Your little victim.

I want to console You for the ingratitude of the wicked, and I beg of You to take away my freedom to displease You. If through weakness I sometimes fall, my Your *Divine Glance* cleanse my soul immediately, consuming all my imperfections like the fire that transforms everything into itself.

I thank You, O my God! For all the graces You have granted me, especially the grace of making me pass through the crucible of suffering. It is with joy I shall contemplate You on the Last Day carrying the sceptre of Your Cross. Since You deigned to give me a share in this very previous Cross, I hope in heaven to resemble You and to see shining in my glorified body the sacred stigmata of Your Passion.

After earth's Exile, I hope to go and enjoy You in the Fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for Your *Love alone* with the one purpose of pleasing You, consoling Your Sacred Heart, and saving souls who will love You eternally.

In the evening of this life, I shall appear before You with empty hands, for I do not ask You, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is stained in Your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in Your own *Justice* and to receive from Your *Love* the eternal possession of *Yourself*. I want no other *Throne*, no other *Crown* but *You*, my *Beloved*!

Time is nothing in Your eyes, and a single day is like a thousand years. You can, then, in one instant prepare me to appear before You.

In order to live in one single act of perfect Love, I OFFER MYSELF AS A VICTIM OF HOLOCAUST TO YOUR MERCIFUL LOVE, asking You to consume me incessantly, allowing the waves of *infinite tenderness* shut up within You to overflow into my soul, and that thus I may become a *martyr* of Your *Love*, O my God!

May this martyrdom, after having prepared me to appear before You, finally cause me to die and may my soul take its flight without any delay into the eternal embrace of *Your Merciful Love*.

I want, O my *Beloved*, at each beat of my heart to renew this offering to You an infinite number of times, until the shadows having disappeared I may be able to tell You of my *Love* in an *Eternal Face to Face*!

Marie-Françoise-Thérèse of the Child Jesus
And the Holy Face, unworthy Carmelite religious

This 9th day of June,
Feast of the Most Holy Trinity,
In the year of grace, 1895.

APPENDIX C

Consecration to the Holy Face

(6 August 1896).

The word in italics were written by Thérèse in red ink

Lord, hide us in the secret of your Face!....

Sr. C. Geneviève of St. Th.-Marie *of the Holy Face*

Sr. L. J. Marie of the Trinity and *of the Holy Face*

Sr. Marie F. Th. Of the Child Jesus *and of the Holy Face*

For a little of this *pure Love* is more beneficial to the church than all these other works put together....Thus it is of the greatest importance that our souls be exercised much in *Love* so that being consumed quickly we do not linger long here on earth but soon attain to the vision of *Jesus, Face to Face*.

Consecration to the Holy Face

O Adorable Face of Jesus! Since you have deigned to choose our souls to be intimately yours in order to give yourself to them, we come to consecrate them to you....*O Jesus*, we seem to hear you say to us: 'Open to me my sisters, my beloved brides, for *my Face* is covered with dew and *my hair* with the drops of the night'. Our souls understand your language of *love*; we want to dry your *gentle Face* and to console you for the forgetfulness of the wicked. In their eyes you are still as one hidden; they look upon you as an object of contempt.....

O Face more beautiful than the lilies and roses of springtime! You are not hidden from our eyes....The *Tears* that veil your *divine look* seem to us like *precious Diamonds* which we want to collect to buy the souls of our brothers and sisters with their infinite value.

From your *Adorable Mouth* we have heard your *loving complaint*. Since we know that the *thirst* which consumes you is *a thirst for Love*, we would wish to have *an infinite Love to quench your thirst*....*Beloved Bridegroom* of our souls, if we had the *love* of all hearts, all that *love* would be for you....Well, give us this *love* and come and *quench your thirst* in your little brides.....

Souls, Lord, we need *souls*....above all *the souls of apostles and martyrs* so that through them we might *inflame* all poor sinners *with your Love*. *O adorable Face*, we shall gain this grace from you!....Then, heedless of our exile on the banks of Babylon, we will sing for your *Ears* the sweetest melodies. Since you are the true, the only Homeland of our hearts, we will not sing our songs in an alien land.

O Beloved Face of Jesus! As we await the everlasting day when we will contemplate your infinite Glory, our one desire is to charm your *Divine Eyes* by

hiding our faces too so that here on earth no one can recognize us....*O Jesus! Your Veiled Gaze is our Heaven!...*

Signed:

*Th. Of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face — M. of the Trinity and of the Holy Face
— G. of St. Th. Marie of the Holy Face*

APPENDIX D

An Unpetalled Rose (19 May 1897)

J.M.J.T.

1. Jesus, when I see you held by your Mother,
Leaving her arms
Trying, trembling, *your first steps*
On our sad earth
Before you I'd like *to unpetal a rose*
In its freshness
So that your little foot might rest ever so softly
On a flower!....
2. *This unpetalled rose* is the faithful image,
Divine Child,
Of the heart that wants to sacrifice itself for you unreservedly
At each moment.
Lord, on your altars more than one new rose
Likes to shine.
It gives itself to you....but I dream of something else:
To be unpetalled!...
3. The rose in its splendor can adorn your feast,
Lovable Child,
But *the unpetalled rose* is just flung out
To blow away.
An unpetalled rose gives itself unaffectedly
To be no more.
Like it, with joy I abandon myself to you,
Little Jesus.
4. One walks *on rose petals* with no regrets,
And this debris
Is a simple ornament that one disposes of artlessly,
That I've understood.
Jesus, for your love I've squandered my life,
My future.
In the eyes of men, a rose forever *withered*,
I must *die!*...

5. *For you*, I must *die*, Child, Beauty Supreme,
 What a blessed fate!
In *being unpetalled*, I want to prove to you that I love you,
 O my Treasure!...
Under your *baby steps*, I want to live here below
 With mystery,
And I'd like to soften once more on Calvary
 Your last steps!....

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