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Under the Veil of the Virgin: The Gradually Developing Relationship of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face to the Blessed Virgin Mary

Christopher R. Armstrong

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Doctoral Dissertation Presented at the International Marian Research Institute
(Pontifical Theological Faculty Marianum)

Christopher R. ARMSTRONG, S.T.L., J.C.L.

UNDER THE VEIL OF THE VIRGIN

The Gradually Developing Relationship
of
Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face
to
the Blessed Virgin Mary

Thesis Director: Rev. Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., S.T.D.



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**UNDER THE VEIL OF THE VIRGIN:
THE GRADUALLY DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIP OF
SAINT THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS AND OF THE HOLY FACE
TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A** *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.*
A new translation from the original manuscripts by J. Clarke.
- ACL** Archives du Carmel de Lisieux.
(Lisieux Carmel Archives). Zélie
- AL** *Annales de sainte Thérèse de Lisieux* (revue).
(Annals of St. Thérèse of Lisieux).
- CE I, etc.** Copie des Ecrits, 1910 (CE I, II, III, IV).
(Copy of the Writings, 1910).
- CF** *Correspondance familiale*, Lettres de Zélie Martin (1863-1877).
(Family Correspondence, Letters from Zélie Martin, 1863-1877).
- CG I** *Correspondance générale*, Tome I, 1972
General Correspondence, Volume I, 1972
- CG II** *Correspondance générale*, Tome II, 1974
General Correspondence, Volume II, 1974
- ChrIG** *Cahier de M. Isidore Guérin, contenant des généalogies et chronologies de sa famille.*
(Copybook of M. Isidore Guérin, containing his family geanealogy and chronology).
- CJ** "Carnet jaune" de Mère Agnès de Jésus.
(“Yellow notebook” of Mother Agnes of Jesus).
- CMG I, etc.** Carnets manuscrits de sœur Geneviève (CMG I, II, III, IV),
(Manuscript Notebooks of Sister Geneviève).
- CSG** *Conseils et Souvenirs*, publiés par sœur Geneviève, 1952.
(Counsels and Reminiscences, published by Sister Geneviève, 1952).
- DCL** Documentation du Carmel de Lisieux.
(Lisieux Carmel’s Documentation).
- DE** Sainte Thérèse de l’Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face, *Derniers Entretien*s, 1971.
(Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, *Last Conversations*, 1971).
- DE/G** *Derniers Entretien*s recueillis par sœur Geneviève.
(Last Conversations set down by Sister Geneviève).
- DE/Meu** *Derniers Entretien*s recueillis par sœur Marie de l’Eucharistie.
(Last Conversations set down by Sister Marie of the Eucharist).
- DE/MSC** *Derniers Entretien*s recueillis par sœur Marie du Sacré-Cœur.
(Last Conversations set down by Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart).

- G/NPHF** *Sœur Geneviève, Notes préparatoires à l'Histoire d'une Famille.*
(Sister Geneviève, Preparatory Notes for *The Story of a Family*).
- Ha 98, etc.** *Histoire d'une âme*, édition 1898 (07 = 1907; 53 = 1953).
(*Story of a Soul*, 1898 edition).
- IM** *Imitation de Jésus-Christ.*
(Imitation of Christ).
- LC** *Lettres des correspondants de Thérèse.*
(Letters from Thérèse's correspondents).
- LD** *Lettres diverses des correspondants entre eux.*
(Diverse letters from the correspondents).
- LT** *Lettres de Thérèse.*
(Letters from Thérèse).
- LT 1948** *Lettres de sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus*, édition 1948.
(Letters of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, 1948 edition).
- LTS** *Lettres supplémentaires de Thérèse.*
(Supplementary letters from Thérèse).
- Ms A** *Manuscrit autobiographique dédié à Mère Agnès de Jésus* (1895).
(Autobiographical manuscript dedicated to Mother Agnes of Jesus, 1895).
- Ms B** Lettre à sœur Marie du Sacré-Cœur, manuscrit autobiographique (1896).
(Letter to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, Autobiographical manuscript, 1896).
- Ms C** *Manuscrit autobiographique dédié à Mère Marie de Gonzague* (1897).
(Autobiographical manuscript dedicated to Mother Marie de Gonzague).
- Mss I, etc.** *Trois volumes du P. François de Sainte-Marie, accompagnant l'édition en fac-similé (1956) des Manuscrits Autobiographiques (Mss. I, II, III).*
(Three volumes of P. François de Sainte-Marie, accompanying the facsimile edition [1956] of the Autobiographical Manuscripts).
- NPPA** *Notes préparatoires au Procès Apostolique.*
(Preparatory notes for the Apostolic Process).
- NPPO** *Notes préparatoires au Procès de l'Ordinaire.*
(Preparatory notes for the Bishop's Process).
- OCL** *Office Central de Lisieux (Maison d'éditions).*
(Central Office of Lisieux, publishing house).
- P** *Poésies de sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus (numérotage de Mss I).*
(Poems of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, according to the Mss I numbering).
- PA** *Procès Apostolique, 1915-1916 (d'après Sum II).*
(Apostolic Process, 1915-1916, according to the second volume of the Summary).

[8]

- PN** *Poésies . . . numérotation nouvelle.*
(Poems, new numbering).
- PO** *Procès de l'Ordinaire, 1910-1911 (d'après sum II).*
(The Bishop's Process, 1910-1911, according to the second volume of the Summary).
- PS** *"Poésies supplémentaires" de sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus.*
(Supplementary Poems of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, according to the Mss. I numbering).
- RP** *"Récréations pieuses" de sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus (numérotation de Mss I).*
(*"Pious Recreations"* of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, according to the Mss. I numbering).
- VT** *Vie Thérésienne, Lisieux (revue).*
(Theresian Life, Lisieux).
- VTL** *Visage de Thérèse de Lisieux (1961), en deux volumes.*
(Face of Thérèse of Lisieux [1961], in two volumes).

INTRODUCTION

Status Quaestionis

Specific writing on the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face seems to make its first appearance after her canonization in 1925. St. Thérèse did not write a formal theological treatise on the Blessed Virgin. Rather, her thoughts on the Virgin are contained in her autobiography, letters, poems, dramatic pieces, other minor Thérèse writings, and the recollection of those who lived with her. Her first commentators¹ extracted her Marian themes from her then-available writings, but seemed to ignore her own principles of internal coherence and judgments concerning her thought on the Virgin. That is to say, St. Thérèse depended on the Gospels for her knowledge of Mary when she wrote and spoke to others about her. She reacts to the Gospel scenes and these Gospel scenes form the basis of that part of her spirituality that could be called Marian.

The disadvantage that these commentators had is that the authentic Theresian texts were not available. On her deathbed, St. Thérèse had entrusted to her natural sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus, the editing of her works. In 1947, the fiftieth anniversary of her death, Mother Agnes turned over to Msgr. Combes most of the writings of St. Thérèse in order for them to be examined systematically. In 1956, the Office Central de Lisieux published the authentic writings of the autobiography and other texts. Meanwhile, most of the writers commenting on the Marian themes of St. Thérèse tended to ignore her own principles of interpretation. However, one commentator² recalled readers of St. Thérèse to re-examine her principles of interpretation. One of the most important articles³ to appear on this subject is a textual criticism of her last poem, "*Pourquoi je l'aime, o Marie.*"⁴ It is an exacting interpretation, according to Thérèse's own principles. The most recent article⁵ examines the

¹ Texier, *Le Sourire de Marie à Ste. Thérèse de L'E. J.* (1929); Martin, *Pour Aimer la Ste. Vierge comme Ste. Thérèse de L'E. J. après sa poésie "Pourquoi je l'aime, o Marie"* (1935); Williamson, *Madonna* (1937).

² Marie-Joseph Nicolas, "La Vierge Marie dans L'Évangile et dans l'Église d'après Ste. Thérèse de Lisieux," *Revue Thomiste* 52 (1952): 508-527.

³ A. Combes, "Marie pour St. Thérèse de Lisieux," *Divinitas* 14 (1970): 75-124 (hereafter Combes).

⁴ PN 54.

⁵ V. Blat, "La espiritualidad mariana de Teresa de Lisieux," *Ephemerides Mariologicae* 33 (1983): 5-95.

complete works of St. Thérèse; the first part comments on her Marian doctrine, piety and devotion; the second and third parts explore her Marian love, imitation and mystical experience.

Specific Problem on the Question

Therefore what could I hope to contribute to the corpus of literature concerning the role of the Blessed Virgin in the life of St. Thérèse? By entitling my thesis "Under the Veil of the Virgin," I wanted to stress 1) the gradual development and 2) the decidedly evangelical cast of the Marian dimension of Thérèse's entire life. Thérèse discovered Mary in the Gospels, but this discovery developed gradually. At first, she "had not discovered the treasures hidden in the Gospels."⁶ But as her spiritual life developed, the Gospels revealed to her "new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings."⁷ Eventually, the Gospels became the only spiritual book she read. Thérèse's appreciation of the role of Mary emerged from the Gospels. At the end of her life, she wanted to hear a sermon on Mary only if it could give proofs of her real life from the Gospels, a life "lived by faith just like ourselves."⁸ What I hope to add to the corpus of Theresian studies is to demonstrate 1) the gradual development of and 2) the evangelical cast of the role of Mary in the life of St. Thérèse.

Methodology

Usually, when Thérèse wrote anything, for example, her autobiography or her poems, she did so at the request of someone else, either out of obedience to a superior or in response to fraternal charity. Thus, the genesis of her writings already reflect a Marian attitude of obedience and discipleship, of hearing the word of another and responding to it with all her heart. Accordingly, a chronology of selected Marian texts, culled from the writings either about or by Thérèse, appear as the first chapter. The advantage of such a chronology is to give the reader unfamiliar with Thérèse's life a sense of its course. The chronology is presented without comment, as that will be the subject of chapters two and three.

An analysis of Thérèse's writings will proceed by asking two questions: 1) What did Thérèse receive? (the subject of chapter two) and 2) What did she do with what she received? (the subject of chapter three). Chapter two will consider what Thérèse received from others concerning Mary—from above and below. From above,

⁶ Ms A 47r.

⁷ Ms A 83v.

⁸ CJ 21.VIII.3.

Thérèse received the grace of her Christmas conversion and the apparition of the Virgin of the Smile. From below, she was influenced by her parents and family, her schooling and Carmel.

Thus, chapter two concerns itself with what Thérèse received. The first half of chapter two treats, among other things, her Christmas conversion, the Marian apparition and her parents. Chronologically, her mother died on August 27, 1877; Mary appeared to Thérèse on May 13, 1883; her Christmas conversion occurred that midnight, 1886; she understood the meaning of the Marian apparition on 4 November 1887. By pairing parent and event, that is, 1) Thérèse's relationship with her father and her Christmas conversion, and 2) her relationship with her mother and the Smile of the Virgin, I hope to illuminate from those sources the emerging role of Mary in the life of Thérèse. The second half of chapter two deals with Thérèse's external formation. In a general way, it looks at the need for others in forming souls and other influences, such as books and Carmel itself. In a particular way, it considers the Marian characteristics of this external formation. These include Marian piety as it was practiced in the Martin home, a brief summary of Mary's place in Carmel, and Thérèse's experience of being under the veil of the Virgin, which occurred in July, 1889.

Chapter three deals with what Thérèse did with what she received, which includes her teaching on the Little Way and her final poem on Mary. The first part of chapter three looks at the Little Way in general, then goes on to consider it specifically from a Marian perspective. The second part of chapter three examines Thérèse's final poem, whose subject is Mary. The poem's context is the final stage of Thérèse's gradual development, marked by an ever deepening reflection upon and practice of fraternal charity, the night of faith and the physical trials of dying a painful death.

Sr. Geneviève noted that Thérèse's final poem was a swan song, in the full force of the term.⁹ With her first hemoptysis, on the night of April 3, 1897, Thérèse's health began to decline.¹⁰ But as her health declined, she sensed more than ever the role of fraternal charity in Christian life and her mission.¹¹ Instinctively she turned to the Blessed Virgin, as she had throughout her life: "My heart was entirely filled with a heavenly peace today. I prayed so much to the Blessed Virgin last night, thinking that her beautiful month was about to begin!"¹² Her poem on Mary is not an outpouring of emotion, nor the recounting of personal favors received through Mary's intercession, but rather all that she thinks about the Blessed

⁹ *Poésies*, Tome I, 238, n. 1.

¹⁰ Ms C 5r.

¹¹ Ms C 11v; DJ 21.V.2; CJ 9.VI.3.

¹² CJ 1.V.2.

Virgin. For Thérèse, “idea” and “thought” are not the same.¹³ An “idea” frequently had the sense of project or plan in her writings; but, her thoughts were bathed in prayer.¹⁴

Finally, chapter four will attempt to synthesize this gradual development of the appropriation of Mary within the life of St. Thérèse, “giving proofs from the Gospels.” Some conclusions will be drawn about the originality of Thérèse who has been considered both “a living word of God”¹⁵ and a “ravishing miniature of the Blessed Virgin.”¹⁶ First, what Thérèse taught and wrote about the Blessed Virgin Mary, she learned from the Gospels. Second, what Thérèse learned from the Gospels she learned gradually; such gradualness will be examined by means of the threefold way of the spiritual life: purgative, illuminative and unitive, and will refer, briefly, to the mystical aspect of Thérèse’s holiness. Third, the originality of Thérèse’s understanding of Mary will be compared and contrasted with the teaching of Pope Leo XIII and Jean-Baptiste Terrien, her contemporaries, and with two more recent authorities. Finally, the under-developed aspect of doing the will of God as constitutive of Mary’s role in the life of Thérèse will be examined.

¹³ *Poésies*, Tome I, 238, n. 2.

¹⁴ Ms A 33v.

¹⁵ Pius XI, Discours 11 February 1923, in *The Story of the Canonization of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1934).

¹⁶ P 241, n. 3: “ravissante miniature de la T. Ste. Vierge.” L’abbé Hodierne, aumônier du Carmel, juste après la mort de Thérèse; citation d’une lettre à Mère Marie de Gonzague, 1899.

CHAPTER ONE

A Selected Chronology

In the story of my soul, up to the entrance into Carmel, I distinguish three separate periods. The first is not the least fruitful in memories in spite of its short duration. It extends from the dawn of my reason till our dear Mother's departure from heaven.¹⁷

ALENÇON

God granted me the favor of opening my intelligence at an early age and of imprinting childhood recollections so deeply on my memory that it seems the things I am about to recount happened only yesterday. Jesus in His love willed, perhaps, that I know the matchless mother he had given me, but whom His hand hastened to crown in heaven.¹⁸

1872

December 15: Mme. Martin writes to her sister-in-law about her pregnancy. "If the good God does me the grace to be able to nurse it, it will be only a pleasure to raise it. I love children to folly. I was born to have them but soon it will be that time that it will be finished."¹⁹ Mme. Martin, born Zélie-Marie Guérin on 23 December 1831, wrote this letter a week shy of her forty-first birthday.

1873

January 2: Birth of Marie-Françoise-Thérèse Martin, at 36 Saint Blaise Street, Alençon. All nine of the Martin children were given "Marie" as their first name. "In

¹⁷ Ms A 4r. This Chronology follows those established in CG II, 1440-1441, and in the translation by John Clarke, O.C.D., of *The Story of A Soul*, 279-285. It will include texts relevant to the role of Mary in the life of St. Thérèse.

¹⁸ Ms A 4v.

¹⁹ CF 83, 15.XII.72.

agreement with my father, she [Zélie] wanted to give each one the name of 'Marie.'"²⁰ "My little girl was born yesterday, Thursday, at half past eleven in the evening."²¹

January 4: Baptism of Thérèse in the Church of Notre-Dame; her godmother was Marie. There was a delay as they waited for the godfather.²²

January 16: "While I was carrying her, I remarked on a thing that has never happened before with the other children: when I was singing, she sang with me. I confide this to you, nobody would believe it"²³ (Mme. Martin).

March 15 or 16: Thérèse was sent out to be nursed by Rose Taille, at Semalle, Orne.²⁴

July 1: Mme. Martin writes to her daughter Pauline that Thérèse "is always smiling . . . she appears very intelligent and has an expression as though she were predestined in some way."²⁵

1874

April 2: "Little Thérèse will arrive definitively on Thursday"²⁶ (Mme. Martin writing to her brother Isidore Guérin).

June 25: "The little one never wants to leave me, she is continually with me . . . I am very glad that Thérèse is so fond of me but it is inconvenient sometimes"²⁷ (Mme. Martin writing to her daughters Marie and Pauline).

November 8: "My Thérèse . . . sings us little songs . . . is intelligent and makes her prayer like a little angel"²⁸ (Mme. Martin writing to her sister-in-law, Mme. Guérin).

1875

At this age, Thérèse thinks: "I had often heard it said that Pauline would become a *religious*, and without thinking too much about what it meant I thought: 'I too will

²⁰ Geneviève de la Sainte Face, *The Mother of the Little Flower*, trans. Michael Collins (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1957), 8 (hereafter MLF).

²¹ CF 84, 3.I.73.

²² MLF, Celine, 8.

²³ CF 85, 16.I.73.

²⁴ CF 89, III.73.

²⁵ CF 104, 1.I.73.

²⁶ CF 194, 29.III.74.

²⁷ CF 119, 25.VI.74; Ms A 5r.

²⁸ CF 124, 8.IX.74.

be a religious.” . . . You were my *ideal*; I wanted to be like you, and it was your example that drew me to the spouse of Virgins at the age of two.”²⁹

Marie, at age fifteen, asks for a new statue of Mary instead of the “Virgin of the Smile.” Her mother replies: “When I am no longer here my daughter you do what you want, but as long as I shall live this Blessed Virgin will not leave here.”³⁰

March 29: Voyage to LeMans: “What a joy to see myself on a trip alone with Mamma.”³¹

April 4: Sr. Marie Dosithée, Mme. Martin’s sister and a Visitandine at LeMans, writes to her sister-in-law, Mme. Guérin: “Zélie brought me her little Thérèse . . . a girl of rare obedience . . .”³²

May 19: “Thérèse is sick . . . the First Communion of Léonie may be a day of mourning” (Mme. Martin writes to her sister-in-law).

May 23: Léonie makes her First Communion: “I remember very well her First Communion especially the moment she picked me up . . . a sister all in white like me . . . We accompanied Mamma the next day or a few days after to the home of Léonie’s little companion [from her first communion]. I believe it was that day that our good little mother took us behind a wall to give us a drink of wine after the dinner (which we provided for Mme. Dagoreau), because she didn’t want to offend the good woman and didn’t want to deprive us of anything. Ah! how delicate a mother’s heart really is, and how it shows its tenderness in a thousand little cares that no one thinks about!”³³

November: Mme. Martin writes to Pauline: “[Thérèse] will not climb the stairs all alone but cries each step: ‘Mamma, Mamma!’ If I forget to say: ‘Yes, my child,’ she stops and won’t go any further.”³⁴

1876

From the age of three, I began to refuse nothing of what God asked of me.³⁵

May 14: Mme. Martin writes to Pauline: “[Thérèse] has a heart of gold . . . It is curious to see her run after me to make her confession . . . basically, this ceremony

²⁹ Ms A 6r.

³⁰ S.-J. Piat, *The Story of a Family: The Home of the Little Flower*, trans. by a Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1947), 149 (hereafter Piat, *Family*).

³¹ Ms A 7 v.

³² CG II, 1115.

³³ Ms A 6v.

³⁴ CF 146, XI.75.

³⁵ DE 717, n. 141.

[of the month of May at Notre-Dame] doesn't please me very much; one hears there impossible hymns, they are cooings that don't mean anything; one would believe it to be a café-concert, it irritates me."³⁶

May 21: Mme. Martin wants to give Thérèse a rose but Thérèse refuses: "The roses belong to Marie . . . she is a child who becomes easily emotional. When she has been naughty, it is necessary that all the world know it . . ."³⁷

July 16: Commenting on Thérèse's first photograph, Mme. Martin writes to Pauline: "The poor little one was afraid of the photographer, she made her 'lip.'"³⁸

October 29: Mme. Martin writes to Pauline: "Little Thérèse asked me the other day if she would go to heaven, I told her 'Yes' if she were good. She answered: 'Yes but if I am not good, I'll go to hell. But I know what I will do. I will fly to you in heaven, and what will God be able to do to take me away? You will be holding me so tightly in your arms!' I could see in her eyes that she was really convinced that God could do nothing to her if she were in her mother's arms."³⁹

October, November, December: Mme. Martin writes about her breast cancer, discovered in 1865:⁴⁰ She is undecided about treatment,⁴¹ yet remains calm,⁴² even though the doctors can do nothing.⁴³

November 8: Mme. Martin writes to Pauline: "[Thérèse] is very lively . . . but her heart is sensitive."⁴⁴

1877

On Sunday, as I was too little to go to services, Mamma stayed with me; I was very good, walking around on tiptoe during the Mass; but as soon as I saw the door open, there was an explosion of joy! I would throw myself in front of my pretty sister, "*adorned like a chapel*" and say: "Oh! little Céline, hurry, give me the blessed bread!" Sometimes she didn't have it because she arrived too late. What to do? I wasn't able to be without "*my Mass*." A way was soon found. "You haven't any blessed bread? Then make some!" No sooner said than done. Céline got a chair, opened the cupboard, took the bread, cut off a slice, and then very *gravely* recited a *Hail Mary* over it, and then she gave it to me. After making a sign of the Cross, I would eat it with *great devotion*, finding it *tasted* the same as the blessed bread.⁴⁵

³⁶ CF 159, 14.V.76; Ms A 7r.

³⁷ CF 160, 21.V.76.

³⁸ CF 164, 16.VII.76.

³⁹ CF 170, 29.X.76; Ms A 5v.

⁴⁰ CF 13, 23.IV.65.

⁴¹ CF 168, 20.X.76; CF 169, X.76.

⁴² CF 170, 2.XI.76; CF 173, 12.XI.76.

⁴³ CF 176, 17.XII.76.

⁴⁴ CF 172, 8.XI.76; Ms A 8v, 9r.

⁴⁵ Ms A 9v, 10r.

February 13: Mme. Martin writes to Pauline: "One morning I wanted to kiss little Thérèse before going downstairs. She seemed to be in a deep sleep, and I didn't dare awaken her; but Marie said to me: 'Mamma, she's only pretending to be asleep; I'm sure of it!' Then I leaned over to kiss her forehead, but she hid immediately under her blanket and said with the tone of a spoiled child: 'I don't want anybody to see me!' I was very much displeased and let her feel it. Two minutes later I heard her crying and very soon, to my great surprise, I saw her at my side! She had left her bed all by herself and had come downstairs in her bare feet, hindered somewhat by her long nightdress. Her face was bathed in tears, and throwing herself at my knees, she said, 'Mamma, I was naughty; forgive me!' Pardon was quickly granted. I took my angel in my arms, pressed her to my heart and covered her with kisses."⁴⁶

April 4: With Pauline guiding her hand, Thérèse writes her first letter to Louise Magdelaine.

May 9: Marie writes to Pauline: ". . . As for myself I think it looks like a chapel instead; my May-altar is so pretty its running competition to the one at Notre-Dame. Its really something to arrange a May-altar in this house. Mamma is too difficult, more difficult than the Blessed Virgin. It has to have hawthorne branches reaching to the ceiling, walls covered with greens, etc., etc. Thérèse is filled with admiration. Each morning she comes to make her prayer, leaping with joy."⁴⁷

May 10: Mme. Martin writes to Pauline: "May, the beautiful month, has begun . . . [Thérèse] has very rare answers for one her age: . . . Céline: 'How is it that God can be present in the Host?'; Thérèse: 'That's not surprising. God is all powerful'; Céline: 'What does all powerful mean?'; Thérèse: 'It means He can do anything He wants.'"⁴⁸

June 18-23: Mme. Martin, with her daughters Marie, Pauline, and Leonie, goes on pilgrimage to Lourdes. A succession of letters reveals the confidence of Mme. Martin: "Really I am dependent now on the help of the Blessed Mother . . . I am eagerly looking forward to a pilgrimage to Lourdes . . . If I am not cured, it will be because it is better for them that I die . . . I will try to sing the hymns just the same . . . Let us surrender everything to His goodness and mercy . . . It seems to me that the more sacrifices we make, the more the Blessed Virgin will be disposed to hear us."⁴⁹ Thérèse notes that Mme. Leriche, M. Martin's sister who came to care for her and Céline, does not pray with them "like Mamma."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ CF 188, 13.II.77.

⁴⁷ CG I, 100; LD 9.V.77.

⁴⁸ CF 201, 10.V.77.

⁴⁹ CF 181, 5.I.77; CF 186, 28.I.77; CF 189, 20.II.77; CF 193, 12.III.77; CF 203, 29.V.77. All these letters are addressed to her sister-in-law, Mme. Guérin.

⁵⁰ Ms A 12r.

June 24: Mme. Martin writes to her brother and sister-in-law: "I lit a beautiful candle for you at the grotto . . . Alas! I am not cured . . . nothing but accidents and miseries."⁵¹

July 8: "I pray to the Blessed Virgin to help me . . . my husband and Marie believe the Blessed Virgin will surely cure me."⁵²

July 24: "I have asked the Blessed Virgin the grace to be able to get up from bed and I have been heard . . . What can be done? If the Blessed Virgin does not cure me, that means my time here is at an end, and the good God wishes me to rest elsewhere than upon this earth."⁵³

July 28: Marie writes to her aunt, Mme. Guérin. "Until two weeks ago she used to recite the five decades of her beads on her knees, before the Blessed Virgin, in my room, which she loved so much. Seeing her so ill I wanted to have her sit down but it was useless to ask her."⁵⁴ On the same day, Céline communicated to this same aunt: ". . . she would like to have you arrange your trip for the week after the feast of the Assumption, because if the Blessed Virgin were to cure her that day . . . let us hope . . . she will be touched by our prayers and our tears."⁵⁵

August: "All the details of my mother's illness are still present to me and I recall especially the last weeks she spent on earth . . . the ceremony of Extreme Unction made a deep impression on me."⁵⁶

August 9: Marie writes to her aunt, Mme. Guérin: "We began a novena that is to close on the Assumption . . . whom would the Blessed Virgin protect if she would not protect Mamma, who is so good and so courageous?"⁵⁷

August 28: "It was on Tuesday, 28 August 1877, one half hour past midnight, that our admirable mother was taken from us. She was only forty-five years and eight months old."⁵⁸

August 29: Mme. Martin is buried. Thérèse chose Pauline as her second mother: "Fifteen year later, I was to stand before another coffin, Mother Geneviève [one of the foundresses of the Lisieux Carmel]. It was similar in size [to her mother's]. I imagined myself back once again in the days of my childhood and all those memories flooded into my mind . . . well as for me Pauline will be my mamma."⁵⁹

⁵¹ CF 209, 24.VI.77.

⁵² CF 212, 8.VII.77.

⁵³ CF 215, 24.VII.77.

⁵⁴ MLF, 102.

⁵⁵ CMG IV, 399-401; MLF, 102-103.

⁵⁶ Ms A 12r; MLF, 109.

⁵⁷ Cf. CG II, 1132.

⁵⁸ MLF, 110.

⁵⁹ Ms A 13r.

LISIEUX-AT LES BUISSONNETS

I entered the second period of my existence, the most painful of the three, especially since the entrance into Carmel of the one whom I chose as my second "Mamma." 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 deeply into the serious side of life.⁶⁰

September 10: M. Guérin describes Les Buissonnets in a letter to his brother-in-law M. Martin.⁶¹

November 15: Thérèse and her sisters arrive at Lisieux under the care of their mother's brother, Isidore Guérin. "It was with pleasure that I came to Lisieux."⁶²

November 16: Marie writes to M. Martin: "We are installed at Les Buissonnets."⁶³ ". . . Our Father's *very affectionate heart* seemed to be enriched now with a truly maternal love. You and Marie, Mother, were you not the *most tender* and selfless of mothers? . . . [at Les Buissonnets] my life was truly happy . . . Elsewhere . . . I was an exile; I wept, I felt I no longer had a mother! There my heart expanded and I smiled once more at life."⁶⁴

1878

April: For the first time Thérèse understands a sermon on the Passion.⁶⁵

June 17 to July 2: M. Martin, with his daughters Pauline and Marie, takes a trip to Paris. Thérèse is confided to her aunt and uncle Guérin: "I loved them very much . . . [her uncle] frightened me and I wasn't much at ease in his home."⁶⁶

August 8: "I was six or seven years old when Papa brought us to Trouville. Never will I forget the impression the sea made on me; I couldn't take my eyes off it since its majesty, the roaring of the waves, everything spoke to my soul of God's grandeur and power."⁶⁷ "I am happy to see the blossoming of Thérèse at the view of the big sea."⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Ms A 13r.

⁶¹ CG I, 112-113; LD 10.IX.77.

⁶² Ms A 13v; CG II, 1221.

⁶³ CG I, 114; LD 16.XII.77.

⁶⁴ Ms A 13r, 13v.

⁶⁵ Ms A 17v.

⁶⁶ Ms A 13v.

⁶⁷ Ms A 21v.

⁶⁸ CG I, 118; LD 9.VIII.78.

1879

“Each afternoon I took a walk with Papa . . . going to a different Church everyday . . . in this way we entered the Carmelite chapel for the first time.”⁶⁹

Summer: Thérèse has a prophetic vision of her father’s future sickness. “One day, however, God showed me in a truly extraordinary *vision*, the *living* image of the trial He was pleased to prepare for us in advance.”⁷⁰

End of the year or the beginning of 1880: Thérèse made her first confession: “Father encouraged me to be devout to the Blessed Virgin and I promised myself to redouble my tenderness for her. I then passed my rosary through to have him bless it. It was evening and on the way home when we passed under a street light I looked at it from all sides. ‘What are you looking at Thérèse?’ you asked. ‘I want to see what a blessed rosary looks like.’ This amused you. I remained a long time affected by the grace I received.”⁷¹

1880

Beginning of the year: Thérèse writes alone.⁷²

May 13: Thérèse recalls Céline’s First Communion: “I believe I received great graces that day and I consider it one of the most beautiful in my life.”⁷³

1881

October 3: Thérèse enters the Benedictine Abbey at Lisieux as a day boarder: “I have often heard it said that time spent at school is the best and happiest of one’s life. It wasn’t that way for me. The five years I spent in school were the saddest in my life.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Ms A 14r.

⁷⁰ Ms A 19r-21r.

⁷¹ Ms A 16 v.

⁷² This letter is lost. CG I, 119.

⁷³ Ms A 25v.

⁷⁴ Ms A 22r.

1882

October 2: Pauline enters Lisieux Carmel; Thérèse returns to the Abbey. "I was about to lose my mother. I understood what life was . . . continual suffering and separation."⁷⁵

December: "Toward the end of the year I began to have a constant headache."⁷⁶

1883

March 25, Easter: While M. Martin, Marie and Leonie are at Paris, Thérèse becomes ill at the Guérins. The illness results in nervous trembling and hallucinations. "The sickness which overtook me certainly came from the demon."⁷⁷

April 6: Pauline receives the habit as Sr. Agnes of Jesus. Thérèse is well enough to embrace her sister in the visiting room. "I was then able to kiss my dear Mother, to sit on her knees and give her many caresses."

April 7: "The next day I had a relapse similar to the first."⁷⁸

May 13, Pentecost: Thérèse is suddenly healed by "the ravishing smile of the Blessed Virgin."⁷⁹ One notes that what leads up to the miracle, the miracle itself, and what follows it, occupies nearly a quarter of Thérèse's story.

May: Thérèse speaks to Sr. Agnes and the other Carmelites and she begins to agonize in her conscience about the subject of her sickness: "I thought I had lied"⁸⁰ (until May 28, 1888) about the smile of the Virgin. "The Blessed Virgin permitted this torment for my soul's good"⁸¹ (until November 4, 1887).

August: Thérèse's "first entrance into the world"⁸² occurred on vacation at Alençon and in the surrounding chateaux, with her father and sisters. "At the age of ten the heart allows itself to be dazzled easily, and I consider it a great grace to have remained at Alençon. Perhaps Jesus wanted to show me the world before his visit in order that I might choose freely the way I was to follow."⁸³

⁷⁵ Ms A 25v-27r.

⁷⁶ Ms 27v.

⁷⁷ Ms A 27r-29v; CG I, 139-149; Chr. IG, 99.

⁷⁸ Ms A 28v.

⁷⁹ Ms A 30r-31r; CG I, 147-149.

⁸⁰ Ms A 31r.

⁸¹ Ms A 31r.

⁸² Ms A 32v.

⁸³ Ms A 32v.

August 22: Thérèse meets Father Almire Pichon, S.J., her future spiritual director at Alençon.⁸⁴

October 1: Thérèse returns to the Abbey in the second division. Concerning the fate of unbaptized infants, she remonstrated with Fr. Domin: "But they have not sinned. But not to see God, that is unhappiness! Ah well! the good God can do all, in his place I would show myself."⁸⁵

1884

February to March: The letters⁸⁶ of Sr. Agnes of Jesus, with expressions like "how the Blessed Virgin keeps always my little Thérèse under her virginal mantle,"⁸⁷ prepare Thérèse for her First Communion. "You used to write me a nice letter each week and this filled my soul with deep thoughts and aided me in the practice of virtue . . . Pauline was replaced by Marie . . . It seemed to me her [Marie's] large and generous heart passed into my own."⁸⁸

May 5-8: Thérèse makes her preparatory retreat for her First Communion; Fr. Domin instructs the class. "I cannot express the sweet memory this retreat left with me."⁸⁹

May 8: Thérèse makes her First Communion at the Abbey. "It was no longer a look but a fusion."⁹⁰

In the afternoon, it was I who made the Act of Consecration to the Blessed Virgin. It was only right that I *speak* in the name of my companions to my Mother in heaven, I who had been deprived at such an early age of my earthly Mother. I put all my heart into *speaking* to her, into consecrating myself to her as a child throwing itself into the arms of its mother, asking her to watch over her. It seems to me the Blessed Virgin must have looked upon her little flower and *smiled* at her, for wasn't it she who cured her with a *visible smile*? Had she not placed in the heart of her little flower her Jesus, the Flower of the Fields and the Lily of the Valley?⁹¹

⁸⁴ Cf. L. Boncompain, *Un directeur d'âmes, le Père Almire Pichon de la Compagnie de Jésus, Notes et Souvenirs* (Montréal, 1921), 30 (as cited in VT [October, 1967]: 203, n.32).

⁸⁵ Ms 37 v; cf. *La Petite Thérèse à l'Abbaye, Souvenir inédits recueillis par une ancienne maîtresse, M. St. Léon* (Notre Dame du Pre, 1930).

⁸⁶ CG I; LC 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34.

⁸⁷ LC 22.

⁸⁸ Ms A 33r; CG I; LT 11: 1-6.III.84.

⁸⁹ Ms A 33v-34r.

⁹⁰ Ms A 35r.

⁹¹ Ms A 35v.

On the same day: Sr. Agnes of Jesus makes her profession at Carmel. "This time of my First Communion remains engraved on my heart as souvenir without clouds . . . my trials left me during the next year."⁹²

After her First Communion: [There is a] "great desire to suffer . . . O Jesus, ineffable sweetness, change for me into bitterness all the consolations of earth."⁹³

May 22, Ascension: Thérèse makes her second communion. "It is no longer I who live but Jesus living in me."⁹⁴

June 14: Mgr. Hugonin, Bishop of Bayeux, confirms Thérèse at the Abbey. "I was prepared with great care to receive the visit of the Holy Spirit, and I did not understand why greater attention was not paid to the reception of this sacrament of *Love*."⁹⁵ Céline will never forget the "vehemence" of the "holy drunkenness" of her little sister in those days.⁹⁶

July: Thérèse has whooping cough on vacation at Saint-Ouen-le-Pin with the Guérins. Her aunt gives her "a glass of warm milk (straight from the cow!). I believe it is a good remedy."⁹⁷

September 25: Thérèse is inscribed in the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary.⁹⁸

1885

April 26: Thérèse is inscribed in the Confraternity of the Holy Face of Tours.⁹⁹

May 3-10: Like LaFontaine's fable [IV,5] "The Donkey and the Pet Dog," Thérèse is "cured [for] life of attracting attention"¹⁰⁰ while on vacation at Deauville.¹⁰¹

May 17-21: "It was during my second [solemn] Communion that I was assailed by the terrible sickness of scruples . . . for me to express what I suffered for one-and-a-half years would be impossible."¹⁰² Fr. Domin said: "God hates the soul in sin."¹⁰³ Marie is her sole oracle.¹⁰⁴

⁹² Ms A 32v.

⁹³ Ms A 36v.

⁹⁴ Ms A 36r.

⁹⁵ Ms A 36v.

⁹⁶ NPPO, 4.

⁹⁷ CG I, 178-179; LD 7.VII.84.

⁹⁸ DE 483, n. a, 3.

⁹⁹ DE 483, n. a, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Ms A 42r.

¹⁰¹ CG I, 184-191.

¹⁰² Ms A 39r.

¹⁰³ CG I, 193.

¹⁰⁴ Ms A 41r.

July 29: Mme. Guérin writes to her husband: "Mother was telling me yesterday that she never saw Thérèse so gay, with a face so frankly happy."¹⁰⁵

August 22 to October: "Papa's trip to Constantinople . . ."¹⁰⁶

End of September: On vacation at Villa Rose, Trouville, "I enjoyed myself very much because I was with my Céline."¹⁰⁷

October: Thérèse returns to the Abbey alone, without "inseparable Céline."¹⁰⁸

1886

February 2: Thérèse is received as an aspirant of the Children of Mary.¹⁰⁹

February to March: "It wasn't long before I was sick . . . without . . . Céline . . . I left the Abbey . . . at . . . 13 and continued my education . . . at the home of Mme. Papineau."¹¹⁰

Beginning of July: "My sickness, which they feared was serious, was only an attack of nostalgia for Les Buissonnets"¹¹¹ while on a three day vacation at Trouville with the Guérins.

Around October 5: On a trip to Alençon of several days, with her father and sisters, "everything about it was sadness and bitterness for me. I cannot express the tears I shed on Mamma's grave, because I had forgotten the bouquet of cornflowers I had gathered especially for her."¹¹²

October 7: "It was during this trip that Leonie made her attempt to enter the Poor Clares. I was saddened by her *extraordinary* entrance . . ."¹¹³

October 15: "When Marie entered Carmel [of Lisieux, as Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart], I was still very scrupulous."¹¹⁴

End of October: Thérèse is freed from scruples through the intercession of two brothers and two sisters who died as infants. "The answer was not long in coming, for soon peace came to inundate my soul . . ."¹¹⁵

December 1: Léonie returns to the family.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁵ CG I, 195; LD 29.VII.85.

¹⁰⁶ Ms A 41v; CG I, 196; LT 25.VII.85.

¹⁰⁷ Ms A 41r.

¹⁰⁸ Ms A 39v.

¹⁰⁹ CG I, 203.

¹¹⁰ Ms A 39v.

¹¹¹ Ms A 42v.

¹¹² Ms A 43r.

¹¹³ Ms A 43v.

¹¹⁴ Ms A 44r.

¹¹⁵ Ms A 44r.

¹¹⁶ CG I, 214, nn. a and b.

December 25: After Midnight Mass, Thérèse receives the grace of conversion at Les Buissonnets. "On that night when He made Himself subject to weakness and suffering for love of me, He made me strong and courageous . . . to run as a giant [Ps 18:6]." ¹¹⁷ "On that night began the third period of my life, the most beautiful and the most filled with graces from heaven." ¹¹⁸

1887

For Thérèse and Céline, life at Les Buissonnets this year is the ideal of happiness. "Céline had become the confident of my thoughts, Jesus wanting us to advance together, formed bonds in our hearts stronger than blood." ¹¹⁹

March 19: Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart takes the habit. ¹²⁰

Spring: "I went very humbly to ask for permission to be received into the Association [the Children of Mary] at the Abbey. The mistress didn't want to refuse but she placed as a condition that I come twice a week in the afternoon in order to prove my worthiness." ¹²¹

May 1: Sr. Agnes of Jesus writes to M. Martin after his first attack of paralysis: "Of course the Blessed Virgin will heal you . . . for Carmel has prayed so much for you." ¹²²

May: Reading *Fin du monde présent et mystères de la vie future*, by Fr. Arminjon, "was one of the greatest graces in my life . . . I knew almost all the chapters of my beloved *Imitation* by heart. This little book never parted company from me." ¹²³

May 29, Pentecost: "Through my tears, I confided [to her father] my desire to enter Carmel and soon his tears mingled with mine." ¹²⁴

May 31: Thérèse is received at the Abbey as a Child of Mary. ¹²⁵

June 20-26: Thérèse is on vacation with the Guérins at Trouville. ¹²⁶

July: "On Sunday, looking at a picture of Our Lord on the cross, I was struck by the blood flowing from one of the divine hands . . . to remain at the foot of the cross . . . to receive the divine dew . . . to pour it out upon souls . . . of great sinners . . . to snatch them from the eternal flames." ¹²⁷

¹¹⁷ Ms A 44v, 85v; CG I 911; LT 201, 1.XI.97.

¹¹⁸ Ms A 45v.

¹¹⁹ Ms A 48r.

¹²⁰ CG I, 223; CG II, 799, 1140.

¹²¹ Ms A 40v.

¹²² CG I, 227; LD 3-4.V.87.

¹²³ Ms 47v, r.

¹²⁴ Ms A 50r; cf. Ms A 44v, 49r, 50v.

¹²⁵ DE 483, n. a, 7.

¹²⁶ CG I, 230; Chr IG, 35.

¹²⁷ Ms A 45v.

July 13: Pranzini who murdered two women and a young girl in Paris, the night of March 19, 1887, is condemned to death. Thérèse prays and sacrifices for his conversion" . . . he would die impenitent. I wanted at all cost to prevent him from falling into hell."¹²⁸

July 16: Léonie enters the visitation of Caen. "Léonie will be happy at the Visitation."¹²⁹

September 1: Thérèse reads in *La Croix* of Pranzini's execution and of his conversion" . . . [he] took hold of the crucifix . . . and kissed the sacred wounds three times [Lk 15:7]."¹³⁰

October 8-22: Under the influence of Sr. Agnès de Jésus, M. Guérin consents to Thérèse's entrance to Carmel at Christmas. ". . . with trembling I confided my resolution to Uncle [October 8] . . . a long time passed before I dared to speak to him again [two weeks] . . . a painful martyrdom lasting three days [October 19-22] . . . on the fourth day, . . . a Saturday, consecrated . . . to the Sweet Queen of heaven . . . he told me that I was the little flower God wanted to gather."¹³¹

October 31: Thérèse and her father visit Bp. Hugonin at Bayeux to solicit the same authorization. ". . . I wanted to be a religious since the dawn of my reason, and I wanted Carmel as soon as I knew about it. I find all the aspirations of my soul are fulfilled in the Order . . . and still everything was futile."¹³²

November 4: On her way to Rome with her father and sister, Thérèse's family stops in Paris. At Notre-Dame des Victoires,

The Blessed Virgin made me feel *it was really herself who smiled on me and brought about my cure*. I understood she was watching over me, that I was *her* child. I could no longer give her any other name but "*Mamma*," as this appeared ever so much more tender than mother. I begged her to protect me always and to bring to fruition as quickly as possible my dream of hiding *beneath the shadow of her virginal mantle!*¹³³

November 7-13: The pilgrims make stops in Switzerland, Milan, Venice and Loreto. "Loreto . . . I am not surprised at all the Blessed Virgin chose this spot . . . our greatest consolation was to receive *Jesus Himself* in His house.

November 13-24: The pilgrims continue on to Rome with excursions to Naples and Pompeii.

November 20: The pilgrims have an audience with Pope Leo XIII. He responds to Thérèse's request to enter Carmel: ". . . You will enter if God wills it . . ."¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Ms A 45v-46v.

¹²⁹ CG I, 234; LT 14.VII.87.

¹³⁰ Ms A 46r.

¹³¹ Ms A 51r, v; CG I, 251; LD 21.X.87.

¹³² Ms A 54v.

¹³³ Ms A 56v-57r.

¹³⁴ Ms A 63r.

November 24-December 2: The pilgrims return home by way of Assisi, Florence, Pisa, Genoa, Nice, Marseille, Lyons and Paris.¹³⁵

December 28: There is a favorable answer from Bp. Hugonin to the Prioress of Lisieux Carmel to admit Thérèse.¹³⁶

1888

January 1: The Bishop's response is transmitted to Thérèse but her entrance to Carmel is deferred for three months: ". . . At the wedding feast of Cana when the Blessed Virgin asked him to come to the help of the head of the house, didn't he answer that His hour had not yet come. I was unable to hold back my tears at such a long wait."¹³⁷

March: "One of the most beautiful months of my life . . . my mortifications consisted in breaking my will, always so ready to impose itself on others . . . this waiting left sweet memories with me."¹³⁸

April 9: Thérèse enters Carmel ". . . the same day the community was celebrating the feast of the Annunciation, transferred because of Lent."¹³⁹

AT CARMEL

Postulancy: April 9, 1888 to January 10, 1889

Assignment: Linen-room

"My desires at last were accomplished; my soul experienced a peace . . . for seven-and-a-half years . . . that has not abandoned me in the midst of the greatest trials."¹⁴⁰

May 22: Thérèse notes "those beautiful festivities of the month of May, namely, the Profession of our dear Marie."¹⁴¹

May 24-28: Fr. Pichon, S.J., preaches two instructions a day at Lisieux.

May 28: Thérèse makes a general confession to Father Pichon.¹⁴² "He spoke the most consoling words I ever heard in my life: 'In the presence of God, the

¹³⁵ Ms A 65r-67r; CG I, 259-313.

¹³⁶ CG I, 333.

¹³⁷ MS A 68r.

¹³⁸ Ms A 68v; DE 779.

¹³⁹ Ms A 68r.

¹⁴⁰ Ms A 69v.

¹⁴¹ Ms A 71r-v; CG I, 368.

¹⁴² CG I, 374; LC 18.VI.87.

Blessed Virgin and all the saints, I declare that you have never committed a mortal sin' . . . Thank God . . ."¹⁴³

June 23-27: M. Martin disappears without telling anyone to Le Havre; he writes for money and Céline and M. Guérin trace him. "You are aware dear Mother of our bitter sufferings during the month of June."¹⁴⁴

August 12: M. Martin suffers a new attack of paralysis at Les Buissonnets.¹⁴⁵

End of October: Thérèse is approved by the conventual chapter to receive the habit.¹⁴⁶

October 31: M. Martin has a serious relapse at Le Havre.¹⁴⁷

1889

January 5-10: Thérèse makes a retreat before the reception of the habit. "Jesus sleeps."¹⁴⁸

January 10: "Against all expectations, our dear father recovered from his second attack and the Bishop [Hugonin] set the ceremony [for the reception of the habit] for January tenth . . . his day of triumph . . . Anticipating the desires of His fiancée, He gave her snow [unexpected due to the unseasonably warm weather].¹⁴⁹ On this date, Thérèse signed her name "Soeur Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus de la Sainte Face, nov. carm. ind."¹⁵⁰

Novitiate: January 10, 1889 to September 24, 1890

Assignment: Refectory, sweeping of corridors

February 12: M. Martin is hospitalized at "Bon Sauveur" of Caen where he will remain for three years. ". . . the most bitter and humiliating of all chalices . . . this inestimable treasure . . . Papa's three years of martyrdom appear to me as the most lovable, the most fruitful of my life."¹⁵¹

July: Thérèse receives a special grace from the Blessed Virgin in the hermitage of St. Mary Magdalene and is under its influence for a whole week. ". . . I was entirely hidden under the Blessed Virgin's veil . . ."¹⁵²

¹⁴³ Ms A 70r.

¹⁴⁴ Ms A 72r; CG I, 375; LD 26.VI.88.

¹⁴⁵ CMG IV, 187.

¹⁴⁶ CG I, 404-406.

¹⁴⁷ CG I, 407-409.

¹⁴⁸ CG I, 426-444; LT 74, 6.I.89.

¹⁴⁹ Ms A 72r-v.

¹⁵⁰ CG I, 445; LT 80, 10.I.89.

¹⁵¹ Ms A 73r-v.

¹⁵² DE 253; CJ 11.VII.2.

December 24: With the lease up at Les Buissonnets, Céline writes to Thérèse: "Tomorrow Les Buissonnets will no longer be ours."¹⁵³

December 25: At Carmel, Thérèse plays the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in "The First Dream of the Child Jesus" with such piety and simplicity that the whole community was profoundly moved."¹⁵⁴

December 31: "Céline; if you wish, let us convert souls; this year, we must form many *priests* who love Jesus! and *handle* Him with the same tenderness with which Mary handled Him in His cradle."¹⁵⁵

1890

During the year Thérèse discovers the texts on the Suffering Servant in Isaiah¹⁵⁶ and reads the works of St. John of the Cross ("I had no other spiritual nourishment.")¹⁵⁷ and P. Surin's *Les Fondements de la vie spiritual*.

January: Thérèse's profession is delayed: "I found it difficult to accept this sacrifice but soon light shone in my soul . . . to make Profession . . . was mixed with self-love."¹⁵⁸

May 10: Thérèse writes to Céline on the Blessed Virgin: "And the Blessed Virgin! Ah, Céline, hide yourself well in the shadow of her virginal mantle in order that she may virginize you."¹⁵⁹

August 28-September 8: Thérèse's retreat for Profession ". . . was [a time] of great aridity . . . I had the happiness of receiving the Sovereign Pontiff's blessing (2.VII.90) . . . while making the Way of the Cross (7.VII.90) . . . I thought I didn't have a vocation . . . the Mistress reassured me . . . Mother Prioress . . . simply laughed."¹⁶⁰

September 8: Thérèse makes Profession; at the end of the day she places her "crown at the Blessed Virgin's feet . . . It was the *little* Blessed Virgin, one day old, who was presenting her *little* flower to the *little* Jesus."¹⁶¹

September 24: On the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, Thérèse receives the veil: ". . . the day veiled in tears . . . Papa was not there . . . Father Pichon was in Canada . . . the Bishop did not come . . . he was sick . . . and still *peace*."¹⁶²

¹⁵³ CG I, 513; LC 121, 24.XII.89.

¹⁵⁴ CG I, 509, 516 n. d.

¹⁵⁵ CG 515; LT 101, 31.XII.89.

¹⁵⁶ CG I, 539-543; LT 108, 18.VII.90.

¹⁵⁷ Ms A 83r.

¹⁵⁸ Ms A 73v.

¹⁵⁹ CG, 529-530; LT 105, 10.V.90.

¹⁶⁰ Ms A 76r-v.

¹⁶¹ Ms A 77r.

¹⁶² Ms A 77v.

1891

Around February 10: Thérèse is named to aid the sacristan.¹⁶³

April-July: Thérèse offers prayers for the ex-Carmelite, Hyacinthe Loyson.¹⁶⁴

October 7-15: Father Alexis Prou (1844-1914), a Franciscan Recollect from Caen, Superior of the house of St. Lazaire, preaches a retreat at Lisieux Carmel. "He launched me full sail upon the waves of confidence and love which so strongly attracted me but upon which I dared not advance."¹⁶⁵

December 5: One of the foundresses of Carmel, Mother Geneviève, dies. Thérèse assists at a funeral for the first time. Thérèse recalls Mother Geneviève saying to her:

You ask for a spiritual bouquet . . . serve God with *peace* and *joy* . . . the following Sunday . . . none at all . . . my admiration was greater . . . that type of sanctity . . . the truest and most holy . . . no importance to dreams . . . yet . . . a very consoling dream . . . [Mother Geneviève] was making her last will and testament . . . 'To you I give my heart' . . . three times.¹⁶⁶

Mother Geneviève's death brings back memories of the death of Thérèse's mother.¹⁶⁷

December 28: "Carmel . . . has . . . influenza."¹⁶⁸ Thérèse becomes in charge of the sacristy and is able to receive communion everyday. "When I am preparing for Holy Communion, I picture my soul as a piece of land and I ask the Blessed Virgin to remove from it *any rubbish* that would prevent it from being *free* . . ."¹⁶⁹

1892

May 10: M. Martin returns to the family at Lisieux.

May 12: M. Martin visits Lisieux Carmel for the last time. "Papa . . . had only one word with which to express his thoughts 'in heaven.'"¹⁷⁰

October 19: Among other things, Thérèse reveals her thoughts on the Blessed Virgin to Céline ". . . 'But good Blessed Virgin, I find I am more blessed than you, for I have you for Mother, and you do not have a Blessed Virgin to love.'"¹⁷¹

¹⁶³ CG I, 616.

¹⁶⁴ CG I, 641, nn. e and f.

¹⁶⁵ Ms A 80r-v.

¹⁶⁶ Ms A 78r-79r.

¹⁶⁷ Ms A 12v.

¹⁶⁸ CG II, 657.

¹⁶⁹ Ms A 79r-80r.

¹⁷⁰ CG II, 673-674; LT 138, 17.XI.92.

¹⁷¹ CG II, 670-673; LT 137, 19.X.92; CJ 11.VII.4.

At the end of the year: “. . . it is especially the Gospels which sustain me during hours of prayer, for in them I find what is necessary for my poor little soul. I am constantly discovering in them new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings.”¹⁷²

1893

February 2: Thérèse composes her first poem, “*La Rosée Divine, ou Le Lait Virginal de Marie.*”¹⁷³

February 20: Mother Agnes of Jesus is elected prioress: “You are truly my mother¹⁷⁴ . . . since the blessed day of your election I have flown in love.”¹⁷⁵ Mother Gonzague is named Mistress of Novices; Thérèse is associated with her in the formation of her companions. Thérèse leaves the sacristy and takes up painting. “To the great astonishment of my sisters I was told to paint.”¹⁷⁶

April-May: Sr. Mary of the Angels takes the photograph of the whole community including Thérèse.¹⁷⁷

June: Thérèse paints a fresco in the Oratory. It has a dozen angels around the Tabernacle; one of them, sleeping, bears the name “Thérèse.”¹⁷⁸

June 24: Léonie enters the Visitation convent of Caen for a second time.¹⁷⁹

September: Thérèse could leave the novitiate but asks to remain there.¹⁸⁰ She continues with the job of painting and becomes second portress.

1894

January 2: Thérèse turns twenty-one and is allowed to fast.¹⁸¹

January 21: Thérèse writes and stars in her first pious recreation, “The Mission of Joan of Arc.”¹⁸²

Spring: Thérèse begins to suffer from her throat which is cauterized.¹⁸³

¹⁷² Ms A 83v.

¹⁷³ PN 1.

¹⁷⁴ CG II, 688-690; LT 140, 20.II.93.

¹⁷⁵ Ms A 80v.

¹⁷⁶ Ms A 81r.

¹⁷⁷ CG II, 1173.

¹⁷⁸ CG II, 865.

¹⁷⁹ CG II, 721-723; LT 148, 13.VII.93.

¹⁸⁰ CG II, 728, n. h.

¹⁸¹ CG II, 726.

¹⁸² RP 1; Pope Leo XIII declared Joan of Arc “venerable” on January 27, 1894.

¹⁸³ CG II, 1187.

February 20: Thérèse writes her second poem, “*A Notre Maîtresse et Mère chérie pour fêter ses soixante ans.*”¹⁸⁴

April-May: Thérèse writes her fifth poem, “*Mon Chant d’Aujourd’hui,*” which pleased its recipient, Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart, “very much.”¹⁸⁵

June 16: Sr. Marie of the Trinity enters the Lisieux Carmel and is entrusted to Thérèse. “[Sr. Marie of the Trinity] has not been brought up like us . . . her education is the cause of her ‘charming’ manners but in her heart she is good.”¹⁸⁶

July 29: “My dear little sisters, Papa [who died at Chateau de la Musse (Eure)] is in heaven.”¹⁸⁷ “God broke the bonds of his incomparable servant.”¹⁸⁸

August: Thérèse changes her cell.¹⁸⁹

September 14: “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 . . . the difficulties seemed insurmountable.”¹⁹⁰

End of December: Thérèse receives the order to write her childhood memories from Mother Agnes of Jesus, never dreaming at that time that the manuscript would leave the family circle.¹⁹¹ Thérèse begins to compose the pious recreation “Joan of Arc accomplishes her mission” for Mother Agnes’ feast day.¹⁹²

1895

January: Thérèse begins writing manuscript A, “Springtime Story of a little white flower, written by herself and dedicated to the Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus.”¹⁹³

It is to you, dear Mother, to you who are doubly my mother, that I come to confide my soul . . . Before taking up my pen, I knelt before the statue of Mary [Virgin of the Smile, which is in the present shrine of St. Thérèse in Lisieux Carmel. The Martin Family held it in special veneration; in January, 1895, it was in the room outside her cell.] (the one which has given so many proofs of the maternal preferences of heaven’s Queen for our family), and I begged her to guide my hand that it trace no line displeasing to her. Then opening the Holy Gospels . . .¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁴ PN 2.

¹⁸⁵ CG II, 779, n. a.

¹⁸⁶ CG II, 775; LT 167, 18.VII.94.

¹⁸⁷ CG II, 780-781.

¹⁸⁸ Ms A 82r.

¹⁸⁹ CG II, 1233.

¹⁹⁰ Ms A 82r-v.

¹⁹¹ CG II, 791.

¹⁹² RP 3.

¹⁹³ Ms A 2r.

¹⁹⁴ Ms A 2r.

January 21: Thérèse takes the role of Joan of Arc.¹⁹⁵ She escapes being nearly burnt in a circle of fire.¹⁹⁶ Afterwards, five photographs are taken.¹⁹⁷

February 5: Céline receives the Habit as Sr. Geneviève.¹⁹⁸

February 26: Thérèse spontaneously composes her poem "*Vivre d'Amour.*"¹⁹⁹

April: Thérèse confides in Sr. Thérèse of St. Augustine: "I will die soon."²⁰⁰
 "... the little white flower . . . only its stem has broken close to the roots . . .
 God . . . will soon break the bonds of His little flower."²⁰¹

June 9: "This year, June 9, the Feast of the Holy Trinity, I received the grace to understand more than ever before how much Jesus desires to be loved . . . oh my Jesus, let me be this happy victim; consume your holocaust with the fire of Divine Love."²⁰² ". . . Finally, I offer to 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."²⁰³

June 11: Thérèse makes this "Act of Oblation to Merciful Love" with Sr. Geneviève.²⁰⁴

June 14: When beginning the Stations of the Cross, Thérèse has an intense experience of the love of God, ". . . I was burning with love."²⁰⁵

July 20: Leonie leaves the Visitation convent.²⁰⁶

August 15: Thérèse's cousin, Marie Guérin, enters the Lisieux Carmel as Sr. Marie de l'Eucharistie.²⁰⁷

October 17: Mother Agnes designates Thérèse as the spiritual sister to Fr. Belliere, a seminarian and future missionary. ". . . it would be impossible to express my happiness."²⁰⁸

¹⁹⁵ RP 3.

¹⁹⁶ PA 1003.

¹⁹⁷ VTL 11-15.

¹⁹⁸ CG II, 802; LT 174, *fin janvier* 95.

¹⁹⁹ PN 17.

²⁰⁰ PO 1945; CG II, 801.

²⁰¹ Ms A 50v.

²⁰² Ms A 84r.

²⁰³ Act of Oblation to Merciful Love.

²⁰⁴ CG II, 808.

²⁰⁵ CJ 7.VII.2.

²⁰⁶ CG II, 790.

²⁰⁷ CG II, 790.

²⁰⁸ CG II, 821; Ms C 31v.

January 20: Thérèse brings to Mother Agnes her copybook of memories (Manuscript A): “. . . the little flower . . . never ceases blessing the dear Mother who offered her to Jesus.”²⁰⁹

January: Thérèse presents her “Flight into Egypt.”²¹⁰

February 24: Sr. Geneviève makes profession. “All is *to us*. All is *for us*, for in Jesus we have all.”²¹¹

March 17: Sr. Geneviève receives the veil; Marie Guérin (i.e., Sr. Marie of the Eucharist) receives the Habit.²¹²

March 21: After the difficult election, the Prioress, Mother Marie de Gonzague, confirms Thérèse in her role as auxiliary mistress in the novitiate as well as her duties in the sacristy, laundry, and of painting. “. . . on that day, Mother [Gonzague] you sowed in tears.”²¹³

April 2-3: From Holy Thursday night to Good Friday, Thérèse experiences her first hemoptysis.

April 3: Thérèse experiences her second hemoptysis. “. . . It was like a sweet and distant murmur which announced the Bridegroom’s arrival.”²¹⁴

April 5: On Easter Sunday or shortly thereafter, Thérèse enters into the Night of Faith, a trial which will last until her death. “. . . One would have to travel through this dark tunnel to understand its darkness.”²¹⁵

May 10: Thérèse dreams [“. . . on May 10, the second Sunday of Mary’s month, and perhaps the anniversary of the day when the Blessed Virgin deigned to smile upon her little flower . . .”] of Venerable Anne of Jesus who says to her, “God asks no other thing from you. He is very content, very content.”²¹⁶

May 30: Mother Marie de Gonzague confides a second spiritual brother to Thérèse, Father Roulland, M.E.P.²¹⁷ This association revived in her a hidden vocation of priest and missionary.²¹⁸

²⁰⁹ Ms A 84v.

²¹⁰ RP 6.

²¹¹ CG II, 827-824.

²¹² CG II, 840.

²¹³ Ms C 1r.

²¹⁴ Ms C 5r.

²¹⁵ Ms C 5v.

²¹⁶ Ms B 2v.

²¹⁷ Ms C 33r.

²¹⁸ Ms B 2v.

June 21: For the feast of Mother Marie de Gonzague, Thérèse composed "The Triumph of Humility,"²¹⁹ after the published memoirs of Diana Vaughn, ex-priestess of Lucifer.

July 3: Fr. Roulland celebrates his First Mass at the Lisieux Carmel and interviews Thérèse.

July 16: Thérèse writes "*A Notre-Dame des Victoires*"²²⁰ as Fr. Roulland embarks on his mission to Su-tchen, in order to fan into flame his apostolic desires.²²¹

August 2: Fr. Roulland leaves for China; Thérèse asks Mother Agnes about Saigon.²²²

August 15: Thérèse writes "*Jésus Seul.*"²²³

July-August: Thérèse experiences a martyrdom of desires; she reads Isaiah and Paul and asks for "double love"²²⁴ Thérèse speaks to Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart about this subject.²²⁵

September 8-17: Thérèse makes a private retreat.

September 8: Thérèse writes Manuscript B, part two, addressed to Jesus. She commemorated in solitude the sixth anniversary of her profession which had made her "a Carmelite, a Spouse and a Mother."²²⁶

September 13-16: Thérèse writes a dedication to Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart, Manuscript B, part one. Thérèse used her free time to explain in writing her "little doctrine," the pages culminate in the discovery of her personal vocation: ". . . in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be *Love.*"²²⁷

September 17: Thérèse confirms and complements her doctrine in a letter to Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart.²²⁸

October 8-15: To the preacher of the community's Retreat, Fr. Godefroid Madeleine, Thérèse confided her temptations against the faith. On his advice, she carried the Credo permanently on her heart: she had chosen to write it out in her own blood.²²⁹

November 21: Thérèse reads the life of Theophane Venard and some of his letters. Thérèse copies in her scripture notebook some four pages of extracts from the

²¹⁹ RP 7.

²²⁰ PN 35.

²²¹ CG II, 873.

²²² Ms C 9v.

²²³ PN 36.

²²⁴ CG II, 849,882.

²²⁵ Ms B 3r.

²²⁶ Ms B 2v.

²²⁷ Ms B 3v.

²²⁸ CG II, 894-897; LT 17.IX.96.

²²⁹ CG II, 883.

martyr's letters and the hymn of Fr. Chauvin in his honor on two pages. She borrowed from these sayings for her own farewell to her own sisters. This young priest was to be numbered among the great friends of Thérèse when she was sick and dying.²³⁰

December 24: Thérèse writes to Céline in the name of the Blessed Virgin, with the envelope addressed: "Message from the Blessed Virgin to my dear Child without a home in a foreign land."²³¹

1897

This year Thérèse begins to understand "fraternal charity."²³²

March 4-12, 19: Thérèse made a personal novena to St. Francis Xavier in order to obtain "passing her heaven doing good on earth." She asked the same favor from St. Joseph.²³³

April (toward the end of Lent): Thérèse falls gravely ill.²³⁴

April 6: Mother Agnes of Jesus begins to record Thérèse's last conversations.²³⁵

May: Thérèse is discharged of all her tasks and choir duty; she writes her Marian testament, "*Pourquoi je l'aime, o Marie.*"

May 3: For the first time Thérèse uses the image of "Jesus . . . the elevator lifting me without fatigue to the infinite regions of love."²³⁶

June 3: Mother Agnes asks Mother Marie Gonzague to order Thérèse to finish her Autobiography. Thérèse writes Manuscript C.

June 9: Thérèse expresses her "night of nothingness"²³⁷ and her unshakable faith: ". . . I enter into Life . . ."²³⁸

July 8: Thérèse is brought down to the infirmary. The miraculous statue of the Virgin of the Smile is placed in the infirmary.²³⁹ She has hemoptyses until August 5.²⁴⁰

²³⁰ CG II, 965, n. f.

²³¹ CG II, 931.

²³² Ms C 28r; DE 393.

²³³ CG II, 966.

²³⁴ CG II, 968.

²³⁵ CG II, 969.

²³⁶ CG II, 988; LT 229, 23.V.97; Ms C 3r.

²³⁷ Ms C 6v.

²³⁸ CG II, 1014-1015; LT 9.VI.97.

²³⁹ DE 455, 6.7.5, n. a.

²⁴⁰ CG II, 970.

July 16: Thérèse expresses to Sr. Martha her desire “to remain a little child.”²⁴¹

July 17: “Saturday, 2 a.m., she had coughed up blood . . . I feel that my mission is about to begin, my mission to make the Good God loved as I love Him.”²⁴²

August 15-27: Thérèse endures great suffering and is tempted to suicide.²⁴³

September 8: Thérèse writes her last autograph: “O Mary, if I were the Queen of Heaven and you were little Thérèse, I would want to be Thérèse so that you could be the Queen of Heaven.”²⁴⁴

September 30: After an agony of two days, toward 7:30 p.m., Thérèse dies.²⁴⁵

October 4: Thérèse is buried.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ CG II, 660, n. c; 694, n. c; 811-814, 828-835; RP 1; Ms C 3r.

²⁴² DE, 269.

²⁴³ CG II, n. s.

²⁴⁴ ACL.

²⁴⁵ CG II, 1237.

²⁴⁶ CG II, 1237.

CHAPTER TWO

What Did St. Thérèse Receive in Regard to the Blessed Virgin Mary?

PART I

Introduction

Chapter two concerns itself with what Thérèse received in regard to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The first half treats, among other things, her Christmas conversion, the Marian apparition and her relationship with her parents. Chronologically, her mother died on August 27, 1877; Mary appeared to Thérèse on May 13, 1883; her Christmas conversion occurred that midnight, 1886; she understood the meaning of the Marian apparition on 4 November 1887. By pairing parent and event, that is—1) Thérèse's relationship with her father and her Christmas conversion, 2) her relationship with her mother and the Smile of the Virgin—I hope to illuminate from those sources the emerging role of Mary in the life of Thérèse. The second half of chapter two concentrates on her external formation, at first in a general way and then on its specific Marian characteristics.

Childhood: Overcoming Self love.

Thérèse's contemporary, Charles Péguy (1873-1914), was speaking about her, too, when he said that a human destiny is rooted in a soil, an epoch, a family, and is dependent upon an heredity and a history.²⁴⁷ Thérèse did not descend from heaven like an angel, but was born on Norman soil, dependent on her ancestors and her country. Like everyone else, she is a product of her education and environment. Thérèse began her life among the middle class of late-nineteenth-century France. Her father was a clock maker and jeweler; her mother a lace-maker. Both were considered fanatics in their day for being so strictly observant in their religious practices. After both having considered religious life, they abandoned the idea. They met; they married; they lived together at first as brother and sister until Zélie per-

²⁴⁷ St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face, *Story of a Soul*, trans. John Clarke, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Publications, 1975), 1 (hereafter A).

suaded Louis' confessor to change his mind.²⁴⁸ The last of nine children was *Marie Françoise Thérèse Martin*, born 2 January 1873, baptized 4 January, and sent out to be nursed by Rose Taille until 2 April 1874, because her own mother had breast cancer, from which she was to die 28 August 1877. Nonetheless, good parents, a good home and a good education do not mean that one will imbibe the faith lived there. It could always remain exterior, enigmatic, and extraneous. Within this environment, Thérèse learned how to overcome her self-love and to clarify some confused ideas about God, a God whom she may have confused with her own father and others who showed her the way to Him.

As an infant, held tightly in her mother's arms, Thérèse feared nothing, convinced that through her saintly mother, God would look favorably on her, too.²⁴⁹ Thérèse quoted from letters such as these in order to explain her early life. There was an idea in her little head that if she owned up to something, she would be the more readily forgiven.²⁵⁰ Once, her father demanded a kiss from his "little Queen," but Thérèse refused him. Her eldest sister, Marie, scolded her, and Thérèse cried until she was reconciled with her father. "I could not stand the thought of having offended my beloved parents. Acknowledging my faults was the work of an instant." Yet such a need to be forgiven, such a desire to be reconciled may not be the result of faith born of religious love,²⁵¹ but rather it may be polishing the idol of self, rubbed with the pride of self-perfection.

Without appearing to do so, she paid close attention to what was said and done around her.²⁵² She looked up to her parents and sisters, but it was Céline, her nearest sister, who was her soul-friend and was to remain as such throughout her life, even though as children they argued during their games of blocks. But Thérèse goes deeper than her mother's letters and the superficial memories of childhood games when she comments: "There was another fault I had when wide-awake, which Mamma doesn't mention in her letters, and this was an excessive self-love."²⁵³ She would not kiss the ground for a sou and wanted her arms bare because it would be prettier: pride and vanity lodged within her. Yet, this excessive self-love was mingled with the love of good, as she was called out of darkness into marvelous light. As soon as she began to think seriously, which she did when she was very little, "it was enough for one to say a thing wasn't good and I had no desire to repeat it twice."²⁵⁴

²⁴⁸ B. Ulanov, *The Making of a Modern Saint* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 13-22.

²⁴⁹ Ms A 5v, quoting from Zélie Martin's letter to her daughter, Pauline.

²⁵⁰ Ms A 5v.

²⁵¹ Bernard Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 115 (hereafter Lonergan).

²⁵² Ms A 4v.

²⁵³ Ms A 8r.

²⁵⁴ Ms A 8v.

An incident that sums up her "whole life" was the choice she made of Leonie's toys; Leonie, thinking she was too old to play with dolls, came up to Céline and Thérèse and offered them her collection: "Here, choose." Céline had a look and took a ball of braid. Thérèse considered for a moment; then exclaiming: "I choose all!" snatched the basket and doll and everything.²⁵⁵ This story grasps the very human inner weakness of Thérèse's nature. In seizing the basket, she displayed a rapacity, an egoism, a spirit of conquest, in a word, an imperialism of quite remarkable energy that would one day have to be given an entirely new direction.²⁵⁶ A limitless will to power was written all over her.²⁵⁷ She would have to saddle it like a bronco or a mustang.

Her Father: Distinguishing Papa from "Papa-God"

But the happiness of childhood ended with her mother's death.²⁵⁸ Now, her father became her support, his heart filled with a maternal love after his wife's death. Thérèse walked with her father on his visits to the Blessed Sacrament; he drank her potions of seed and bark and admired her altars built in the garden: "How can I express the tenderness with which Papa showered his Queen."²⁵⁹ Going fishing with her father, she would leave his company and be engaged in real prayer.²⁶⁰ The prayerful attitude of the father passed into the daughter. Yet, at the Sunday sermon, she looked at her father more frequently than at the preacher, "for his handsome face said so much to me."²⁶¹ At the end of the Lord's day, the Martin family gathered for Compline. "The little Queen was alone near her king, having only to look at him to see how the saints pray."²⁶²

I cannot say how much I loved Papa; everything in him caused me to admire him. In the bottom of my heart I was happy that it was only myself who knew Papa well, for if he became the king of France and Navarre, I knew he wouldn't be happy because this is the lot of monarchs; but above all he would no longer be my king alone.²⁶³

²⁵⁵ Ms A 10r/10v.

²⁵⁶ Henri Ghéon, *The Secret of the Little Flower* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1934), 41 (hereafter Ghéon).

²⁵⁷ Ghéon, 41.

²⁵⁸ Ms A 12v.

²⁵⁹ Ms A 14v.

²⁶⁰ Ms A 14v.

²⁶¹ Ms A 17v.

²⁶² Ms A 18r.

²⁶³ Ms A 21r/21v.

Such happiness was disturbed by a prophetic vision of the future sufferings of a mental collapse her father was to endure.²⁶⁴ This vision helped her to make the distinction between Papa and "Papa God." For Thérèse idolized her Father. Indeed, her own father helped her to realize the goodness of her Father in heaven, but still she needed to make the distinction between them.

Her five years (1881-1886) as a day boarder at the Benedictine Abbey were very unhappy. Well prepared by Pauline, she outranked the other girls her age. Placed with older girls, she suffered when one of them became jealous and persecuted her, making her pay in a thousand ways for her little successes.²⁶⁵ She did not know how to play at other children's games. Rather, her joy was the intermittent joys of home. For example, when Céline began to prepare for First Communion, Thérèse joined her in reforming her life and making amends. Her deepest sorrows were again from home, especially when Pauline left for Carmel.²⁶⁶ During this time a strange sickness came over her and her father thought his little girl was going crazy because she suffered from hallucinations: her father's hat, for example, was transformed into an indescribably dreadful shape: she showed such great fear at the sight of it, that her Father left the room sobbing. On May 13, 1883, she was cured through the ravishing smile of Our Lady.²⁶⁷ Not only was her body tried but her soul as well, for after the cure she became sick with scruples.²⁶⁸ She would confide the burden of such a tyranny to Marie, her eldest sister, feel peace for a moment but once again they would return.²⁶⁹ But Marie, too, left for Carmel and Thérèse's soul felt keenly the separation.²⁷⁰

Her aunt tried to console her by taking her to the sea-side, where the pleasurable impression of compliments on her looks showed her how much she was filled with self-love.²⁷¹ She also tried to imitate her cousin who was cuddled when she complained of headaches. Thérèse did the same but was not pampered like a child but rather chided as an adult, for headaches were considered the result of a guilty conscience.²⁷² No longer able to confide in Marie about her scruples, Thérèse turned toward heaven, to her two brothers and two sisters, who died in infancy. She held dialogues with them about the sadness of her exile and of her desire for the Father-

²⁶⁴ Ms A 19v/20r.

²⁶⁵ MS A 22v.

²⁶⁶ MS A 25v.

²⁶⁷ MS A 27r-31r.

²⁶⁸ Ms A 39r.

²⁶⁹ Ms A 41v.

²⁷⁰ Ms A 41r.

²⁷¹ Ms A 42r.

²⁷² Ms A 42v.

land.²⁷³ Thérèse tried to do things around the house, but she was unaccustomed to housework. She tried to do these things for God alone, but cried if no one thanked her. "I really was unbearable because of my extreme touchiness."²⁷⁴

The Grace of the Christmas Conversion

It was on December 25, 1886, that she received the grace of leaving her childhood or, as she says, "the grace of my complete conversion."²⁷⁵ Thérèse was to leave behind the idol of self-perfection and her confused ideas about God. He worked a miracle to make her grow up in an instant. On that night she began the third period of her life, "the most beautiful and the most filled with graces from heaven."²⁷⁶ Thérèse could not achieve her own salvation. The work that she had not been able to do in ten years was done by Jesus in an instant, contenting himself with good will, which was never lacking on her part.²⁷⁷ Thérèse simply describes her conversion as charity entering her soul, the need to forget self and to please others.²⁷⁸ The source of her tears dried up. It was for Thérèse an experience of the "mystery of love and awe, remaining within the subjectivity as a vector, an undertow, a fateful call to a dreaded holiness."²⁷⁹

Yet in her own way she tried to objectify it, and the language with which she describes it is important: "Jesus, who reveals the delight of the Trinity, the gentle little child, subject to weakness and suffering for love of me" ["See that Babe in the lowly manger, he's gonna take all my sins away"]—"made me strong and courageous, . . . walking from victory to victory . . . running as a giant . . . never defeated in combat."²⁸⁰ She knew she was loved in heaven by her dead brothers and sisters, because of this peace which flooded her soul, a peace she attributed to their intercession.²⁸¹

But "that charity which flooded her soul" is the utmost in self-transcendence, and man's self-transcendence is ever precarious.²⁸² There now accrued to Thérèse "the power of love to enable [her] to accept suffering involved in undoing the ef-

²⁷³ Ms A 44r.

²⁷⁴ Ms A 44v.

²⁷⁵ Ms A 45r.

²⁷⁶ Ms A 45v.

²⁷⁷ Ms A 45v.

²⁷⁸ Ms A 45v.

²⁷⁹ Lonergan, 133.

²⁸⁰ Ms A 44v/45r

²⁸¹ Ms A 44r.

²⁸² Lonergan, 110.

fects of decline.”²⁸³ Thérèse’s religious conversion transformed her into a “subject held, grasped, possessed, owned through a total and so other-worldly love.”²⁸⁴

The incident Thérèse related immediately after the grace of her Christmas conversion bears out that she both began to conquer her self-love and to clarify her ideas on God as distinct from her own father. As usual, she had put out her shoes in the hearth, as Céline wanted to continue her custom and to treat Thérèse like a baby. Her father always enjoyed this happiness for Thérèse, but as she went upstairs that night she heard her father say as he looked at the shoes “with words that pierced me to the heart: ‘Well, fortunately this will be the last year.’” Tears came to her eyes; Céline cautioned her not to go downstairs, but “Jesus had changed her heart.” Fighting back her tears, she took the slippers in front of Papa, and, with the appearance of a little Queen, made her old king laugh. Céline could not believe her eyes. “Fortunately, it was a sweet reality. Thérèse had discovered once again the strength of soul that she had lost at the age of four-and-a-half and she was to preserve it forever.”²⁸⁵ She had learned from that Child in the manger that all her troubles arose from self-sufficiency and self-esteem, from a vainglorious concern about her own reactions and the inordinate value she put on herself.²⁸⁶

Soon after her Christmas conversion, on a Sunday, a picture of Our Lord on the Cross slipped out of her missal. She was resolved to remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross, bedewed with his blood.²⁸⁷ Her faith was no longer exterior, enigmatic, extraneous, but interior; she confessed: “Truly this is the Son of God” (Mk 15:38) in her heart.

This conversion made her experience a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners, a desire she had not felt so intensely before. He made her a fisher of souls. Her “first child” was Pranzini, a barefaced and bestial ruffian, sentenced to death. There was not a single redeeming feature about him. Thérèse did not want him to die impenitent, so she redoubled her prayers and her efforts at mortification, in order to obtain his conversion. She told Céline, and both of them joined in prayer and waited for a sign. The sign was not long in coming. She read in *La Croix* the sign she hoped for: he seized the crucifix the priest was holding out to him and kissed the wounds three times.²⁸⁸ She was overjoyed at the sight of divine mercy toward sinners.

²⁸³ Lonergan, 242.

²⁸⁴ Lonergan, 242.

²⁸⁵ Ms A 45r.

²⁸⁶ Ghéon, 99.

²⁸⁷ Ms A 45v.

²⁸⁸ Ms A 46r.

Likewise, in an important parable of the foreseeing love of the Father, described below, Thérèse delicately nuanced her own conversion and how, in one sense, she kissed the wounds of the Crucified that Christmas night. A child, the son of a doctor, having tripped over a stone and having broken his leg, would be more than thankful for the healing acts of his father; but if that same father knew beforehand that his son would trip over that stone and, by his foreknowledge, removed that stone, would not the son, learning of this action, be even more grateful for the loving attention of his father?²⁸⁹ In the same way, Thérèse saw herself, even with the obstacles to grace removed from her path in advance by her heavenly Father, as a sinner who had been forgiven not much, but all. Thus, she could love God more than a Magdalene. After the grace of her Christmas conversion, Thérèse felt she had become a new creation: "When I think of the past, my soul overflows with gratitude when I see the favors received from heaven. They have made such a change in me that I don't recognize myself."²⁹⁰ She adds, "at the beginning of my spiritual life when I was thirteen or fourteen . . . I asked myself what would I have to strive for later on because I believed it was quite impossible for me to understand perfection better."²⁹¹

However, she was to understand perfection better, smelted in the crucible of suffering. In a picture of her taken in 1897, Thérèse is holding against her breast images of the Holy Face and the Child Jesus; she smiles reservedly, gently, serenely, casting a thin veil over the face of one who is strong, tough and obstinate, imperative and victorious, who knows what she wants, who will want it until death, and will not yield an inch from having her own way.²⁹² Yet holiness can be grafted on to pride, just as grace is grafted on to nature; the last end of holiness is not so much renunciation of the human personality as the possession of God.²⁹³ In the end, her spirit clarified by instruction, by prayer and the Holy Spirit, she willed holiness wholeheartedly; but before it opened its gates, Heaven was to crush her with all the weight of love.²⁹⁴

The grace of this Christmas conversion at Midnight Mass, 1886, it seems, enabled Thérèse to understand the apparition of the Smiling Virgin on May 13, 1883, and at the Church of Notre-Dame des Victoires, Paris, when she was there with her father and sister on November 4, 1887. However, before this apparition and its sub-

²⁸⁹ Ms A 38v/39r.

²⁹⁰ Ms A 43r.

²⁹¹ Ms A 74r

²⁹² Ghéon, 42.

²⁹³ Ghéon, 62.

²⁹⁴ Ghéon, 63.

sequent understanding can be explored, it is necessary to turn to Thérèse's relationship to her natural and "adopted" mothers.

The Two Mothers of Thérèse: Madame Martin and Pauline

Madame Martin (née, Zélie Guérin) played a significant, albeit brief, role in Thérèse's Marian formation. Although it is not the focus of this present paper to offer a psychological interpretation of Thérèse's life, nevertheless, since salvation engages the whole person, and since one is influenced greatly by such primary significant others as parents, the impact of these analogues cannot be ignored. They influence conceptions and preconceptions about God and the things of God, as the following story illustrates.

A retreatant had been in psychotherapy for wounds of abuse received as a child. She wrote to a retreat director: I had become so turned off to the concept of mothers that I consciously rejected the love of Mary, Jesus' mother. After your talk about personal conversion, I went outside—feeling deeply alone. I prayed for some kind of conversion. I wanted to cry, but haven't for months.

You may have noticed the small round building near the cemetery. Curiosity is one of my strongest traits. So I walked to it and opened the door.

When I looked inside, I was filled with fear. There stood a large statue of Mary. My first impulse was to run away in anger. But something drew me slowly to the kneeler at her feet. Then I fell to my knees, weeping into the folds of her robes.

When it was over, I felt cleansed and new. I felt willing to be a trusting child. Even more important, I felt that a mother's love had touched me, leaving in me a true desire to forgive my natural mother.²⁹⁵

This story contrasts sharply with Thérèse's own "incomparable mother"²⁹⁶; yet, its inclusion suggests that maternal analogues influence preconceptions and conceptions about Mary. The relationship of Thérèse to her mother is examined below.

In four short years, Mme. Martin awakened within the heart of her last child, love, particularly to love to pray to the Blessed Virgin. *Correspondance familiale*²⁹⁷ reveals the heart of Mme. Martin, which she pours out to her brother, her sister-in-law, and her sister, a Visitandine. To them, she first announced the coming birth of Thérèse.²⁹⁸ To them, she reveals just a few months before her death that her only happiness is her children, her anxious concern, their salvation.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ Mark Link, S.J., *Decision* (Valencia, CA: Tabor Publications, 1988), 26.

²⁹⁶ Ms A 4v.

²⁹⁷ VT 83:3, 63; *Correspondance familiale de Zélie Martin* (fragments), 1863-1877 (Office Central de Lisieux, 1958) (hereafter CF).

²⁹⁸ CF 83: 15.XII.72.

²⁹⁹ CF 192: 4.III.77.

Madame Martin tells her family how Thérèse sticks close to her even if it is constricting.³⁰⁰ But what is particularly revealing is Thérèse's question.

Little Thérèse asked me the other day if she will go to Heaven. I told her yes, if she were well-behaved; she answers me: "Yes, but if I was not little, I would go to hell . . . but I know what I'll do; I'll go with you when you go to Heaven. How will the good God take me? You will hold me tightly in your arms." I saw in her eyes that she positively believed that the good God could do nothing if she were in the arms of her mother.³⁰¹

Such an embrace full of confidence and security will sustain Thérèse as the image of her heavenly mother emerges.

Within the maternal embrace Thérèse's heart expanded to love both disinterestedly and forgivingly. Her disinterest is unusual:

Baby is a little imp; she'll kiss me and at the same time wish me to die. "O how I wish you would die, dear little mother!" When I scold her she answers: "It is because I want you to go to heaven, and you say we must die to get there!" She wishes the same for her Father in her outbursts of affection for him.³⁰²

Yet her desire to be forgiven is profound. Her mother went to kiss her one morning but she did not respond, pretending to sleep. Finally, Thérèse covered herself with a blanket, and said with the tone of a spoiled child, "I don't want anybody to see me." It didn't take long for Thérèse to seek forgiveness for such cheekiness. "Her face was bathed in tears and throwing herself at my knees she said: 'Mamma, I was naughty; forgive me!' Pardon was quickly granted. I took my angel in my arms pressed her to my heart, and covered her with kisses."³⁰³ Once again, Mme. Martin's embrace holds in harmony word and deed, forgiveness and love, salvation desired and accomplished.

Little by little, Mme. Martin taught Thérèse to pray by showing her the crucifix, a statue of the Blessed Virgin, and explaining their meaning in words a child could understand.³⁰⁴ Moreover, Mme. Martin's own devotion toward the Blessed Virgin was great, and poured itself into the heart of her little Thérèse.

The statue of Our Lady of the Smile, given to Louis Martin, Thérèse's father, by the same charitable woman who set him up in his watchmaking business,³⁰⁵ became the center of spiritual life in their home.³⁰⁶ When Marie, the oldest, wanted to replace the large statue (35" high) with one of better proportions, her mother

³⁰⁰ CF 119: 25.VI.74.

³⁰¹ CF 170: 29.X.76.

³⁰² CF 172: 8.XI.76.

³⁰³ CF 188: 13.II.77.

³⁰⁴ CF 124: 8.XI.74.

³⁰⁵ Piat, *Family*, 31.

³⁰⁶ Piat, *Family*, 149.

protested. "When I am gone you can do as you wish, but while I'm here the Virgin doesn't leave her place."³⁰⁷

Yet it was Marie who had charge of decorating the May altar with flowers and candles for a mother who was more difficult to please than the Blessed Virgin herself.³⁰⁸ Even the ceremonies at Notre Dame did not please Mme. Martin! The chants are impossible, "cooings" difficult to understand, more like an irritating café-concert.³⁰⁹ Meanwhile, Thérèse participated in the home May devotions with great joy, placing bouquets of flowers at the foot of the statue.³¹⁰

Mme. Martin's contagious devotion to Mary went beyond her home. In 1864 she wrote her brother asking him to light a candle for her at Notre Dame des Victoires. Little did he know that his sister, "who had good reason to trust in Our Lady," was asking by this candle and his daily "*Ave Maria*" for his own conversion.³¹¹ Eventually, after marriage and setting up his own pharmacy, he became editor of a local newspaper and a champion of the Catholic cause, inspired and encouraged by devotion to Our Lady of Victories.³¹² She returned the favor by lighting a candle for him and his wife at Lourdes.³¹³

Mme. Martin entrusted all of her nine children to the Virgin; all of them had the first name of "Marie."³¹⁴ She prayed that they all became saints³¹⁵ and was especially concerned about Léonie, whom she commended to the Virgin through the prayers of her dying Visitandine sister. Soon after that sister's death a miraculous change came over Leonie.³¹⁶ Another girl, Marie Helene, died at five and a half. The mother was distraught that her child might be in purgatory. She had recourse to the family statue of the Virgin of the Smile and asked for some sign of her little girl's salvation. She thought she heard a voice distinctly say: "she is beside me in heaven."³¹⁷

Toward the end of her life, Mme. Martin made a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Although her cancer³¹⁸ was not cured, her faith was strengthened. Marie often found

³⁰⁷ Piat, *Family*, 149.

³⁰⁸ CG I, 100: 9.V.77.

³⁰⁹ CF 159: 14.V.76.

³¹⁰ CG I, 100: 9.V.77; PA 267; PA 154.

³¹¹ CF 6: 11.III.64; CF 16: 3.XII.65.

³¹² Piat, *Family*, 60.

³¹³ CF 209: 24.VI.77.

³¹⁴ MLF, 8; Guy Gaucher, *The Story of a Life: St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Sr. Anne Marie Brennan, O.C.D. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 227.

³¹⁵ Piat, *Family*, 43.

³¹⁶ Piat, *Family*, 72.

³¹⁷ Cf. A, 64, n. 57 of M. Agnes.

³¹⁸ A, 28, n. 24.

her on her knees, pale and bent in pain before the family statue, praying the rosary.³¹⁹ In her letters to her brother she entrusts her sufferings to the Virgin.³²⁰

For the last two days I have washed with Lourdes water, while the pain has been very severe, especially under the arm . . . what can be done? If the Blessed Virgin does not cure me, it is because my time is up, and Our Lord wants me to rest elsewhere than on earth.³²¹

On August 28th, she calmly died amid the sobs of her husband and the tears of her children.

Thus, within the first years of her life before her mother's death, Thérèse absorbed a childlike, simple trust like that of her own mother in the Mother of God. The same sentiments passed from the heart of the mother to the heart of her child. It seemed that Thérèse was incapable of disassociating her *Maman* from the *Maman* of the Little Jesus. It seems that the love of Thérèse confused them, and identified them incorrectly.

Her mother noted early that baby Thérèse had a tender heart³²² and her death devastated the heart of Thérèse. She takes three pages in manuscript A to describe these events, "the winter of trial" for a "springtime flower."³²³ All the details are present to her: Mme. Leriche did not remain to pray with them in the morning of her mother's death as was the custom; the beautiful apricot offered to Mme. Martin but not eaten because she could no longer eat the fruits of the earth, but awaited a draft of that mysterious wine.³²⁴

Thérèse remembered both the ceremony of Extreme Unction, which had been imprinted on her soul, and the sobs of her father.³²⁵ She felt exiled. Accustomed to live with her mother, she was now faced with her death. She assisted at her death-bed neither crying much nor speaking but wondering to whom she would confide her heart, her life. With the help of her father, she kissed her mother for the last time on the day of her death. She distinctly remembered her mother's coffin standing in the hall and, seeing the coffin of Mother Geneviève, one of the foundresses of the Carmel of Lisieux, fifteen years later, caused the memories of her mother's death to come flooding back.³²⁶ But the difference between her mother's obsequies and those of M. Geneviève was not an intense unspeakable grief, but a joy that

³¹⁹ Piat, *Family*, 252-253.

³²⁰ CF 212: 8.VII.77; CF 215: 24.VII.77.

³²¹ CF 217: 24.VII.77.

³²² CF 172: 8.XI.76.

³²³ Ms A 12r.

³²⁴ Ms A 12v.

³²⁵ Ms A 12v.

³²⁶ Cf. Ms A 12v.

longs for heaven. She claimed her trial was over. What happened? How was this crushing blow softened? How was this deep wound healed? Thérèse takes up one quarter of her autobiography to explain.

Pauline

It largely fell to her second mother, Pauline, to comfort and guide her. Pauline became her second mother the day after the funeral. Their maid, Louise, commented that the two little girls, Céline and Thérèse, no longer had a mother.³²⁷ Céline chose her eldest sister, Marie. In a break from her usual habit, Thérèse on this occasion did not imitate Céline but chose her sister Pauline.³²⁸ Years later, Thérèse told Céline that she did not want Pauline to suffer the pain of being without a little girl.³²⁹ Thérèse intuited that her first mother could never be replaced. Yet, Pauline was her ideal and to her she confided all her secrets, and from her she received light to illumine her doubts.³³⁰ Pauline cherished Thérèse yet did not spoil her. On her part, Thérèse would do nothing without Pauline's consent.³³¹ Thérèse felt, by a luminous experience of the tender care of Pauline, what a mother is. In a similar fashion, Thérèse loved the Virgin Mary, the *maman* of the Infant Jesus. Yet once again, Thérèse would learn the difference between the mothering of Pauline and that of the Mother of Jesus.

The Smile of the Virgin

With the death of her mother, Thérèse entered "the second phase of my existence, the most sorrowful of the three."³³² This second phase began when she was four and a half, 28 August 1877, the day her mother died, and lasted until she was nearly fourteen, 25 December 1886, the date of her Christmas conversion (discussed earlier). Inclusive dates are the departure of Pauline for Carmel, 2 October 1882, and the "strange sickness"³³³ that overtook her from that date until the smile of the Virgin on Pentecost, 13 May 1883. The above-mentioned events give the context for the last one mentioned: the smile of the Virgin.

³²⁷ Ms A 12v.

³²⁸ Ms A 13r.

³²⁹ VT 23, 1983, 173.

³³⁰ Ms A 18v.

³³¹ Ms A 19v.

³³² Ms A 13r.

³³³ Ms A 28v.

With the death of Mme. Martin, Thérèse's temperament completely changed. No longer the happy child trailing her mother,³³⁴ she was given over to touchiness,³³⁵ excessive tears,³³⁶ crying for having cried.³³⁷ The shock of her mother's death necessarily affected her relationship to Mary. "The spontaneous identification she made in her heart between her maman and the Blessed Virgin is undermined in a muted fashion."³³⁸ Thérèse was deprived of her mother who taught her to love the Blessed Virgin. The foundations were shaken; nevertheless, Thérèse persevered in her filial affection toward the Blessed Virgin.

Her father, her godmother and sister, Marie, and her second mother, Pauline, strove to fill the void left by Mme. Martin.³³⁹ They showered Thérèse with "maternal affection" and in it Thérèse recognized the grace of God, caring for his little flower under the snow of trial.³⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Thérèse felt tranquil and happy³⁴¹ as they prayed each evening before the statue of Our Lady. In fact, only there, among her family,³⁴² did she find herself less touchy and at ease.

Soon, however, Thérèse was to suffer another loss. She overheard Pauline telling Marie that she planned to enter Carmel. Thérèse was cut to the quick.³⁴³ As Pauline was explaining her decision to enter Carmel, Thérèse likewise felt drawn to this desert, not for Pauline's sake but for the Good God.³⁴⁴ On 2 October 1882, Pauline left the family for Carmel amid tears and blessings.³⁴⁵ Thérèse felt keenly the deprivation: no more kisses, no more embraces from her dear Pauline. Even the visits in the parlor after Pauline's entrance brought no consolation to Thérèse. Later, Pauline would regret not sounding the depths of Thérèse's grief,³⁴⁶ yet, recognized the hand of God in her error because of what happened next. Thérèse never openly complained. Her first mother died a natural death, leaving her quite alone. Now her second mother seemed to ignore her. Thus, little by little, a strange sickness overcame Thérèse.

³³⁴ Ms A 13r.

³³⁵ Ms A 24r.

³³⁶ Ms A 44v.

³³⁷ Ms A 44v.

³³⁸ VT 23, 1983, 176.

³³⁹ Ms A 13r.

³⁴⁰ Ms A 13r.

³⁴¹ Ms A 22r.

³⁴² Ms A 22r.

³⁴³ Ms A 25v/26r.

³⁴⁴ Ms A 26r.

³⁴⁵ Ms A 26v.

³⁴⁶ CG 131, note b.

The Strange Sickness

Toward the end of 1882, Thérèse had a constant headache. As it did not interfere with her studies, she continued at the Abbey until Easter 1883.³⁴⁷ That Easter, her maternal uncle, Isidore Guérin, took Thérèse and Céline for a vacation. Easter evening, 25 March 1883, quite by accident, her uncle reopened Thérèse's wound of grief. According to Leonie, during these years, Thérèse called her aunt, the wife of Isidore, "maman." Her cousins objected. This hurt Thérèse; however, she remained full of affectionate care for them.³⁴⁸ Isidore spoke lovingly of his sister, their mother. So deeply affected was Thérèse, that as she was getting ready for bed that same evening she was seized with a strange trembling.³⁴⁹ Her uncle judged it to be serious; Dr. Nolta had never seen it in a young child; her own father thought his little girl was crazy or was about to die.³⁵⁰

"This sickness was not unto death but, like that of Lazarus, it was to give glory to God."³⁵¹ The only light in the darkness was Pauline's clothing, 6 April 1883. Thérèse was well enough to attend and enjoy once more the kisses and caresses of her "maman." She believed herself well but the next day the sickness attacked her with a vengeance. Neither Dr. Nolta, nor her uncle, a pharmacist familiar with all kinds of maladies, could identify it.³⁵²

Thérèse was later convinced it was the work of the devil.³⁵³ Her cousin, Jeanne Guérin concurred.³⁵⁴ Whether the strange sickness resulted from a demon, or the loss of her first and second mother, or her uncle's words about his sister, is not altogether clear. What is certain, however, is that Thérèse was in a very weakened state. Although her whole family treated her with maternal tenderness,³⁵⁵ her real consolation was to receive letters from Pauline and to weave crowns from daisies and forget-me-nots for the statue of the Virgin. Meanwhile, her father sent to Notre Dame des Victoires for masses, seeking a healing for his little girl.³⁵⁶

³⁴⁷ Ms A 27v.

³⁴⁸ Cf. PO 352.

³⁴⁹ Ms A 27v.

³⁵⁰ Ms A 28r.

³⁵¹ Ms A 28r.

³⁵² Ms A 27v.

³⁵³ Ms A 27r; Ms A 28v/29r.

³⁵⁴ PA 515.

³⁵⁵ Ms A 29r.

³⁵⁶ Ms A 29v.

The Blessed Virgin Appeared to Me Beautiful

On Pentecost Sunday, 13 May 1883, during the novena of masses, Marie went into the garden and left Thérèse in her bedroom under Leonie's care. Thérèse called out "Mama . . . Mama." Leonie thought nothing of it, since Thérèse in her sickness was always calling for her mother. But she called out all the louder. Marie returned and, with Céline and Leonie, they turned to the statue of the Smiling Virgin, begging for a cure. Marie, praying with the fervor of a mother asking for the life of her child, obtained what she desired. Thérèse, likewise, turned to the statue, joining the gesture of the others, imploring the Mother of Mercy.³⁵⁷

All of a sudden the Blessed Virgin appeared *beautiful* to me, so *beautiful* that never had I seen anything so attractive, her face was suffused with an ineffable benevolence and tenderness, but what penetrated to the very depths of my soul was the "ravishing smile of the Blessed Virgin."³⁵⁸

Thérèse was twenty-two when she recalled this apparition. The Virgin looked at her in silence and simply smiled, a sight Thérèse had never seen before, not even the most beautiful, most tender smile of Mme. Martin could match it. Thérèse telescopes the experience into one word, "the smile," and did not try to make others understand what penetrated to the very depths of her soul.

Immediately, after the smile all her symptoms vanished never to appear again, to which both Leonie and Pauline attested on separate occasions.³⁵⁹ Thérèse recognized that her extreme touchiness was healed, not all of a sudden, but sweetly, gently, until five years later "she blossomed on the fertile mountain of Carmel."³⁶⁰

"Ah, I thought, the Blessed Virgin smiled at me, how happy I am, but never will I tell anyone for my happiness would then disappear."³⁶¹ But Marie divined what had happened and because she felt she owed this "smile" to the prayers of her sister, she told her sister what transpired: "Thérèse is healed." Marie wanted to tell the Carmelites.³⁶² When Thérèse had been taken to Carmel and saw Pauline in the habit of the Blessed Virgin she was filled with joy, but this soon vanished when the other Carmelites hounded her with questions about her vision.³⁶³ Thérèse was mortified and even began to think she had faked her illness and lied about the smile.³⁶⁴ Only Father Pichon would convince her that no one would feign such an

³⁵⁷ Ms A 30r.

³⁵⁸ Ms A 30r.

³⁵⁹ PO 344; PA 139.

³⁶⁰ Ms A 30v.

³⁶¹ Ms A 30r/v.

³⁶² Ms A 30v.

³⁶³ Ms A 30v/31r.

³⁶⁴ Ms A 31r.

illness; moreover, it was the Virgin herself, at the Church of Notre Dame des Victoires, who would confirm the truth about her ravishing smile.³⁶⁵

To the Bottom of My Soul

Years later, Thérèse was convinced the Virgin smiled at her in the morning of her life.³⁶⁶ She realized that in divulging her secret to Marie and the Carmelites, God used this humiliation to keep her from vanity. Thus Thérèse considered the trial that followed the grace of the smile, a purification.

But she never forgot the smile. On her coat of arms she lists the gifts given to her by Her Spouse . . . "the Smile of the Virgin, May 1883."³⁶⁷ This smile is both sensible as to her eyes, and expressed in human language; and insensible, inasmuch as the knowing and loving action of God directly on the soul is insensible. On her coat of arms, she mentioned only the smile. Yet the smile became as it were a sacrament of divine penetration, to the bottom of her soul.

Earlier, her own mother duly records the joy of Thérèse who knew her with a beautiful smile.³⁶⁸ The silent language of love between mother and daughter is expressed in that smile. It seemed the Virgin herself adopted this language in order to express her own maternal affection for Thérèse. Again Thérèse never forgot this smile,³⁶⁹ and it seemed to have imprinted itself on her own lips; for her contemporaries at one time or another comment on her beautiful if inexplicable smile,³⁷⁰ especially the irritable and irritating Sr. Thérèse of Saint Augustin.³⁷¹ Earlier in her childhood, Thérèse seemed to expect others to smile at and caress her for which Céline reproached her.³⁷² Now with the ravishing smile of the Virgin, Thérèse forgot herself and considered only the joy in the heart of the Virgin that expressed itself silently on her lips. "By her smile, the Blessed Virgin officially takes the place, as in a relay, of Mme. Martin: she continues to form the heart of her daughter . . . sweetly, gently."³⁷³

³⁶⁵ Ms A 28v; Ms A 70r; Ms A 56r.

³⁶⁶ PN 54: 25, 3-4.

³⁶⁷ Ms A 86r.

³⁶⁸ CF 185:16.I.73.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Ms A 8v, concerning her keen memory.

³⁷⁰ Ms C 29v.

³⁷¹ Ms C 14r.

³⁷² CG I, 100.

³⁷³ VT juillet 1983, 191.

At Notre Dame des Victoires

M. Martin took both Céline and Thérèse with him on his pilgrimage to Italy in the autumn of 1887.³⁷⁴ On 4 November 1887, they entered the Church of Our Lady of Victories. There, adoring the Blessed Sacrament, they moved to pray before the venerated statue. Neither her father nor Céline nor, it seemed, anyone else guessed at what was passing through the soul of Thérèse. In fact, when writing to their sisters about the trip, Céline mentioned nothing about the visit to the Church,³⁷⁵ while Thérèse wrote she was happiest in the church.³⁷⁶ Why?

"Ah, what I felt kneeling at her feet cannot be expressed. The graces Notre Dame des Victoires granted me so moved me that my happiness found expression only in tears, just as on the day of my First Communion."³⁷⁷ What Thérèse perceived, she was unable or unwilling to express, perhaps because of the pain she suffered from divulging the secret smile of the Virgin. She was filled with joy and had never been happier since the day of her First Communion, 8 May 1884. In her description of what cannot be expressed, two graces emerge from this Marian encounter. The first grace, the Virgin made her "feel,"³⁷⁸ without a word passing between them, that on 13 May 1883 it was truly she who had smiled upon her and healed her.³⁷⁹ At that moment the first sorrows of her soul disappeared. Yet, during the subsequent four-and-a-half years, a nagging doubt had troubled her soul: had she merely imagined the smile and then lied about it? The Virgin, with the tenderness and sweetness found in the heart of a mother, eased this burden: ". . . it was really herself who smiled on me and brought about my cure."³⁸⁰ Thérèse perceived her motherly mark in this new found freedom.

* "I understood that she watched over me." She wanted to remember both the painful doubt and its wonderful resolution: I understood that she watched over me, like a mother watches over her baby . . . that I was her child."³⁸¹ Thus, Thérèse expressed in very simple terms what profoundly marked her soul. Throughout her childhood, Thérèse referred to the Blessed Virgin as "Mother." At age seven, she wrote in her notebook: "the Blessed Virgin is my dear mother and ordinarily little children resemble their mother."³⁸² Like all Christians, she believed this. Yet now,

³⁷⁴ Ms A 55r.

³⁷⁵ CG I, 261; LD 5-6.XI.87.

³⁷⁶ LT 30, 6.XI.87.

³⁷⁷ Ms A 56v.

³⁷⁸ Ms A 56v.

³⁷⁹ Ms A 56v.

³⁸⁰ Ms A 56v.

³⁸¹ Ms A 56v/57r.

³⁸² VT juillet 1983, 201, n. 65: premier cahier scolaire, été 1880.

at the sanctuary of Notre Dame des Victoires, a change had taken place. Thérèse no longer needed human words to understand the depths of Mary's maternal love. She "understands"³⁸³ this tenderness and spontaneously calls her "Maman."³⁸⁴ I could no longer give her any other name but "Maman," as this appeared ever so much more tender than Mother."³⁸⁵ Thérèse maintains this intimacy and confidence in all her prayers.³⁸⁶ "Maman" is what would spring to her lips and in her heart as she prayed to the Blessed Virgin.

The second grace to emerge in this Marian encounter at Notre Dame des Victoires is manifested in three aspirations from the heart of Thérèse. The first aspiration is general and encompasses the other two. Thérèse was keenly aware of her own weakness and sought the protection of "Maman," praying to her instinctively and fervently for such a grace. Secondly, she wanted to be hidden "beneath the shadow of her virginal mantle."³⁸⁷ The protection implored in the first petition is nuanced by the second. Carmel was that protection, that desert where she will be hidden under the Virgin's mantle.³⁸⁸ Moreover, the third aspiration partially explains the first two. More explicitly, she wanted nothing to tarnish her purity. Thérèse was ignorant of evil and feared discovering it on her trip through Italy. Her idea of purity goes beyond acts of chastity but rather encompasses the purity of God in whose image she was made. After a prayer to St. Joseph, she undertook "without any fear the long journey; being so well protected what was there to fear?"³⁸⁹

PART II

Introduction

The second half of this chapter now deals with Thérèse's external formation. In a general way, it looks at the need for others in forming souls and other influences, such as books and Carmel itself. In a particular way, it considers the Marian characteristics of this external formation. These include Marian piety as it was practiced in the Martin home, a brief summary of Mary's place in Carmel, and Thérèse's experience of being under the veil of the Virgin.

³⁸³ Ms A 56v/57r.

³⁸⁴ Ms A 57r.

³⁸⁵ Ms A 57r.

³⁸⁶ On addressing Jesus as "tu," see CSG, 82.

³⁸⁷ Ms A 57r.

³⁸⁸ Ms A 26r.

³⁸⁹ Ms A 57r.

The Need for Others in Forming Souls

While caring herself for young children, Thérèse realized the importance of direction given early in childhood: "Jesus willed to be helped in His divine cultivation of souls, seconding the action of grace by learning virtue from the soul responsible for forming them."³⁹⁰ She concludes that the theological virtues planted deep within at Baptism are worth the sacrifices required to bring them out. In her own parable on formation through others, Thérèse compares it to little birds learning to sing by listening to their parents: "So do children learn the science of virtues, the sublime song of Divine Love, from souls responsible for forming them."³⁹¹

Even before her Christmas conversion, Thérèse was being formed by those around her: her father, her sisters, her schoolmates, her teachers and books. Moreover, when God had extricated her from scruples and its excessive sensitiveness, that narrow circle in which she turned without knowing how to come out, then the biggest step had been taken: "But there still remained many things for me to leave behind."³⁹² This formation through detachment came during her attempts to enter Carmel, through the separation of sisters and her father's illness, and Carmel itself with its traditions and superiors, in short, the daily martyrdom of religious life.³⁹³

Sunday with Her Father

Sunday at the Martins was the archetype of Thérèse's childhood and her spiritual formation at that time.³⁹⁴ Her king would kiss her hand more tenderly than usual that day.³⁹⁵ One April Sunday in 1878, in church with her father, she understood her first sermon which was on the Passion—consequently understanding all the others afterwards.³⁹⁶ On their Sunday walks together, they frequently met poor people and it was always little Thérèse who was put in charge of bringing them alms, which made her quite happy.³⁹⁷ But, the happiness of Sunday gave way to

³⁹⁰ Ms A 53r.

³⁹¹ Ms A 53r.

³⁹² Ms A 46v.

³⁹³ In her book, *Written in Heaven* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1937), 79-100, Frances Parkinson Keyes provides telling anecdotes about Thérèse by her own former teachers and playmates, still living at the time of her book.

³⁹⁴ Ms A 17v: "I longed for that never-ending repose of heaven, that everlasting Sunday in the Fatherland."

³⁹⁵ Ms A 17r.

³⁹⁶ Ms A 17v.

³⁹⁷ Ms A 11v.

the later sufferings of her father. His mental collapse began during their trip to Rome in May of 1887 and continued until his death on 29 July, 1894.³⁹⁸ When they went to visit the Pope, the Holy Father placed his hand on her father's head. Thérèse saw it as a prophetic gesture of the martyrdom he would endure.³⁹⁹ For example, they all suffered deeply when he disappeared on 24 June, 1888. He was found three days later in Le Havre by Céline and her uncle, M. Guérin.⁴⁰⁰ His health further declined after Thérèse's Clothing Day. But she was happy to suffer this,⁴⁰¹ because her Father wanted to suffer, wanted to offer himself as victim.⁴⁰²

Pauline

"Having nothing but good example around me, naturally I wanted to follow it."⁴⁰³ As noted earlier, after her mother's death she threw herself into the arms of Pauline in an almost prophetic gesture and called her "Mama."⁴⁰⁴ Pauline was her ideal from childhood.⁴⁰⁵ "A mother's heart understands her child even when it can but stammer, and so I'm sure of being understood by you who formed my heart, offering it up to Jesus."⁴⁰⁶ Pauline was chosen to lead Thérèse, forming a bond between their souls.⁴⁰⁷ It was Pauline, too, who received all her intimate confidences and cleared up all her doubts.⁴⁰⁸

Pauline taught both by word and example. In the morning Pauline used to come to Thérèse and ask her if she had raised her heart to God, and then she would dress her.⁴⁰⁹ It was Pauline who took care of her when she was sick in the winter with bronchitis or in the summer with stomach aches.⁴¹⁰ It was Pauline who sacrificed her mother-of-pearl-starred knife for a sick Thérèse, leaving her very happy.⁴¹¹

³⁹⁸ Ms A 72r.

³⁹⁹ Ms A 64r.

⁴⁰⁰ Ms A 72r.

⁴⁰¹ Ms A 73r-75v.

⁴⁰² A, 154, n. 182.

⁴⁰³ Ms A 8v.

⁴⁰⁴ Ms A 13r.

⁴⁰⁵ Ms A 6r.

⁴⁰⁶ Ms A 3v.

⁴⁰⁷ Ms A 6r.

⁴⁰⁸ Ms A.

⁴⁰⁹ Ms A 13v.

⁴¹⁰ Ms A.

⁴¹¹ Ms A 19r.

I wonder at times how you were able to raise me with so much love and tenderness without spoiling me; for it is true you never allowed an imperfection to pass, you never scolded me without a reason, you never went back on something once you made a decision.⁴¹²

Not only did Pauline watch over her tenderly, she also taught Thérèse how to read and to write and to overcome her natural fears. Pauline, for example, would have her overcome her fear of the dark by making Thérèse search for an object in a far-off, unlit room at night: "I consider the overcoming of my fears as a grace I received through you, dear mother."⁴¹³

Moreover, Pauline's ability to communicate the most sublime truths to her young mind delighted Thérèse. Thérèse wondered why God did not give equal glory to all the Elect in heaven, and "I was afraid all would not be perfectly happy . . ."

Then Pauline told me to fetch Papa's large tumbler and set it alongside my thimble and filled both to the brim with water. She asked me which one was fuller. I told her each was as full as the other and that it was impossible to put more water than they could contain. My dear Mother helped me to understand that in heaven God will grant His Elect as much glory as they can take, the last having nothing to envy in the first. And it was in this way that you brought the most sublime mysteries down to my level of understanding and were able to give my soul the nourishment it needed.⁴¹⁴

Pauline took care, also, to guard Thérèse's heart from vanity when, at Trouville by the sea, Thérèse was admired for being pretty. Yet at that same sea, at Trouville, "everything made her soul consider God's grandeur and power."⁴¹⁵ Near Pauline, she resolved never to wander far away from Jesus; near the sea, she considered the sun's reflection on the water as God's grace shedding its light across the path her little white-sailed vessel was to travel.⁴¹⁶

October 2, 1882, marked the sad day Pauline separated from Thérèse; for, on that date, Pauline entered the Carmel of Lisieux.⁴¹⁷ But, even behind the grille, Pauline instructed her charge. Pauline sent Thérèse a doll dressed as a Carmelite.⁴¹⁸ Earlier, Thérèse wanted to be a religious like Pauline; now her vocation had definition: she wanted to be a Carmelite.⁴¹⁹ To Pauline, suffering with her in her attempts to enter Carmel, Thérèse applies Luke 22:28: "It is you who have been

⁴¹² Ms A 19r.

⁴¹³ Ms A 18v.

⁴¹⁴ Ms A 19v.

⁴¹⁵ Ms A 21v.

⁴¹⁶ Ms A 22r.

⁴¹⁷ Ms A 25v.

⁴¹⁸ Ms A 29v.

⁴¹⁹ However, "the desire to enter Carmel was not because of the example of Pauline but the certitude of the divine call given by Jesus alone which left a great peace in my soul" (Ms A 26r).

with me in all my trials.”⁴²⁰ Moreover, after an inconclusive trip to Rome seeking the Holy Father’s permission to enter Carmel, Thérèse was delighted to see Pauline once again and to open up her wounded soul to her who understood it so well—to her to whom a word, a look were sufficient to explain everything.⁴²¹ When Thérèse finally entered Carmel, it was Pauline who introduced her to the devotion to the Holy Face, a devotion that was to shape her life in Carmel where she fathomed the depths of the treasures hidden in the Holy Face.⁴²² When Pauline was elected Prioress, Thérèse considered her living Jesus⁴²³ and doubly as her mother.⁴²⁴ As Thérèse had always looked upon Pauline as her ideal, she desired to be like her in everything.⁴²⁵ The effects of Pauline’s influence on Thérèse’s total formation from her cradle through Carmel are inestimable.

Marie

Nonetheless, other influences also held sway. After Pauline was enclosed, Marie replaced her as catechist.⁴²⁶ “You are the one who taught me divine instructions.”⁴²⁷ Marie prepared Thérèse for her first Communion; Thérèse’s sacrifice was not to be prepared for this great event by Pauline. But Marie told her of life’s struggles and the palm given to the victors, explaining the way of becoming holy through fidelity to little things. So touched by this teaching of Marie on holiness through fidelity to little things, Thérèse felt others, even sinners, would lay aside perishable riches and long for those of heaven.⁴²⁸ From Pauline and Marie, Thérèse received warmth, gentle dew, springtime breezes⁴²⁹; for it is easy to learn from teachers you love. Yet, what Thérèse said of spiritual directors could also be applied to Pauline and Marie: “Directors are faithful mirrors reflecting Jesus in souls: for me, God was using no intermediary, He was acting directly.”⁴³⁰

⁴²⁰ Ms A 55v.

⁴²¹ Ms A 67r.

⁴²² Ms A 71r; Thérèse also makes reference to Is. 53:3; Jn. 18:36; *Imitation*: Bk. I, ch.2, n.3; Bk. III, ch.49, n.7.

⁴²³ Ms A 80v.

⁴²⁴ Ms A 2r.

⁴²⁵ Ms A 81r.

⁴²⁶ Ms A 33r.

⁴²⁷ Ms B 1r.

⁴²⁸ Ms A 33r.

⁴²⁹ Ms A 13v.

⁴³⁰ Ms A 48v.

Céline

The lessons of Pauline and Marie were reinforced by the friendship of Céline and Thérèse. Céline and Thérèse were inseparable.⁴³¹ On the day Céline received her first Communion, Thérèse was inundated with joy and resolved to prepare herself for her own Communion with the Lord from that day forward. Both of them found the practice of virtue natural and sweet; eternal rewards had no proportion to life's small sacrifices. Frequently they had pious conversation together like Monica and Augustine at Ostia.⁴³² After Thérèse's Christmas conversion they became spiritual sisters; Céline became the confidant of her thoughts; age and height no longer made any difference. Thérèse used the words from St. John of the Cross's *Spiritual Canticle* to express the bond formed in their hearts that was stronger than blood⁴³³:

Following your footprints
 Maidens run lightly along the way;
 The touch of the spark,
 The special wine,
 Cause flowings in them from the balsam of God. (St. 25)⁴³⁴

Again, Thérèse uses the words of St. John of the Cross to express "the suffering and contempt" they both endured during their father's protracted illness.⁴³⁵ Thérèse had left for Carmel before her sister who took care of their ailing father. At one point, during their separation, Céline was invited to a ball and Thérèse was worried that her sister's head might be turned by some young man. Thérèse asked God to prevent her sister from dancing; later Céline told her that all her escort could do was walk her around the floor: "This incident, unique in its kind, made me grow in confidence and love."⁴³⁶ Céline, who cared for her father with some difficulties, to whom a possible but not realized mission was proposed in Canada, and who (although one of the Sisters did not want one more Martin in the Carmel of Lisieux)

⁴³¹ Ms A 24r.

⁴³² Ms A 48r.

⁴³³ Ms A 47v.

⁴³⁴ St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), 182 (St. 25).

⁴³⁵ John Clarke, O.C.D., *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1975), 157, n. 190: "Our Lord asked what he wanted in return for a service rendered, and John's reply was 'Lord, what I want You to give me is trials to suffer for you, to be despised and esteemed as of little worth.'" Crisogono de Jésus, O.C.D., *The Life of St. John of the Cross*, trans. by K. Pond (New York: Harper, 1958), 268.

⁴³⁶ Ms A 82r.

eventually came to join her sister (Jesus having arranged all of her affairs for entrance): she is the flower Thérèse wanted: "She is the one that I offer Him as my most delightful bouquet."⁴³⁷

Childhood Companions

If Céline was her childhood companion and source of joy, other children made Thérèse suffer. She was not good at their games so she invented her own, like burying dead birds with great ceremony and telling fairy tales during play time. However, the Benedictine Sisters soon put a stop to these as they thought it better for the children to run and play. Thérèse considered herself a good student even though her Uncle thought she was a dunce. She liked history, composition, and, having a great zeal for catechism, was called "my little doctor" after her namesake by the priest who taught it.⁴³⁸

Success in studies did not win her success in friendship. In fact, childhood friendships taught Thérèse that there is only bitterness in earth's friendships, especially after the experience of longing for the return of a friend who, upon returning, had completely forgotten Thérèse. "But there is no merit here for her because she was preserved through God's mercy and not detached through fidelity."⁴³⁹ She felt Confirmation had given her the strength to suffer this and more and wondered why there was not more than one day's preparation to receive this sacrament.⁴⁴⁰ Eventually, she left the Abbey during her illness and took up studies afterwards with Mme. Papineau. She had always loved the great and beautiful, but at this epoch of her life she was taken up with an extreme desire for learning. Nonetheless, she remembered the admonition given in the *Imitation of Christ* (3:43) on learning and mortified her quest by limiting the number of hours. Although she was no longer a student at the Abbey, she went there in order to become a Child of Mary but she had no teacher with whom she could pass the time. So after finishing her task, she went to chapel, to Jesus her only Friend. Her soul was filled with longing for eternity which she saw as a family reunion. Finally, Thérèse interpreted her school days as Jesus "changing into bitterness all the consolations of earth."⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ Ms A 82v.

⁴³⁸ Ms A 37v.

⁴³⁹ Ms A 38r.

⁴⁴⁰ Ms A 36v.

⁴⁴¹ Ms A 38r.

Books

The effect of books on the life of Thérèse has already been mentioned. The family read from Dom Guéranger's *Liturgical Year* on Sundays. Before entering Carmel, Thérèse preferred the *Imitation* to all other books; she knew it by heart and could repeat whole chapters on request.⁴⁴² She received an eschatological awareness from Fr. Arminjon's *On the End of the Present World and the Mysteries of Future Life*. In Carmel, she received many lights drawn from the works of St. John of the Cross. But in the end, it was the Holy Scripture that expanded her heart.

Attempts to Enter Carmel

After her Christmas conversion, the formative trial of Thérèse's life, however, comprised the attempts she made to enter Carmel at such a young age. Man proposes but God disposes. Marie opposed her; Pauline tried her; Céline alone helped her. Moreover, her greatest difficulty was in telling her father. On Pentecost Sunday 1887, she summoned up courage, like the apostles in the Upper Room, to ask her father's permission. Not with the fateful resignation of Agamemnon's immolation of Iphigenia, but with the obediencial faith of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, did he consent. In a symbolic action, he plucked a little white flower without breaking it from its roots, giving it to Thérèse and explaining how God had made it flower under his loving care: "I believed I was hearing my own story."⁴⁴³ She placed it in her copy of the *Imitation* at "One must love Jesus above all things." When it later broke at its roots, she recognized it for a presentiment of her short life. Finally, after three days of a dark night, her Uncle, too, consented: "He told me I was the little flower God wanted to gather."⁴⁴⁴

But the Superior of Carmel would not consent until she was twenty-one. To overcome his opposition, Louis took Thérèse to the Bishop of Bayeux. She told the Bishop that she wanted to be a religious when very young, and a Carmelite when she had heard about it, since this order filled all the aspirations of her soul. But the Bishop would not consent without first speaking to the Superior; to Thérèse, it seemed a wasted visit. Nonetheless, Thérèse was determined to live out the grace of her conversion and its demands: if the Bishop of Bayeux would not consent perhaps the Bishop of Rome would.

⁴⁴² Ms A 47r.

⁴⁴³ Ms A 50v.

⁴⁴⁴ Ms A 51r/51v.

During her trip to Rome, the high-born by their affectations taught her that all things are in vain; the priests by their example taught her why Carmelites pray for them; the scenery by its beauty taught her to remember all that she had seen with thanksgiving when Carmel's garden enclosed her. Finally, on the seventh day of the trip, she met the Pope from whom she requested entrance into Carmel in honor of his jubilee: "You will enter if God wills it."⁴⁴⁵ She was pierced to the quick by his answer but remained firm in hope. The rest of the trip held no attraction for her; she did not desire luxurious hotels, only the bare cell of Carmel.

Finally, the Bishop of Bayeux did consent but not according to Thérèse's timetable. Not entering on Christmas Day 1887, as she had hoped, was a trial for her. To those whose faith is small like a mustard seed he grants miracles, until he tries their faith (Mt. 17:19): *to his intimate friends, however, He works no miracles until He tries their faith*. Thérèse's faith was further tried by a delay she did not anticipate. Mother Gonzague received the Bishop's letter of consent on 28 December 1887, but delayed Thérèse's entrance until 9 April 1888.

Carmel

The three months passed quickly, however, and finally Thérèse's barque, arrived at the blessed shore of Carmel.⁴⁴⁶ Carmel—the holy mountain, the fertile mountain, the garden, the holy ark—became her finishing school. There she was taught secrets "in a place no one else appeared," as she quotes St. John of the Cross's *Dark Night* (st. 3&4). There she was taught the things of His love hidden from the clever and learned (Mt. 11:25). There she received peace at her entrance that never left her.⁴⁴⁷

The Carmelites had known Thérèse since childhood, but she never ceased repeating to God that it was for him alone that she entered Carmel.⁴⁴⁸ At her entrance she took her Sisters for models, but three are outstanding in this regard: her prioress, Mother Gonzague; the Novice Mistress, Sister Marie of the Angels; and Mother Geneviève, one of the founders of the Carmel of Lisieux. Early on, by a meeting of minds, Mother Gonzague wished her to take the name Thérèse of the Child Jesus; yet, through Mother Gonzague, Thérèse was to grow in abandonment and in other virtues by suffering at her hands. It commenced with her delayed entrance into Carmel and continued throughout her religious life. Although Thérèse was an open book to her superiors, Mother Gonzague tried her severely without being aware of it. Thérèse was thankful for such a firm and precious education.

⁴⁴⁵ Ms A 63v: Thérèse likens her suffering to Lk. 12:32, 22:29, 24:26; Mt. 20:21-22.

⁴⁴⁶ Ms A 49r.

⁴⁴⁷ Ms A 69v.

⁴⁴⁸ Ms A 26r

However, she opened up with difficulty to her Novice Mistress; because of her well-meant orders (which the Mistress would forget, but which Thérèse obeyed to the letter), she frequently caused the young novice to be scolded by the Prioress, who considered Thérèse lazy and indolent. At her Profession, the Novice Mistress reassured her about her sudden doubts; the Prioress simply laughed. Yet, Mother Geneviève, whom Thérèse considered to be a prophet, consoled her in her troubles: "Serve God with peace and joy; remember, my Child, our God is a God of peace."⁴⁴⁹ But, if Mother Geneviève had no revelation, she gave none; Thérèse wanted to imitate that kind of sanctity as the truest and most holy. At Mother Geneviève's death, it seemed that Thérèse herself received some of the joy that the holy foundress was enjoying in heaven.

Carmel itself instructed her and she suffered no illusions about its life. Fr. Pichon declared that she had never committed a mortal sin, for which she was to thank God because it was by no merit on her part: "May our Lord always be your superior and your novice master."⁴⁵⁰ Carmel taught her detachment from herself and from things, even sensible consolation. Her failings, like falling asleep during meditation, did not leave her desolate; for "does not a doctor put a patient to sleep?"⁴⁵¹ Distractions and sleepiness during her communion meditations made her resolve to be thankful throughout the day. Trials themselves did not take away her deep peace. Carmel taught her to love Jesus, as her newlywed cousin Jeanne did her Francis, with the attentions of a bride for a bridegroom. Yet, for all this, God repays even in small things one-hundredfold, even including a corn cockle seen only in Alençon, among the sheaves of wildflowers sent to the Carmel of Lisieux.

General themes in Thérèse's external formation have been considered. Yet, these themes have some specific Marian characteristics. Marian piety in the Martin home and in Carmel marked the life of Thérèse in such a way that she used the language of both to describe her experience in July, 1889, as being under the veil of the Virgin.

Thérèse's External Marian Piety: Specific Characteristics

Each evening the family said its prayers before the statue of Our Lady. When Pauline would prepare Thérèse for bed, the little girl asked her "maman," "Is the Blessed Virgin happy with me?"⁴⁵² The answer was invariably "yes," otherwise

⁴⁴⁹ Ms A 78r.

⁴⁵⁰ Ms A 70r.

⁴⁵¹ Ms A 75v/76r: Thérèse quotes Ps. 102:14, "He knows that we are dust."

⁴⁵² DCL, 65, note on Mother Agnes' copy of *Autobiography*.

"I would have cried the whole night."⁴⁵³ She had her own May altar, replete with flowers and candles, and, while her father and sisters were attending devotions at church, she held her own devotions, which evoked in Thérèse amusing anecdotes about Victoire the maid.⁴⁵⁴ Each morning, Pauline asked if she spoke to God ". . . and the Blessed Virgin."⁴⁵⁵

Later, at around six years of age, Thérèse confessed for the first time, convinced she spoke to God through the priest; and through the priest, God spoke to her. Thus, his words were embedded in her soul; "Father encouraged me to be devout to the Blessed Virgin and I promised to redouble my tenderness for her." She responded wholeheartedly with all the affection of a girl of six.

I then passed my rosary through to have him bless it. It was evening and on my way home when we passed a street light I looked at it from all sides. "What are you looking at Thérèse?" you asked. "I want to see what a blessed rosary looks like!" This amused you; I remained a long time affected by the grace I received.⁴⁵⁶

The effects showed themselves in her school books. In the summer of 1880, she wrote, "The Virgin went to the temple at the age of three. She was remarkable among her companions for her piety and angelic sweetness. Everyone loved her but especially the angels who considered her as their little sister . . . I want to be a very good daughter. The Blessed Virgin is my dear mother, and ordinarily children resemble their mothers."⁴⁵⁷

During this time, pictures fed her Marian piety.⁴⁵⁸ "I owe to the beautiful pictures you [Mère Agnès] gave me as rewards, one of the sweetest joys and strongest impressions which aided me in the practice of virtue."⁴⁵⁹ What did they represent? Usually they were pictures of the Blessed Mother of no artistic value, but having some doctrinal thought at the bottom. On one was painted a thought from St. Ambrose: "Mary considers as her children all those who are united to Jesus Christ by divine grace." Another had a caption from St. Ephraim: "Mary is the mother of those whom Jesus makes His brothers and sisters." One represented a flowering plant before the Tabernacle door, and Thérèse added: "How I longed to be that flower pleasing Him and living for Him, and finally to be gathered by His hand." Another engraving encouraged the reader to remember the happy passage of those who die under the eyes of Mary. St. Grignon de Montfort was quoted in another:

⁴⁵³ Ms A 18v.

⁴⁵⁴ Ms A 15v.

⁴⁵⁵ Ms A 13v; PN 22: 5.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. A 41, n. 38.

⁴⁵⁷ VT juillet 83, 201, n. 65: premier cahier scolaire, été 1880; DCL.

⁴⁵⁸ For description of images found in Carmel Archives, see Blat, "La espiritualidad mariana," 53-54.

⁴⁵⁹ Ms A 31v.

"Happy the soul that throws itself, looses itself, into the divine mold, which is Mary. It soon becomes like Mary and with her like Jesus Himself."⁴⁶⁰ Through these pictures which Thérèse lovingly regarded, her soul was nourished on Marian piety.

From October 3, 1881, to February, 1886, Thérèse attended the Benedictine Abbey School at Lisieux as a day boarder. These were unhappy years for her as was already mentioned. In May, 1884, she replaced the practices of the Association of the Holy Angels with the ribbon of an aspirant of the Children of Mary, but she had to leave the Abbey before being received into the Association of Mary.⁴⁶¹ It was her constant headaches, at the beginning of 1886, that caused her departure and made her take up her lessons with Mme. Papineau.⁴⁶² Her teacher had a great many visitors and they never failed to comment on the "very beautiful young girl."⁴⁶³ Yet, the Lord kept her from vanity and "The Blessed Virgin, too, watched over her little flower and, not wanting her to be tarnished by contact with worldly things, drew her to her mountain before she blossomed."⁴⁶⁴ Fearing to be less of a child of Mary than her sisters who had been members, Thérèse returned to the Abbey and there fulfilled the conditions of the organization. Lonely and socially awkward, "it was for the Blessed Virgin alone"⁴⁶⁵ that she returned to the Abbey. On May 31, 1887, she was admitted to the Association of the Children of Mary.

Dates played an important part in the life of Thérèse, as she herself wrote. And this was no less true in her Marian calendar. From her childhood up to the end of her life, she continually called May "the beautiful month,"⁴⁶⁶ echoing the sentiments of Mme. Martin.⁴⁶⁷ For example, on 30 May 1889, she wrote to her cousin Marie about that cousin's scruples and about her own sorrow about the fact that Marie had given up her communions because of these scruples on the Feast of Ascension and on the last day of Mary's month.⁴⁶⁸ For another example, Saturday was consecrated to the sweet Queen of Heaven and it was on a Saturday that her uncle permitted her to enter Carmel.⁴⁶⁹ Moreover, other Marian dates figure prominently in the life of Thérèse. Here are more examples. She entered Carmel on 9 April 1888, that year the feast of the Annunciation, because of the date of Easter that year;

⁴⁶⁰ S.-J. Piat, *Our Lady of the Smile and St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus*, trans. M. Collins (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1954), 27.

⁴⁶¹ Ms A 40v.

⁴⁶² Ms A 39v.

⁴⁶³ Ms A 20r.

⁴⁶⁴ Ms A 40r.

⁴⁶⁵ Ms A 41r.

⁴⁶⁶ PO 347; Ms A 29v; CJ 1.5.2.

⁴⁶⁷ CF 20: 10.V.77.

⁴⁶⁸ LT 92, 30.V.89.

⁴⁶⁹ Ms A 51v .

henceforth, Thérèse maintained a special devotion to the mystery of the Incarnation throughout her religious life.⁴⁷⁰ On 8 September 1890, she made her profession, happy to be presented by the Little Virgin as her little flower to the Little Jesus.⁴⁷¹ That evening she placed her crown at the foot of the Virgin “without a trace of sadness.”⁴⁷² On 30 May 1896, she received her second spiritual brother, Fr. Rolland; later, she wrote to him that his apostolic vocation was saved on 8 September through the intercession of Notre Dame de la Délivrance.⁴⁷³

Thérèse had great confidence in the sacramentals of the Church. She liked to distribute medals of the Blessed Virgin without doubting their efficacy. She put medals around the necks of two little poor girls whom she had instructed⁴⁷⁴ and persuaded a woman who did not believe in them to wear the one she offered her.⁴⁷⁵ On 16 July 1894, she wrote to her childhood playmate, Céline Maudelonde, “I am happy that you are involved with the holy scapular. It is an assured sign of predestination and thus are you not united more intimately to your little sisters at Carmel?”⁴⁷⁶ Finally, as at her first sickness so at her last, she was pleased with the Masses offered for her at the sanctuary of Notre Dame des Victoires,⁴⁷⁷ a sanctuary dearer to her heart than all other sanctuaries she had visited.⁴⁷⁸

She also had her favorite Marian prayers. All of her life a particularly favorite gesture of hers was to offer flowers.⁴⁷⁹ After her First Communion, a particularly favorite prayer was to recite the Memorare.⁴⁸⁰ In Carmel, she was particularly devoted to the daily Angelus.⁴⁸¹ And what was particularly astonishing to many, when the original manuscript was published in 1956, was her attitude toward the rosary.⁴⁸² The confraternity of the Rosary in the Church of St. Peter at Lisieux inscribed Thérèse on 25 September 1884.⁴⁸³ From 31 May 1887, she imposed on herself as a “child of Mary” the regular recitation of the rosary.⁴⁸⁴ Two years earlier, in

⁴⁷⁰ PO 279.

⁴⁷¹ Ms A 77r.

⁴⁷² Ms A 77r.

⁴⁷³ In LC 25-26.IX.96, n. K: Fr. Roland confirms this.

⁴⁷⁴ Ms A 52v.

⁴⁷⁵ CSG, 89.

⁴⁷⁶ LT 166: 16.VII.94.

⁴⁷⁷ LT 224: 9.VI.97, à l'abbé Belliere.

⁴⁷⁸ For lists of sanctuaries, see Blat, “La espiritualidad mariana,” 58.

⁴⁷⁹ PA 233; PA 267; Ms A 17r, 34r, 45v.

⁴⁸⁰ CSG, 89; PO 345; PA 267; PA 413.

⁴⁸¹ CJ 4.9.4.

⁴⁸² T. O'Brien, O.Carm., and W. Carlin, O.Carm., “The Autobiography of Thérèse of Lisieux,” *Sword* (1957):294; Ms C 25v.

⁴⁸³ ACL.

⁴⁸⁴ DE, 535.

1885, she tried to recite one or two decades of the mysteries each day.⁴⁸⁵ But, on 20 August 1897, she echoes a sentiment which her sister would eventually delete from the *Autobiography*: "When I think that I have all my life so badly said my rosary."⁴⁸⁶ Yet she was not desolate since the Queen of Heaven was her mother who must see and be satisfied with her good will.⁴⁸⁷

Marian books are notable by their absence. Authors like St. Bernard, St. Alphonse de Liguori, St. Louis de Montfort, are not directly quoted. Although she heard them in the refectory, she does not seem to have read either Mary of Agreda or Catherine Emmerich⁴⁸⁸ and she took only one theme "Virginal Milk"⁴⁸⁹ from Mary of St. Peter⁴⁹⁰ which will be explored later. Céline and Pauline read d'Argentan,⁴⁹¹ but it is not clear if Thérèse did. She enjoyed Faber⁴⁹² but, again, above all, her favorite book on Mary was the Gospel.

In addition to all these influences on her Marian piety, the Liturgy itself left its mark. She felt unworthy to recite the Divine Office⁴⁹³ as a Carmelite, although this prayer of the Church was already felt within the Martin home. From the Divine Office, Thérèse specifically mentions Compline which has as its last hymn an antiphon to Mary,⁴⁹⁴ exemplar of the Church in all that she hopes to be. Moreover, Dom Gueranger's *Liturgical Year* continued to instruct her both at home and within Carmel.⁴⁹⁵ Likewise, the sacraments themselves had their Marian dimension. For example, on the day of her First Communion, Thérèse read the act of Consecration to the Blessed Virgin: "Had she not placed in the heart of her little flower her Jesus, the Flower of the Fields and Lily of the Valley (Sg of Sg 2:1)."⁴⁹⁶

On so sensitive a child, young girl, and religious, all of these external acts of Marian piety had a powerful influence. Nevertheless, the most powerful influence was in July 1889, when she felt herself to be under the Veil of the Virgin. But suspended between these external actions and internal sentiments is the bridge of Carmel's history. Using historians⁴⁹⁷ of the Order, the Carmelite "family record"

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. Blat, "La espiritualidad mariana," 58.

⁴⁸⁶ C.J. 20.8.16.

⁴⁸⁷ Ms C 25v.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. DE, 546, n. b.

⁴⁸⁹ PN 1.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. DE, 517, n. b.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. *Poésies*, 2:46.

⁴⁹² F. W. Faber, *The Foot of the Cross or the Sorrows of Mary (Le Pied de la Croix ou les douleurs de Marie)*, 10th ed. (Paris: Bray et Retaux, 1877).

⁴⁹³ Ms C 25v.

⁴⁹⁴ Ms C 25v.

⁴⁹⁵ A, 43, n. 40.

⁴⁹⁶ Ms A 35v.

⁴⁹⁷ Elisée of the Nativity, O.C.D., "Le Carmel tout marial," in *Maria: Études sur la Sainte Vierge*, ed. Hubert du Manoir (8 vols.; Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1952), 2:835-861 (hereafter Elisée).

(Mt. 1:1) will be briefly followed. They explain Carmel 1) as *Totus marianus est*, 2) the legends that surround its origins, 3) its first historical documents, 4) three Marian interventions, 5) saints given by Mary, 6) medieval Carmelite Marian literature, 7) the devotion to the Holy Scapular, 8) the Reformers of Carmel, 9) the Marian-form Life, and, finally, 10) St. Thérèse and her effect on Carmel. The following overview of Carmelite history is for the sake of its influence on St. Thérèse.

Carmel: *Totus Marianus est*

Carmel as a proper religious order dates from the beginning of the twelfth century, born at a moment when the West became conscious of the role of Mary in the life of the baptized.⁴⁹⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, wholly devoted to Mary, preached the second crusade at that time. The first Carmelites were men of that crusade, rooted in this Marian fervor of the Mellifluous Doctor. Curiously, Carmel has no discernible founder like the Benedictines, Dominicans, or Franciscans. However, Elijah the prophet has been regarded from the beginning as its patriarch and model; but the patronal feast accorded to the Order by the Avignon Papacy was not his, but a feast of Our Lady. Thus, the origins of Carmel are obscure but its Marian piety is not: "Christ, having wanted to reserve to his Mother a gift of royal dignity to him and to herself, made her a gift of a religious order called to honor her for ages without end."⁴⁹⁹

The legends attribute to Elijah⁵⁰⁰ a prophetic awareness of the time of Mary's birth, her Immaculate Conception, her Perpetual Virginity and her Divine Maternity. Philip of the Trinity collected such legends which profoundly influenced the Carmelite soul and which for seven centuries were accepted as true. William of Sandwich's chronicles⁵⁰¹ report that after the Saracens recaptured the Holy Land, some of the Carmelites sought refuge in Europe "where they would be permitted to serve in security the Lord God and the Virgin his mother." This statement establishes subsequent official texts which shows indeed that the Order of Carmel, from its origin, is vowed to the cult of Our Lady, based on more than pious legends.

Joachim Smet, *The Carmelites: A History of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel*, Vol. 1: ca 1200 until the Council of Trent (1975); Vol. 2: Post-Tridentine Period 1550-1600 (1976); Vol. 3: parts one and two, 1600-1750 (1982) (Darien, IL: Carmelite Spirituality Center) (hereafter Smet).

⁴⁹⁸ Elisée, 835; Smet, 1:1.

⁴⁹⁹ Elisée, 836; Smet, 1:25.

⁵⁰⁰ Smet, 3/pt. 2:467-468.

⁵⁰¹ Smet, 1:64.

William of Sandwich also reports the first of three interventions of Mary on behalf of Carmel. Through the intercession of Mary, the prior of the Holy Land hermits allowed some of the brethren to return to Europe and to allow themselves to be subsumed by the Mendicants.⁵⁰² Despite his own prohibition against new religious orders, Honorius III (1216-1227), at the command of the Virgin it is said, approved the Order of Carmel on January 30, 1226.⁵⁰³ Finally, amid tension between Carmel and the secular parochial clergy,⁵⁰⁴ St. Simon Stock⁵⁰⁵ beseeched the Virgin, *Flos Carmeli*, for a sign of her favor for her Order. He was granted the Vision of Our Lady and Her Child holding out to him the scapular of his Order. Although its beginnings were precarious, through these interventions, Mary marvelously sustained her servants.⁵⁰⁶

The Carmelite saints, Albert of Sicily (+1360), Andrew Corsini (+1373), and Peter Thomas (+1366), likewise reflect the intervention of the Virgin on behalf of her Order. St. Albert of Sicily was born to parents who sought a child through the intercession of the Virgin. The Carmelite liturgy holds him up as the norm of purity, innocence and continence, guarded by the Mother of Mercy herself. St. Andrew Corsini,⁵⁰⁷ another child beseeched of the Virgin, after leading a disappointing youth, put on the habit of Carmel. Mary appeared to "her servant"⁵⁰⁸ at the beginning and end of his priesthood and was indeed "glorified" by her "chosen one." St. Peter Thomas,⁵⁰⁹ Carmelite Patriarch of Constantinople, was noted by his Franciscan biographer, Carmesson, as taking the Virgin for a special patron: "She was his hope, she was his support, she was his extraordinary consolation." These three Carmelite saints represent a "life in Mary by Mary."

Eventually, the Carmelites moved into the schools⁵¹⁰ and produced both men of great learning—like Gerard of Bologna (+1317),⁵¹¹ Guy of Perpignan (+1342),⁵¹² and John Baconthrop (+1348),⁵¹³ and great works of theological, scriptural, and Marian literature. The Marian literature principally concerns itself with a defense of the Immaculate Conception and the Patronage of Carmel. Concerning the Immaculate

⁵⁰² Smet, 1:15.

⁵⁰³ Smet, 1:9.

⁵⁰⁴ Smet, 1:40-41.

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. Smet, 1:26-27.

⁵⁰⁶ Cf. Elisée, 842.

⁵⁰⁷ Smet, 1:54.

⁵⁰⁸ Elisée, 843.

⁵⁰⁹ Smet, 1:56-57.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. Smet, 1:59-71.

⁵¹¹ Smet, 1:59.

⁵¹² Smet, 1:60.

⁵¹³ Smet, 1:60.

Conception, Carmelites allowed the palm to go to the Franciscans, but feel they contributed more effectively to the triumph of the dogma. The writings of John Baconthrop especially, exposed in lengthy fashion the why and the how of the Carmelite vow to the cult of Mary.⁵¹⁴ In 1465, Bendouin Leersius⁵¹⁵ published a work, well researched for the time, of Mary's protection afforded the Carmelites, a sort of Marian *Fioretti*. Arnold Bostius (+1499) was the enthusiastic panegyrist of the scapular of which he spoke "in such terms that in sum since then none better has been said and one could hardly say more."⁵¹⁶ All of their medieval Marian literature profoundly marked the Carmelite soul.

Nevertheless, devotion to the Scapular was critically examined.⁵¹⁷ St. Simon Stock's vision of 1251 is regarded by Carmel as the sign of its definite triumph over its precarious beginnings. Accordingly, the scapular's increasing popularity, especially after the Protestant revolt⁵¹⁸ of the sixteenth century represent the lay Catholic's fidelity to the Church and the cause of Mary. To the faithful, the scapular represented a shield against the assaults of Hell, the grace of salvation and the much debated Sabbatine Privilege.⁵¹⁹ Most importantly the humble origins of the scapular must be kept within a historical framework. Around 1400, John Grossi (+1434) recounts in his *Viridarium*, a catalogue of Carmelite saints, the vision of St. Simon Stock, stripped of all embellishments, reduced to six very sober lines, and "apparently truthful."⁵²⁰ Moreover, contrary to the practice of the Dominicans, from whom they borrowed much of their rule, the Carmelites, under pain of excommunication, are never to be found without wearing their scapulars.⁵²¹

The Reformers of the Carmelites recalled the order to its first goal, the eremitic and prophetic life which leads to divine control under the action of the Holy Spirit.⁵²² But its other goal, the veneration of Mary, was not forgotten either by St. Teresa of Avila⁵²³ or St. John of the Cross.⁵²⁴ More than ten times and in diverse ways, Teresa underscores the Order of Carmel as the Order of the Virgin. She lauds the intervention of Mary, even claiming that Philip II was chosen "to protect and

⁵¹⁴ Elisée, 846; Smet, 1:65.

⁵¹⁵ Smet, 1:136.

⁵¹⁶ Elisée, 846, 848, 850.

⁵¹⁷ Smet, 2:222-225.

⁵¹⁸ Cf. Smet, 1:215-276.

⁵¹⁹ Elisée, 853.

⁵²⁰ Smet, 1:137.

⁵²¹ Elisée, 853.

⁵²² Elisée, 846.

⁵²³ Smet, 2:22, 39, 233.

⁵²⁴ Smet, 1:49, 87, 233.

raise again”⁵²⁵ Carmel. A Carmelite must be before all “a true child of Our Lady”⁵²⁶ by practicing mutual charity. As she recounts her labors, trials, and foundations, she rejoices in “the glory of God and the habit of His glorious Mother.” Likewise, her male counterpart, St. John of the Cross, speaks of Mary five times in his works. Mary saved him from drowning as a child, called him to her service, convinced him through Teresa to embrace a solitary, contemplative life wearing the habit of the Virgin, freed him from Toledan captivity, and granted him numerous favors. He died happy, going to recite the Matins of Our Lady of Heaven on the night of 13 December 1591.

During the seventeenth century, Michael of St. Augustine and his spiritual daughter, Marie of St. Teresa, championed Marianform life.⁵²⁷ Together they affirmed a spirituality, a “life in Mary and by Mary.”⁵²⁸ No grace is given to men without passing through the hands of Mary. Mary is the one who directs the soul into the state of entire transformation in God.⁵²⁹

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Carmelites vied for the palm, the better to glorify Mary, especially in France.⁵³⁰ “After the winter of the Revolution and after the Restoration of the nineteenth century, there blossomed the ‘Flower of Lisieux’ who ‘rendered more simple and more evangelical the notion of Marian piety,’”⁵³¹ who calls Mary more mother than Queen,⁵³² who realized Carmel’s Marian piety⁵³³ within every moment of her life: silent, hidden interior by preference. Hence that moment in her life, which Thérèse designated as “under the veil of the Virgin,” draws attention to her Marian formation, from that of external acts of piety to those of internal sentiments which occur within the context of Carmel: “*Totus marianus est.*”

Under the Veil of the Virgin

Thérèse’s desires to enter Carmel were fulfilled on 9 April 1888. On 10 January 1889, she took the habit of Carmel. But it was not until 11 July 1897, that she revealed to Mother Agnes a grace she received through the hands of Mary, during

⁵²⁵ *Elisée*, 854.

⁵²⁶ *Elisée*, 855; PN 54.

⁵²⁷ Smet, 3/pt.2:444-445.

⁵²⁸ *Elisée*, 856.

⁵²⁹ *Elisée*, 857.

⁵³⁰ Smet, 3/pt.1:497.

⁵³¹ *Elisée*, 858.

⁵³² Cf. CJ 21.VIII.3.

⁵³³ *Elisée*, 859, n. 46.

the month of July 1889. This grace emphasizes 1) the role of Mary in the life of the baptized with 2) a palpable manifestation of divine control under the action of the Holy Spirit that, now, 3) as a Carmelite, she is “a true child of Our Lady”⁵³⁴ and, finally, 4) Carmelite Marian piety “hidden, silent, interior by preference.”⁵³⁵

What is this grace? In brief, Thérèse told Mother Agnes that she understood by experience what is called “a flight of the spirit” and described it as hidden under the veil of the Virgin.⁵³⁶ She remained “hidden” for a week and seemed to be outside of herself. In a later oblique reference to being under this veil, she would discover Jesus nursed there by his mother Mary.⁵³⁷

In the yellow notebook, Mother Agnes wrote on 11 July 1897: “During Matins, she spoke to me of her prayers at other times, the evening during the silence of summer, and told me to have understood by experience what a ‘flight of the spirit’ was. She told me of another grace of this kind, received in the grotto of St. Mary Magdalene, in the month of July 1889, a grace which was followed by several days of quietude.”⁵³⁸

The authentic ownership of this language in this preface to the description of Thérèse is difficult to ascertain. Words like “flight of the spirit”⁵³⁹ and “quietude”⁵⁴⁰ are technical words of the great mystics, rarely found in Thérèse’s own writings. Whether Mother Agnes is defining terms of “this kind” or they were actually used by Thérèse in this conversation remains of secondary importance. What is helpful, though, is the place and date mentioned wherein Thérèse received this grace.

Sr. Geneviève gives a sober description of the place, a grotto dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene: “It is a grotto made of flint . . . constructed at the back of the cemetery, against the wall. The little statue of St. Madeleine, since painted differently, occupies the same place in the cleft of the rocks.”⁵⁴¹ The same grotto is surmounted by a statue of the Immaculate Conception, plainly in view. Within this grotto, following the custom of the Carmelites, Thérèse took her “hermitage day.” As to the date, no other precision is given other than “July 1889.” Prior to this date, the Martin sisters had been concerned about the health of their father who had been committed to the Bon Sauveur in Caen.⁵⁴² That is the context of the grace Thérèse recounted exactly eight years later:

⁵³⁴ *Elisée*, 855.

⁵³⁵ *Elisée*, 859.

⁵³⁶ Cf. CJ II,VII.

⁵³⁷ PN 1: 1.

⁵³⁸ CJ 11.VII.2; cf. *Last Conversations*, 88, nn. 31, 32, 33.

⁵³⁹ Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, 2:123.

⁵⁴⁰ Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 2:123.

⁵⁴¹ CJ 11.VII.2, n. b.

⁵⁴² Ms A 73r, note; PO 573; CGI: 451s.

. . . It was as though a veil had been cast over all the things of this earth for me . . . I was entirely hidden under the veil of the Blessed Virgin. At this time, I was placed in charge of the refectory and I recall doing things as though not doing them, it was as if someone lent me a body. I remained that way for one whole week.⁵⁴³

The experience seems to have profoundly marked this Carmelite's soul.⁵⁴⁴

Hidden

"Hidden under the veil" is a striking image and it reappears frequently in her letters (1888-1894) and after 1894 in her poetry. The Carmelites had three veils, a short one for work, a longer one for choir and a transparent one that veiled their faces, as on certain retreats, or in the parlor.⁵⁴⁵ Having taken the veil, the novice wore white and the professed, black.⁵⁴⁶ Beyond the literal sense, Thérèse attached a symbolic sense. She reminds Sr. Marie of the Eucharist that the black veil means the spouse of Jesus is in exile.⁵⁴⁷ Without reporting the grace of 1889, the veil maintains the sense of "hidden."⁵⁴⁸ The letter to Sr. Agnes during her ten-day retreat, May 1890, echoes the grace of the grotto. Like a grain of sand, hidden, insignificant, Thérèse desires to remain hidden, within the dark shadows of this exile; she wants to hide under the veil in order to share her light.

"Tell Jesus to look at me so that the four-o'clocks may penetrate with their bright rays the heart of the grain of sand . . ." This floral symbolism comes from a prayer to the Holy Face composed by Sr. Agnes of Jesus. She compared each of his features to flowers, the eyes being "belles-de nuit"⁵⁴⁹ (four-o'clocks). Sr. Agnes introduced her sister to this devotion, influenced by the writings of Sr. Marie of St. Peter of the Tours' Carmel. Thérèse entered deeply into this devotion in a very personal way because of the events in her own life and also her own reading, but especially when she made the discovery of Isaiah 53. In a letter to Sr. Martha of Jesus, she attached "of the Holy Face" to her name for the first time (10 January 1889).⁵⁵⁰ This Holy Face is also hidden; with eyes lowered, he gazes upon all the tribulations of his Thérèse and her sisters, of which she writes in her letters.⁵⁵¹ Her

⁵⁴³ CJ 11.VII.2.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. *Elisée*, 846, 848.

⁵⁴⁵ LT 150 13.V.88.

⁵⁴⁶ Ms A 35v, 71r, 75r, 86r; Ms B 2r.

⁵⁴⁷ LT 234 2.VI.97.

⁵⁴⁸ Ms A 20v, 48r, 13r; Ms C 7r, 26v, 27r; LT 201 1.IX.96; LT 226 9.V.97.

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. LT 103, n. 5.

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. LT 80, n. 2.

⁵⁵¹ LT 87, 95, 98, 102, 105, 108, 110, 115, 117, 120, 127, 134, 140, 149, 156, 161.

Jesus reflects the same.⁵⁵² Thus toward the month of July 1889, Thérèse is marked by the words of Isaiah, "His face was hidden" (Is. 53:3). She perceives the realization of these words in the Incarnation, in the Passion, in the Eucharist; forgetfulness of self no longer suffices, she must be hidden like the Suffering Servant, Jesus.⁵⁵³ Penetrating more and more this mystery with pure faith, the Veil of the Virgin remains a refuge,⁵⁵⁴ a hiding place,⁵⁵⁵ a place of repose,⁵⁵⁶ peaceful sleep,⁵⁵⁷ in short, a child's symbol of security, the place of abandonment.⁵⁵⁸

What Thérèse expresses simply: "It was as though a veil had been cast over all the things of the earth for me . . . I recall doing things as though not doing them; it was as if someone had lent me a body," the great Carmelite mystics St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross are at pains to articulate. St. Teresa of Avila describes this state in the *Way of Perfection*: "Those who enjoy this favor . . . see with evidence that they are not entirely at their exterior occupations. They lack the principle, I want to say the will, which, according to me, is thus united to her God, and leaves the other powers of the soul free so that she occupies herself with the service of his glory."⁵⁵⁹

St. John of the Cross nuances this experience even more.

When the soul is united with God, she lives without form or images, the imagination disengaged, the memory prolonged in a fine sovereign, *in a great forgetfulness*, without remembering what may be. For, this union with God empties her of imagination, brushes away all images and knowledge and raises her to the supernatural . . .⁵⁶⁰ The cause of this forgetfulness is the purity, the simplicity of this knowledge. And this knowledge occupies the soul and renders it pure, simple and limpid, disengaged from all human attainments, from images which furnish ordinarily the senses and memory, and which yields the soul to act in time. This is why it leaves the soul in forgetfulness and without time . . .⁵⁶¹

Thérèse "remained that way for one whole week."⁵⁶²

This grace given to beginners seems to be like the other graces⁵⁶³: the smile of 13 May 1883 and the experience at Notre Dame des Victoires of 4 November 1887,

⁵⁵² PN 23: 2; 24: 1, 28; 32: 3; 40: 5.

⁵⁵³ Cf. VT juillet 83, 215.

⁵⁵⁴ PN 13: 4.

⁵⁵⁵ PN 1: 1; 13: 4; LT 161 26.IV.94.

⁵⁵⁶ PN 5: 11.

⁵⁵⁷ PN 44: 8; 54: 12.

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. Poésies, 2:90.

⁵⁵⁹ Teresa of Avila, *Way of Perfection*, 2:123.

⁵⁶⁰ John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, 255, 310, 307.

⁵⁶¹ John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, 170, 187; 164.

⁵⁶² CJ 11.VII.2.

⁵⁶³ CJ 11.VII.2, 256, 311, 307.

which are bathed in a Marian light. In this grace of July 1889, Thérèse is under the Veil of the Virgin, a symbol of this great forgetfulness. This rapport seems to be suggested by John of the Cross himself who at the end of his explanation of it concludes: "Such are the works and prayers of the ever glorious Virgin, Our Lady, who, from the beginning being raised to this high state, never had in her soul a form imprinted by any creature and never put one there herself, but always under the action of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁶⁴

Yet, Thérèse does not forget this forgetfulness, nor fail to give it its Marian dimension, that of being under the veil of the Virgin. Not willing to risk what happened on 13 May 1883, this grace seems to go the way of that of 4 November 1887: it remains hidden, silent, interior by preference. Although she finds herself powerless to express in human language the secrets of heaven, she does reveal something of them in her poetry where human language reaches its pinnacle. Her first poem, "The Divine Rose," requested by Sr. Thérèse of St. Augustine, couches St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus' experience of the flight of the spirit in veiled language.

"The Divine Rose"

A quick perusal of the dates of Thérèse's verses, listed below, indicates a recurrence of this image "under the veil," to express this experience of the flight of the spirit. Thus:

(Feb.2,1893) "Ah! Allow me to hide under the Veil."⁵⁶⁵

(June 1,1894) "Oh Mother, allow me to repose under your Veil."⁵⁶⁶

(Dec. 25,1894) "I will hide you under the Veil where the King of Heaven takes refuge. But for that I always take refuge under my veil close to Jesus."⁵⁶⁷

(Oct.21, 1895) "The shadow of your Veil is luminous and pure."⁵⁶⁸

(Dec. 28,1896) "Under the starred Veil hiding your blond head"⁵⁶⁹

(May 1897) "Jesus sleeps in peace under the folds of your Veil."⁵⁷⁰

As mentioned above, Sr. Thérèse of St. Augustin elicited Thérèse's first poem. For St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, this sister was more irritating than a hair shirt;

⁵⁶⁴ CJ 11.VII.2, 257, 313-314.

⁵⁶⁵ PN 1: 1, 5.

⁵⁶⁶ PN 5: 11, 3.

⁵⁶⁷ PN 13: 1, 2, 4, 5.

⁵⁶⁸ PN 24: 28, 5.

⁵⁶⁹ PN 44: 8, 3.

⁵⁷⁰ PN 54: 12, 5.

everything about her seemed disagreeable.⁵⁷¹ Sr. Thérèse of St. Augustin recounted her part in bringing these verses about.

One day I asked her to compose a song on one preferred subject. "It's impossible," she told me, "I know nothing about poetry." "What are you doing? It's not a question of sending it to the Academy; I'm only talking about pleasing me and satisfying a desire of my soul." "I hesitate a little because I do not know if it is the will of God." "Oh! for that I will give you a little counsel. Before beginning, go to our Lord saying: 'My God, if it is not your will, I ask you for the grace not to be able to perform this successfully, but if it procures your glory, come to my aid.' I believe after that you could without worry." She followed my advice.⁵⁷²

That was the proximate source. The remote sources were themes from the Liturgy, already well known to Thérèse from the days of Les Buissonnets when the family read Gueranger's *Liturgical Year*; its repetition in the Divine Office at Carmel; the texts of Sr. Mary of St. Peter, who was influenced by d'Argentan; Sr. Thérèse de St. Augustin's own well-loved poem "*Le Lys Virginal*"; and a verse from "*Les Mages au Carmel de Lisieux*" dedicated to her by its author, Sr. Agnes of Jesus (January 6, 1884). In short, the well-loved theme, and dominant image of this first poem, was Mary nursing the child Jesus "under the Veil."⁵⁷³ Within this context comes forth a cascade of images. This "rose of Mary" blossoms "on the Cross"; his flesh and "blood," "the bread of Angels," is "the Virginal milk"⁵⁷⁴; Jesus suckles "under the Veil" of the Virgin, and there Thérèse "will find a foretaste of heaven."⁵⁷⁵

Nonetheless, the power of this image of "the Virginal milk" is difficult to decipher in the writings of Thérèse. She uses it rarely, seven times in the first poem, only seven times after that.⁵⁷⁶ Thérèse seems to sense that a Mother not only gives life, but also watches over its growth. Could our spiritual Mother, Mary, do any less? For we can read of St. John of the Cross, "All is mine, all is for me, the earth is mine, heaven is mine, God is mine and the Mother of my God is mine."⁵⁷⁷ In July 1889, Thérèse is hidden with Jesus "nursing" under the veil of the Virgin. Her desire is itself realized more and more: she is a child of the Virgin, her mama.

Through her natural family and through her religious family, Jesus showed her the way to please Him and to practice the most sublime virtues. "And now I have no other desire except to love Jesus unto folly. My childish desires have all flown away."⁵⁷⁸ However, soon the student will be asked to teach her teachers, so well had she learned their lessons.

⁵⁷¹ Ms A 26v; Ms C 13v/14r.

⁵⁷² *Poésies*, 2:46s-47.

⁵⁷³ PN 1: 1.

⁵⁷⁴ PN 1: 4.

⁵⁷⁵ PN 1: 1.

⁵⁷⁶ LT 185; PN 18: 21; 24: 4; 26: 8; RP5; RP6.

⁵⁷⁷ LT 137 19.X.92, following "Spiritual Canticle," 25.

⁵⁷⁸ Ms A 82v.

CHAPTER THREE

What Did St. Thérèse Do with What She Received in Regard to Mary?

Chapter two dealt with what Thérèse received. Chapter three deals with what Thérèse did with what she received. The first part of chapter three looks at the Little Way in general. It goes on to consider it again but from a specifically Marian perspective. The second part of chapter three examines Thérèse's final poem whose subject is Mary. The poem's context is the final stage of Thérèse's gradual development, marked by an ever-deepening reflection upon and practice of fraternal charity, which make one a true child of Our Lady.

PART 1

The Little Way and the Act of Oblation to Merciful Love

While writing Manuscript A, during the year 1895, Thérèse sought permission from her sister and superior, Mother Agnes of Jesus, to offer herself to merciful love, along with her second self, Céline. In a letter to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, now called Manuscript B, she explains Merciful Love in the terms of the Little Way of spiritual childhood, passing on the fruits of her contemplation. Although she never intended to systematize her thoughts and intuitions, nor the elements of her spirituality in the scattered texts of her writings and in her conversations,⁵⁷⁹ there are recurring themes that constitute a theology of the Little Way of Merciful Love.

On a retreat conducted from 8 to 15 October 1891, a Franciscan Recollect, who was supposed to do good to great sinners but not to religious souls, did a great deal of good to Thérèse. She felt understood by him, who launched her full-sail on the waves of confidence and love, because he told her that her faults caused God no pain. She had never heard that before.⁵⁸⁰ If Pauline had been so ready to forgive her little offense, how much more so God who is more tender than a mother. "My nature was such that fear made me recoil; with love, not only did I advance,

⁵⁷⁹ F. Jamart, *The Complete Spiritual Doctrine of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. W. Van de Putte (New York: St Paul Publications, 1961), 33.

⁵⁸⁰ Ms A 80r/80v.

I actually flew.”⁵⁸¹ Thérèse was not discouraged by her miseries but found a way to profit from them and to be happy, because Jesus seemed to be encouraging her on this way.

Therefore, from experience, like painting pictures and writing poems, she distinguished vanity from happiness. Happiness consists in hiding oneself, in remaining ignorant of created things, in understanding that without love all works are nothing, even raising the dead or converting the multitudes.⁵⁸² It is love alone that attracted her.⁵⁸³ On the way of love, one can fall or commit infidelities, but, knowing how to draw profit from everything, love quickly consumes everything that can be displeasing to Jesus. Love leaves nothing but a humble and profound peace in the depths of the heart.⁵⁸⁴ Through love, Thérèse contemplated all the other perfections of God.⁵⁸⁵

From her youth, Thérèse, realizing all the many natural and supernatural goods she had received, wanted to share her love. In fact, if all creatures had received the same graces as she did, God would be not feared but loved; through love, not fear, no one would ever consent to cause Him any pain.⁵⁸⁶ But this love had to be chosen freely. After her illness, she returned to Alençon in August, 1883. While being admired and pampered, she received the grace to know the world just enough to despise it. Thoughts of death were the cure for worldly vanities: the only good, she realized, was to love God with all one’s heart and to be poor in spirit here on earth. Yet, this exposure to the world enabled her to choose freely the way she was to follow: Love.⁵⁸⁷

The Little Way is best summed up in Thérèse’s own words, given below. The references to the Old Testament derive from notebooks in which Céline copied such quotes and which she brought with her when she entered Carmel, September 14, 1894. Thérèse came upon these texts toward the end of 1894 or the beginning of 1895.⁵⁸⁸

You know, Mother, I have always wanted to be a saint. Alas! I have always noticed that when I compared myself to the saints, there is between them and me the same difference that exists between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and the obscure grain of sand trampled underfoot by the passers-by. Instead of becoming discouraged, I said to myself: God cannot inspire unrealizable desires. I can, then, in spite of my littleness, aspire to holiness. It is impossible for me to grow up, and so I must bear with myself such as I am with all my imperfections. But

⁵⁸¹ Ms A 80v.

⁵⁸² Ms A 81r.

⁵⁸³ Ms A 83r.

⁵⁸⁴ Ms A 83r.

⁵⁸⁵ Ms A 83v.

⁵⁸⁶ Ms A 83v.

⁵⁸⁷ Ms A 32v.

⁵⁸⁸ Gaucher, *The Story of a Life*, 139.

to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new.

We are living now in an age of inventions, and we no longer have to take the trouble of climbing stairs, for, in the homes of the rich, an elevator has replaced these very successfully. I wanted to find an elevator which would raise me to Jesus, for I am too small to climb the rough stairway of perfection. I searched, then, in the Scriptures for some sign of this elevator, the object of my desires, and I read these words coming from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom: "*Whoever is a LITTLE ONE, let him come to me* [Pr 9:4]." And so I succeeded. I felt I had found what I was looking for. But wanting to know, O my God, what You would do to the very little one who answered Your call, I continued my search and this is what I discovered: "*As one whom a mother caresses, so will I comfort you: you shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees they shall caress you* [Is 66:13, 12]." Ah! never did words more tender and more melodious come to give joy to my soul. The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, O Jesus! And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain little and become this more and more.⁵⁸⁹

The Little Way she was to follow was ratified in the Act of Oblation of Merciful Love which she made on Trinity Sunday, 9 June 1895. It sums up Thérèse's understanding of herself. Realizing how much Jesus desired to be loved, she offered herself up as a victim of Divine Love. It is cast in the language of sacrificial love born of religious faith. Thérèse desired to be purified and consumed by the fire of Divine Love. She wished to make this act incessantly, living and dying in love.

Manuscript B: Thérèse's Letter to Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart (September, 1896)

Thérèse had sufficiently pondered this mystery for herself. But her sister, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, wanted to know the secrets Jesus was communicating to her soul. In a letter to her, Thérèse begins to unfold the implications of her offering to Merciful Love, "her little doctrine."⁵⁹⁰ Thérèse gives her sister Jesus, who will teach her everything that she must do, allowing her to read in the Book of Life wherein is contained the science of love.⁵⁹¹

Thérèse understood so well that it is only love which makes us acceptable to God, and this love was the only good Thérèse desired ambitiously.⁵⁹² Like Shakespeare's Cordelia, she could not but love and be still, weeping with gratitude.⁵⁹³ Again and again she struggled to write, to tell her sister about love. Love made

⁵⁸⁹ Ms C 3r.

⁵⁹⁰ Ms B 1v.

⁵⁹¹ Ms A 1r.

⁵⁹² Ms B 1r.

⁵⁹³ Ms B 1r/1v.

her desire much: she realized her three privileges summed up her true vocation: Carmelite, Spouse, Mother; but love made her desire more: Warrior, Priest, Apostle, Doctor, Martyr.⁵⁹⁴ Her immense desires caused her a “veritable martyrdom.”

I Corinthians, chapters 12 and 13, quenched her desires. The twelfth chapter convinced her that not everyone can do everything in the Mystical Body of Christ. But that did not satisfy her completely. She read on and discovered that charity is the more excellent way. She had her answer. Surely, the Body had a heart; within “the heart of the Church, my mother, I shall be love.”

Without love the apostles would not preach the Gospel, martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that love comprised all vocations, that love was everything, that it embraced all times and places, in a word, that it was eternal—my vocation. I have found it: MY VOCATION IS LOVE.⁵⁹⁵

Thus, a new way, a new meaning informed her life: Love is everything. Within the Church, she would perform the smallest acts (like picking up a pin) for pure love, because they are of more value to the Church than all other works put together.⁵⁹⁶

Elements of the Little Way Contained in Manuscript B

She desired to suffer for love and to rejoice through love. Love is repaid by love alone and she wanted to use her riches to make friends; because, if Divine Justice demanded pure and spotless victims, then Love lowered itself to the weak and imperfect, transforming nothingness into fire. Thérèse would ransom souls through love by having them understand her Little Way, of which there are at least five elements: a) divine condescension, b) spiritual childhood, c) abandonment, d) suffering, e) the practice of hidden virtues. These five elements also appear in Thérèse’s final poem on Mary as will be noted in the second half of chapter three.

Divine Condescension: “For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven.” Christ laid aside his divinity and clothed himself in humanity. This is the presupposition in all of Thérèse’s writing. He taught her, little-by-little, that His love is revealed as perfectly in the most simple soul that does not resist His grace as in the most excellent soul.⁵⁹⁷ His grace is a condescending grace, to simple souls, in little ways. For example, Thérèse had hoped for snow on her Clothing Day (10 January 1889), but the weather was too mild for snow. Yet after the ceremony, in

⁵⁹⁴ Ms B 2v.

⁵⁹⁵ Ms B 3r.

⁵⁹⁶ Ms B 4r.

⁵⁹⁷ Ms A 2v.

which she herself was mantled in white, so was the world outside: "What bridegroom could do the same? . . . This accentuated even more the incomprehensible condescension of the Spouse of Virgins."⁵⁹⁸

Spiritual Childhood: Jesus remains present in His Church. Thérèse saw herself as a child of the Church, her Mother. Her own glory would be the reflected glory which shines on her Mother's forehead.⁵⁹⁹ For example, as a child she had a dream of two sprites dancing on a barrel in the garden. When they saw Thérèse approach they fled. She felt God had permitted her to remember that dream in order to prove to her that a soul in a state of grace has nothing to fear from demons, who are cowards, capable of fleeing before the gaze of a little child.⁶⁰⁰ Marie had told her, as she prepared her for her Communion, about suffering, but that Thérèse would probably not walk that way: God would always carry her as a child.⁶⁰¹ In Carmel, when deprived of Fr. Pichon as spiritual director, Thérèse turned to the Director of directors: "It was he who taught me the science hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to little ones."⁶⁰² Thérèse did not understand spiritual childhood in terms of Matthew's injunction—"Unless you become like little children you shall not enter the kingdom of God" (Mt 18:4) but, rather, in terms of the Old Testament: "Whoever is a little one let him come to me" (Pr 9:4). "For to him that is little, mercy will be shown" (Ws 6:7). "As one whom a mother caresses, so will I comfort you; you shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees they will caress you" (Is 66:12-13).⁶⁰³

Abandonment: the means of spiritual childhood, however, is the surrender of a little child who sleeps without fear in its Father's arms.⁶⁰⁴ Jesus does not demand great actions from us but simply surrender and gratitude.⁶⁰⁵ At Jacob's well, he asks the Samaritan woman: "Give me to drink" (Jn 4:7). Jesus is parched; for He met only the ungrateful and indifferent among His disciples in the world, and among His own disciples, He finds few hearts who surrender to Him without reservations, who understand the real tenderness of His infinite love. For example, Thérèse lamented her own weakness. She saw the saints as eagles and herself as a small little bird. The eagles soar toward the sun; the small bird is distracted by the things of this earth. Yet, even when the Sun is hidden, she will continue to believe in it. Even when unfaithful, that small bird will not weep or die of sorrow; rather, it

⁵⁹⁸ Ms A 73r.

⁵⁹⁹ Ms B 4r.

⁶⁰⁰ Ms A 10v.

⁶⁰¹ Ms A 36r.

⁶⁰² Ms A 71r.

⁶⁰³ Ms B 1r.

⁶⁰⁴ Ms B 1r.

⁶⁰⁵ Ms B 1v.

recounts in detail all its infidelities, thinking in the boldness of its full trust that it will acquire in even greater fullness the love of Him who came to call not the just but sinners.⁶⁰⁶

Suffering: the Little Way is the way of suffering—the only way to attain holiness.⁶⁰⁷ The Lord only parcels out trials according to the strength he also gives. For example, when Pauline announced her entrance into Carmel, Thérèse saw life as nothing but continual suffering and separation: “I did not understand the joy of sacrifice.”⁶⁰⁸ When Thérèse herself was in Carmel, she was to draw on the riches of her Spouse in order to repay Pauline for all she suffered on her account, because He repays one-hundredfold.⁶⁰⁹ Marie, while preparing Thérèse for communion, had told her that she would walk without suffering; but, instead, Thérèse’s desire for suffering grew. She believed Jesus had a great number of crosses for her. Suffering became her attraction; Her Beloved suffered without loving suffering.⁶¹⁰ In imitation of Jesus, who came into this land of exile, willing to suffer and to die in order to draw souls to the Blessed Trinity,⁶¹¹ so did Thérèse want to taste the sweet bitterness of martyrdom.⁶¹²

Hidden Virtues: one cannot become a martyr unless one is prepared to live like one. Thérèse therefore applied herself to the practice of hidden virtues, not having the capability of practicing the great. She had a love of mortification, but was allowed nothing in the way of satisfying it. Rather, the penances the superior allowed her consisted in mortifying her self-love, which did her much more good than corporal penances.⁶¹³ For example, she would not ask for her lamp back, once taken, nor excuse herself for a vase she did not break, nor talk to Mother Agnes of Jesus unless it was important. These are small in appearance but they cost her a great deal. In Carmel, Mother Geneviève had practiced the ordinary hidden virtues with humble trust in Divine Mercy. Thérèse desired to imitate her. Thérèse dreamed that Mother Geneviève, being about to die, was disposing of her property; to Thérèse she repeated three times with emphasis: “To you, I leave my heart.”

Again and again, Thérèse repeats that true glory is that which will last eternally, and to reach it, it is not necessary to perform striking works,⁶¹⁴ but rather to engage in breaking a will so ready to impose itself on others, in holding back a

⁶⁰⁶ Ms B 5r.

⁶⁰⁷ Ms A 10r.

⁶⁰⁸ Ms A 25v.

⁶⁰⁹ Ms A 29v.

⁶¹⁰ Ms A 36v.

⁶¹¹ Ms B 5v.

⁶¹² Ms B 5v.

⁶¹³ Ms A 74v.

⁶¹⁴ Ms A 32r.

reply, in rendering little services without any recognition.⁶¹⁵ She realized this not in prayer but in the midst of her daily occupations. In another dream, Venerable Anne of Jesus, the foundress of Carmel in France, reassured her that God was pleased with her poor little actions and desires: "He asks no other thing from you. He is content, very content."⁶¹⁶ It struck her all the more because previously she had been indifferent to Venerable Anne of Jesus.⁶¹⁷ She would prove her love by not allowing one little sacrifice to escape, not one look, one word, profiting by all the smallest things and doing them through love.⁶¹⁸ It is only the first step that costs anything.⁶¹⁹ Yet, she humbly admitted that she was far from practicing these hidden virtues, but the desire to do so gave her peace.⁶²⁰

I have always wanted to be a saint . . . but God cannot inspire unrealizable desires. I can, then, in spite of my littleness, aspire to holiness. It is impossible for me to grow up, and so I must bear with myself such as I am with all my imperfections. But I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short and totally new.⁶²¹

If the elevator can take the rich upstairs without strain on their part, so will the arms of Jesus lift her up to Perfection. As these characteristics of the Little Way have their Marian dimension, a kind of Magnificat follows as Thérèse "stammers . . . to express things which the human heart can hardly understand."⁶²²

The Little Way (of Discipleship): Its Marian Characteristics

"What you have as heritage, take now as task: for thus you make it your own."⁶²³ Underneath the "arms of Jesus and Thérèse,"⁶²⁴ Thérèse lists her "days of Graces accorded by the Lord to his Little Spouse." Among them are "the Smile of the Virgin, May 1883," "the Entrance into Carmel, 9 April 1888" (that year the feast of the Annunciation), and, the very last one, "the Offering of myself to Love, 9 June 1895." Above their arms is the legend "I will sing eternally the mercies of the Lord." Between the two escutcheons is the motto "Love is repaid by love

⁶¹⁵ Ms A 68v.

⁶¹⁶ Ms B 2v.

⁶¹⁷ Ms B 2v.

⁶¹⁸ Ms B 4r/4v.

⁶¹⁹ Ms C 18v.

⁶²⁰ Ms C 17r.

⁶²¹ Ms C 2v.

⁶²² Ms B 1r.

⁶²³ B. Buby, S.M., *Mary, the Faithful Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), [ix], quoting Goethe's *Faust*.

⁶²⁴ Ms A 85v.

done.”⁶²⁵ Such merciful love is the inheritance of Thérèse. Her task is to make it her own and to make it known.

His Mercy: Context of the Little Way

Elsewhere, the Act of Oblation to Merciful Love has been noted. Now its Marian implications are unfolded. Mother Agnes had permitted her sisters, Céline and Thérèse, to make this “holocaust” on Trinity Sunday, 11 June 1895. Later, on 24 February 1896, the day of Céline’s profession, Thérèse put into her sister’s cell a large print of the Holy Face of Jesus: “Only Son of God and the Virgin Mary” who will give to his “poor, exiled spouse” . . . “the Wheat of the Elect” . . . and “wine . . . sprouting from Virgins,” . . . “nourishment through the hands of the humble and glorious Virgin, the Mother of us both.”⁶²⁶ To the Mother of them both, Thérèse had confided the “Act of Oblation to Merciful Love,” concluding with: “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.” Later, Céline (that is, Sr. Geneviève) said that Thérèse placed in the hands of the Virgin all the merits of each day, applying them as she wished and also those that would be given to her after death.⁶²⁷

This continuous offering had a practical expression. At three o’clock each day Thérèse recited the “Hail Mary,” offering to her the work she was doing.⁶²⁸ In fact, Thérèse recommended all of her intentions and enterprises to the Virgin, thinking that all conversions must be obtained by invocation to her.⁶²⁹ Conversions were the desire of Thérèse, expressed in a letter carried on her heart the day of her profession, the liturgical celebration of Mary’s birthday, 8 September 1890. “Jesus allowed me to save many souls.”⁶³⁰ She repeats this desire in the Act of Oblation five years later: “. . . to work for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls on earth.”⁶³¹ All is placed in Mary’s hands; Thérèse, therefore, had unabashed confidence. “Her Divine Son, my *Beloved Spouse*, told us in the days of His mortal life: ‘*Whatever you ask in my Father’s name he will give it to you.*’ I am certain, then, that You will grant my desires.”⁶³²

⁶²⁵ Quoting Saint John of the Cross, from his explication in the *Spiritual Canticle*, strophe IX.

⁶²⁶ LT 183 24.II.96.

⁶²⁷ PO 282; PA 286.

⁶²⁸ CSG 89s.

⁶²⁹ PO 291; CSG 49, 89.

⁶³⁰ Cf. Mss Appendices, 317.

⁶³¹ Cf. Mss Appendices, 318.

⁶³² Mss Appendices, 318.

Divine Condescension

Why did Thérèse express such confidence, a sure signpost on the Little Way? Such confidence is born of “what the Almighty has done for me,” of “divine condescension.”⁶³³ It is for Merciful Love to come down to the little, the weak, “the lowly” (Lk 1:48, 52). Neither Mary nor Thérèse are diminished by this but “raised up” (Lk 1:52). “The Almighty” even consents to calling them Mother and Sister (Lk 8:21), such is divine condescension that the only Son of God is an obedient Son to Mary and Joseph. He hides his power; nevertheless, each deed, each attitude of his, Mary adores without fully comprehending—“like us.”⁶³⁴ Thérèse, the “little bird” of Jesus is happy to be “weak and little”⁶³⁵ but she has the desires of an eagle. Mary seemed to Thérèse much the same, because in Mary’s littleness, in her weakness, hidden from human concern, Thérèse intuited, God’s holiness triumphs!⁶³⁶ That is to say, the Word of God came down to Mary; joyously she responded in her *fiat*, faithfully guarding “all those things in her heart” (Lk 2:19); without measure, she adhered to the reality of its content and embraced the Little Child, the Word of God Himself, announced to her.⁶³⁷ Thus, concerning the divinity of her Son, Mary knew it as do all believers, “from hearing” (Rm 10:17), by the light of the word of the angel, and by the signs that followed his message—all of which meditation on the Bible always renders more comprehensible.

Perhaps, the most intense experience for Thérèse of divine condescension was in Holy Communion. Elsewhere, as has been noted, Thérèse expressed her thoughts about the significance of the Eucharist, but in her last poem she tells the Virgin what she thinks:

O Beloved Mother, despite my littleness, / Like you I possess The All-Powerful within me. / But I don’t tremble while seeing my weakness: / The treasures of a mother belong to her child, / And I am your child, O my dearest Mother. / Aren’t your virtues and your love mine too? / So when the white Host comes into my heart, / Jesus, your Sweet Lamb, thinks he is resting in you! . . .⁶³⁸

Her sisters repeated similar expressions, heard from the lips of Thérèse. Sr. Thérèse of St. Augustine recalled that while making her preparations for Communion, she

⁶³³ Cf PN 54: 5; Ms B 3v.

⁶³⁴ PN 54: 2; CJ 21.VIII.3.

⁶³⁵ Ms B 4v.

⁶³⁶ Nicolas, “La Vierge Marie,” 516.

⁶³⁷ Nicolas, “La Vierge Marie,” 512.

⁶³⁸ PN 54: 5; “Oh! I would like to sing, Mary, why I love you”—English translation comes from *The Poetry of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, Complete Edition, Texts and Introductions; trans. Donald Kinney, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1996), 211-220 (hereafter *Poetry* [trans. D. Kinney]).

did so in union with the Virgin, asking her to clothe her soul with her own dispositions.⁶³⁹ To her sister Pauline, Mother Agnes, she wrote (in her first manuscript) about this more explicitly. She imagined her soul as a piece of land and begged the Blessed Virgin to remove any rubbish that would prevent it from being free. The Virgin must set up a tent, adorn it with her own jewels, invite all the angels and saints, and provide music. Jesus would know such contentment there that His Thérèse would be happy as well.⁶⁴⁰ Communicating to a young novice, she returns to a theme mentioned above, that of clothing. She tells Sr. Marie of the Trinity, her novice, that she sometimes sees herself as a little girl three or four years old, playing with all her might, yet disheveled and dirty. Soon the Virgin comes, puts her arms around her, then straightens her apron, arranges her hair and adorns it with a ribbon or maybe even a little flower. It was enough for Thérèse to thank “her mama” and approach the festival of angels without blushing.⁶⁴¹ Thus did Thérèse respond to her sisters about Holy Communion, each thought given with thought to the receiver, such was her own delicate condescension.

Spiritual Childhood

Just as the “Almighty looked with favor on his lowly servant,” so the way of spiritual childhood emerged for Thérèse as an appropriate response to this favor of divine condescension. Thérèse’s initial predilection was for the Child Jesus, the Little One. But with her introduction to the Holy Face,⁶⁴² subsequently added to her religious name, she seemed to concentrate less on “the Child” and more on the God-Man. As God grew within her, Thérèse became less; she became the child, weak and imperfect, but full of trust. She reflected this child-like quality in her prayers to the Virgin.⁶⁴³

Her faithfulness to the *Memorare* and her trouble with the rosary and acceptance of it have already been noted. In her spontaneous prayers, as well, she revealed yet another signpost along the Little Way, a child-like disposition. Mary never failed to protect her as soon as she was invoked. “If I was troubled, I quickly turned to her, and like always, like the most tender of mothers, she took care of all my interests.”⁶⁴⁴ With the candor of a child she prayed likewise: “My good Blessed

⁶³⁹ PO 329.

⁶⁴⁰ Ms A 79v/80r.

⁶⁴¹ Cf. VT janv. 1979, 59.

⁶⁴² A 152, n. 175.

⁶⁴³ Gaucher, *The Story of a Life*, 139.

⁶⁴⁴ Ms C 26r.

Virgin, make it such that your Little Thérèse never puts holes in herself.”⁶⁴⁵ An exact theologian would see in this apparent childishness a manner of practicing conditional prayer, but she saw herself as a child and with a child’s spontaneity, graced with recourse to Mary, permitted herself this kind of trust and confidence.

When her profession was delayed, she found the sacrifice difficult, but also saw it as an opportunity to grow in “wisdom, age, and grace.”⁶⁴⁶ She wanted to come to Jesus in a beautiful dress, and the Virgin helped her “prepare the dress of my soul.”⁶⁴⁷ Meanwhile, she wrote to her sister Céline, who was on pilgrimage to Lourdes in May of 1890. She hoped the Virgin would grant her sister her graces, either of consolation or light; she urged Céline to hide well in the shadow of her virginal mantle. She herself prayed to the Virgin so much for her.⁶⁴⁸ Her prayer to the Virgin is at every instant, as indispensable to her soul as breathing is to the body. “I love her very much . . . I so love the Blessed Virgin . . . Virgin Mary, I love you with all my heart.”⁶⁴⁹

In the Spring of 1889, she wrote to Marie Guérin not to fear, it was impossible to love the Virgin too much, for Jesus is very happy when she is loved as His mother.⁶⁵⁰ In the Autumn of 1892, she wrote to Céline about the Virgin. To her, she confided one of her simplicities. Sometimes she caught herself saying, “But my Good Blessed Virgin I find that I am happier than you because I have you as a Mother and you have no Blessed Virgin to love . . . It is true that you are the Mother of Jesus but this Jesus has given us you completely . . . and on the cross He gave us you as our Mother; we are richer than you because we possess not only Jesus but you.”⁶⁵¹ She suspects the Virgin laughs at her naiveté but Thérèse knows the thought to be true. Her last written words were to echo the same sentiment.⁶⁵²

In 1894, Céline entered Carmel and brought with her the family statue of the Virgin of the Smile, the same one Mme. Martin had venerated so much, in whom she had great confidence, from whom she had received favors known to her alone.⁶⁵³ When Thérèse went to the convent door to receive the statue, she picked it up rapidly, as if picking up a pen, and easily carried it off. She astonished the sisters because it was very heavy. She put the statue on a white table brought from Buissonnets, within an antechamber near her cell, separated from it by a light wooden

⁶⁴⁵ VT juillet 1983, 231, n. 37.

⁶⁴⁶ Ms A 75r.

⁶⁴⁷ Ms A 75r.

⁶⁴⁸ LT 105 10.V.90.

⁶⁴⁹ CJ. 11.IX.7; Ms C 25v; CJ 4.IX.4.

⁶⁵⁰ PA 471.

⁶⁵¹ LT 139 19.X.92.

⁶⁵² CJ 21.VIII.3; cf. Mss III 34.

⁶⁵³ CF 1.I.63.

folding screen. It became a sort of little oratory of the Blessed Virgin.⁶⁵⁴ Before this same statue, then placed in the infirmary, at the end of her life, Thérèse wove crowns of forget-me-nots in order to give her “mama” pleasure.⁶⁵⁵

Such was her childlike simplicity and trust in the Mother of the Lord. Mary took charge of her affairs. For the Little Way of little souls is the way of pure love in pure faith, without great exterior works. Mary is the model of this love, of this faith, not as a double of Jesus, but totally dependent on Him: “daughter of Your only Son.”⁶⁵⁶ The mediating role of Mary, her maternal character which predestined her to help the Little Ones, is understood because, not only her soul, but also her life had been simple in its sublimity.⁶⁵⁷ “He remembers his promises of mercy . . . to his children “(Lk 2:54-55).

Abandonment

Her sublimity as Mother of God, Immaculate, holiest of all creatures, beloved of Christ, illumines the Marian implications of the Little Way. Indeed Mary lived the most perfect human life possible. The Church renders all this light more visible, and gives it its full value and meaning. Yet, Thérèse, not a theologian in the professional sense, is therefore content to apply spontaneously to the Virgin her notion, derived from experience, of holiness—a life lived with Jesus and for Jesus alone. Thérèse applied her experience—of abandonment, of surrender, of letting go and letting God—to the Virgin. At the foot of the Cross, Mary felt more than compassion; she felt the same abandonment as Jesus on the Cross. For Thérèse the cross was a matter of purification and participation. Jesus leads all those whom He loves along the way of His cross, the way of abandonment and suffering.

It was among her novices, especially, that Thérèse learned to let go and let God. For example, “Many times, while speaking to the novices, it happened that I invoked [Mary] and felt the benefit of her motherly protection,”⁶⁵⁸ thus renouncing her own preferences, her own conceptions, her own way, while waging war on imperfections.⁶⁵⁹ Often her novices would say she had an answer for everything: “Where do you get everything you say?”⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁴ PA 434.

⁶⁵⁵ CJ 11.9.3.

⁶⁵⁶ Dante, *Commedia Divina*, “Paradiso,” Canto XXXIII.I.

⁶⁵⁷ Nicolas, “La Vierge Marie,” 519.

⁶⁵⁸ Ms C 26r.

⁶⁵⁹ Ms C 23v.

⁶⁶⁰ Ms C 26r.

Thérèse never failed to lead them to her source. For example, at the Apostolic Process, Sr. Marthe, the companion of Thérèse in the novitiate, said that she was suffering very much. She tried to hide it from Thérèse by speaking to her in a very friendly manner. But Thérèse said to her: "You are troubled, I'm sure of it."⁶⁶¹ Sr. Marthe could not figure out how she knew.⁶⁶² Thérèse told her her secret, on a similar occasion. She never made an observation without invoking the Blessed Virgin, asking her to inspire her with a word or action that would produce the most good: "I myself am often astonished at the things I teach you. I feel simply that in speaking them to you that I am not mistaken."⁶⁶³

Sr. Mary of the Trinity related similar astonishment. In direction with Thérèse, she had things to say that bothered her. Thérèse would lead her to the statue of the "Smiling Virgin" and would say that it was not to her but to the Blessed Virgin that she told her troubles. Sr. Mary of the Trinity revealed her tensions as Thérèse listened to her confidences. Following that, Thérèse made her kiss the hand of Mary, a mark both of tenderness and submission. She gave her some advice and peace returned to her soul.⁶⁶⁴

Thérèse confided to Mother Gonzague that she was overwhelmed at the thought of directing souls.⁶⁶⁵ Her prioress assured her she had what was necessary, perhaps remembering that "His secrets" are revealed "to the little ones." "I prefer to agree very simply that the Almighty has done great things in the soul of His divine Mother's child, and the greatest thing is to have shown her her *littleness*, her impotence."⁶⁶⁶ Thérèse numbered herself among the lowly, because she had abandoned herself to the Almighty, "God [her] savior" (Lk 1:47).

Suffering

Thérèse recognized early her "excessive self-love."⁶⁶⁷ At the end of her life she could write that she understood charity,⁶⁶⁸ "Jesus alone who is acting in her."⁶⁶⁹ In between, such love cost her a great deal: it took "place in the midst of sacrifices."⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶¹ Ms C 26r.

⁶⁶² PA 418.

⁶⁶³ Cf VT juillet 1979, 228.

⁶⁶⁴ PA 471.

⁶⁶⁵ Ms C 4r

⁶⁶⁶ Ms C 4r.

⁶⁶⁷ Ms A 8v.

⁶⁶⁸ Ms C 11v.

⁶⁶⁹ Ms C 12v.

⁶⁷⁰ Ms C 8v.

Suffering alone attracted her.⁶⁷¹ Love, when it is pure, actual and perfect, renders the soul capable of experiential awareness.⁶⁷² Thérèse became capable of living “now” and accepted her ignorance of the “hour.” Thérèse suffered as Mary did, enlightened little-by-little, keeping all things in her heart and turning them over and over. Such suffering, such love, such faith is mentioned in the Lucan Marian text, “narratives . . . coming from the Virgin herself,”⁶⁷³ who “invites us to comprehend also how much her suffering, her love, her faith was human, meditative, progressive, going from light to light, rather than given perfectly in the first instant.”⁶⁷⁴

Once again, Thérèse the novice mistress perceived a suffering heart. On Christmas Eve 1896, she left a note for her sister Céline (i.e., Sr. Geneviève). The envelope was labeled as sent from the Virgin to her child without ease in a foreign land. The Virgin told her how much she rejoiced her heart and the heart of her child. But she neither perceived nor understood this, and her soul sorrowed. “I would like to be able to console you; if I do not do it, it is because I know the prize of suffering and anguish of heart.”⁶⁷⁵

In the last months of her life, Thérèse reflected on the commingling of this abandonment and suffering. “Our Lord really died as a Victim of Love, and you see what his agony was.”⁶⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Thérèse desired a beautiful death to please her sisters. She asked the Blessed Virgin to arrange it because asking her was not like asking God. She did not want to oblige God. It seemed to her other saints sought the intercession of the Virgin; just so, Thérèse decided to go to her first, seeming immediately to receive the grace she requested: “Do it yourselves and see.”⁶⁷⁷ She requested to die and told the Blessed Virgin so; yet said she could do as she pleased with her “little wish.”⁶⁷⁸ For “when we pray to the Blessed Virgin and she doesn’t answer, that’s a sign she doesn’t want to. Then it’s better to leave her alone and not torment ourselves.”⁶⁷⁹ In her prayers to the Virgin, Thérèse put no limit. She might hide her suffering from the Good God, whom she always wanted to make happy, but she did not hide anything from Mary.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷¹ Ms A 32r; Ms C 10v.

⁶⁷² Nicolas, “La Vierge Marie,” 514.

⁶⁷³ Nicolas, “La Vierge Marie,” 513.

⁶⁷⁴ L. Cameli, “Mary, Mother of Sorrows: The Mystery of Comfort and Hope,” *Chicago Studies* 27 (April 1988): 8, n. 1.

⁶⁷⁵ LT 211 25.XIII.96.

⁶⁷⁶ CJ 4.VI.1.

⁶⁷⁷ PA 156.

⁶⁷⁸ CJ 6.VI.9.

⁶⁷⁹ CJ 23.VIII.8.

⁶⁸⁰ PA 471.

In the course of her dying days, she did not guard her thoughts but expressed quite openly, "I have asked the Blessed Virgin that I be not so tired and withdrawn as I have been all these days. I really felt I was causing you pain. This evening, she answered me."⁶⁸¹ Neither Mother Agnes nor Céline could stop looking at Thérèse who that day was no longer suffering and seemed transfigured. Getting better to her surprise, Thérèse forced herself not to be sad. "The Blessed Virgin really carried out my message well . . . I tell her often: Tell Him never to put Himself out on my account. . . . I am totally content with what God does, I desire only His will."⁶⁸² Did Thérèse no longer suffer because she had so completely abandoned herself to "God her Savior" or did she suffer like Him who cried out: "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mk 15:34).⁶⁸³ "I was asking the Blessed Virgin yesterday evening to stop me from coughing in order that Sister Geneviève would be able to sleep, but I added: If you don't do it, I'll love you even more."⁶⁸⁴

During her illness, her sisters moved the miraculous statue of the Virgin of the Smile into the infirmary, at the foot of Thérèse's bed (as has been noted earlier). "My good Blessed Virgin, here is what gives me the desire to leave: I tire out my little sisters, and then I give them pain when being so sick . . . Yes, I would like to go."⁶⁸⁵ Just hours before she died she murmured, "O my good Blessed Virgin, come to my help."⁶⁸⁶ Such were her last prayers in which she repeated so often what she wanted from Mary: to be protected in her woundedness.⁶⁸⁷ Once again, it is the cry of "Mama," not Thérèse, the child, bouncing off each step of the stairs and calling out to Mme. Martin, but now, in her dying, her calling is directed to her heavenly mother with each step of her life.⁶⁸⁸ In her weakness, in her suffering—both physical and spiritual, she had the same need to be sustained, the same confidence to be protected by her whom "all generations call blest" (Lk 1:48).

Hidden Virtues

"Let the priests, then, show us practicable virtues!"⁶⁸⁹ Thérèse was struck by the ordinariness of Mary's life as revealed by the Gospels. Her life consisted of hum-

⁶⁸¹ CJ 4.VI.1.

⁶⁸² CJ 10.VI.

⁶⁸³ Cf. "Introduction," *St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Her Last Conversations*, trans. and ed. J. Clarke, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1977), 30.

⁶⁸⁴ CJ 15.VIII.4.

⁶⁸⁵ CJ 28.VIII.9.

⁶⁸⁶ CJ 30. IX.

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. Ms A 32v, 35v, 57r; Ms C 25v, 26r.

⁶⁸⁸ Cf. Ms A 5r/v; A, 18, n. 6.

⁶⁸⁹ CJ 23.VIII.9.

ble work, like the majority of women, and it was hidden from the majority of people, most Carmelite in its expression: "hidden, silent, interior by preference." Mary's life, for Thérèse, is without visions, interior words, revelations, ecstatic phenomena, or charismatic graces like miracles or prophecies. Thus, the highest love can be attained on this earth with neither extraordinary light nor felt experience, according to Thérèse, because this was the Virgin's own inner life.⁶⁹⁰ The Hiddenness of Mary is echoed in the Gospel even to her Assumption. "It is necessary above all that we can imitate her."⁶⁹¹ Thérèse prefers imitation to admiration, and "Mary's life was so simple!"⁶⁹²

Thérèse's novices knew this well. In order to excite one of them to virtue, a novice said, "Thérèse competed with me to make little sacrifices which were marked each day, placing the list each Sunday at the foot of the Virgin."⁶⁹³ Thérèse's love manifested itself in a multitude of these kinds of little actions in which the Virgin, together with Jesus, intervened. Thus, for example, she struggled with herself to care for Mother Gonzague's sisters from Tours.⁶⁹⁴ She struggled not to succumb to thoughts against authority because of Mother Gonzague's imposition, but implored God to help her overcome them. She did this by thinking she prepared the night-light not for Mother Gonzague's relatives, but for the Mother and her Child, no longer feeling angry and fidgety, but peaceful and sweet. Even if she had taken the wrong lamp and had to do it over, the thought of the Virgin and Jesus needing it filled her with such sweetness that she resolved never to question obedience which had gained for her such delight. This child Jesus was obedient to His Mother; could she do less? Moreover, she encouraged another novice to make a trousseau for the Infant at Christmas, in the same spirit of obedience.⁶⁹⁵ She herself offered morsels of her food to the Holy Family as she ate in the refectory.⁶⁹⁶ Hidden, silent, ordinary—such practicable virtues profited her a great deal.

Such virtues were those of the Virgin. Thérèse constantly represented Mary as an active presence in heaven as she had been on earth, so human; so approachable, so imitable. Mary's life was a continual witnessing that heaven is in continuity with earth: there, in heaven, flowers what had been lived here on earth; there is seen in full light what was possessed in darkness here; there is revealed what was

⁶⁹⁰ Nicolas, "La Vierge Marie," 515.

⁶⁹¹ CJ 23.VIII.9.

⁶⁹² CJ 23.VIII.9.

⁶⁹³ PA 434.

⁶⁹⁴ CJ 12.VII.1.

⁶⁹⁵ Cf. Ms C 13r.

⁶⁹⁶ CJ 24.VII.1.

hidden here; there is proclaimed what was silent here; there is extraordinary what was ordinary here: the greatness of Mary's soul, there and here favored, there and here blessed: "Holy is his name" (Lk 1:49).

PART II

Thérèse's Life: Manuscript C (June, 1897)

By the time Thérèse had written Manuscript C, in obedience to the wish of Mother Gonzague, she had been perfected through suffering. To paraphrase Hebrews 5:8, daughter though she was she learned obedience through what she suffered; for Mother Gonzague⁶⁹⁷ had given her to drink of the living waters of humiliation.⁶⁹⁸ This obedience curbed Thérèse's self-seeking ego and the living waters of humiliation made her grow.⁶⁹⁹ Writing under obedience, Thérèse felt powerless to express all that was within her soul and longed for heaven where each would be understood in a single glance.⁷⁰⁰ However, here below, those who are able to express themselves, those who are more enlightened, show God's love inasmuch as those more enlightened nourish with their thoughts those less enlightened. Nonetheless, perfection does not consist in receiving spiritual lights; thinking beautiful thoughts is nothing without doing good works.⁷⁰¹ Thus, within the context of doing the job of Novice Mistress while Mother Gonzague held the title, of dying from tuberculosis, of enduring a dark trial of faith, Thérèse, like Jesus, was perfected through suffering in body, mind and soul. To Mother Gonzague she gave the fruits of her passion: thoughts on communion, contemplation, prayer, faith and, above all, the penetration of fraternal and divine charity.

Presbyter (the Mature)

Thérèse's thought, now brought to maturity, was to nourish novices; Mother Gonzague had appointed her Novice Mistress in March, 1896. While Novice Mistress she learned much because she was forced to practice what she was teaching to others.⁷⁰² However, she would rather receive reproofs than give them, while trying

⁶⁹⁷ Ms C 11r; cf. K. Rahner, "Reflections on Obedience," *Cross Currents* 10/4 (1960): 363-374: "The defective fulfillment of the higher obligations cruelly lays bare short-comings."

⁶⁹⁸ Ms C 2r.

⁶⁹⁹ Ms C 32r.

⁷⁰⁰ Ms A 56v.

⁷⁰¹ Ms C 19v.

⁷⁰² Ms C 19r.

not to attract hearts to herself but to lead them to God and to see Jesus in their Superior.⁷⁰³ In directing souls, she realized that while all have the same battles to fight, there are a great many differences: "Souls vary more than faces do," Fr. Pichon used to say.⁷⁰⁴ It was prayer and sacrifice which gave her all her strength in directing souls. For instance, she told one Novice that a Carmelite's duty was to pray and not to write letters in order to obtain conversions; shortly thereafter they, having joined in prayer, won over the sought-after convert without the letter.⁷⁰⁵ Again and again, Thérèse received nourishment for souls from Jesus while renouncing her own likings, her own conceptions, her own way, while waging war on imperfections.⁷⁰⁶ In the eyes of others she may have traveled the road of honors, but deep within her heart she suffered.

As Novice Mistress, Thérèse saw her greatest asset in littleness; she did not disagree with Mother Gonzague's assessment of her humility. God had done great things for her and the greatest thing was to make her powerless.⁷⁰⁷ If, when the veil was lifted from her imperfections and the novices let her know about it, then she counted it a joy⁷⁰⁸; for not only was she content in her weakness but she gloried in it.⁷⁰⁹

Like the psalmist's silver, Thérèse was seven times refined by suffering. When she saw Pauline go to Carmel, her soul was far from being mature and she was to pass through many crucibles of suffering like Pauline's departure before attaining the end she so greatly desired.⁷¹⁰ Her end was glory and her glory was to become a great saint, despite her weakness and imperfections. She aspired to holiness and virtue while reading the account of Joan of Arc; but she did not realize then that one had to suffer much in order to reach sanctity.⁷¹¹ Sometimes, however, virtue can be mistaken as an imperfection and vice-versa. For example, once the Procuratrix needed a third party to go to the door to let in some workmen; Thérèse rose slowly in order to give this small pleasure to her companion, but another sister remonstrated with her for her slowness: "Since one can take little acts of virtue as imperfection, one can also be mistaken in taking for virtue what is nothing but imperfection."⁷¹² Yet, suffering itself becomes the greatest of joys when it is sought as the most precious of treasures.⁷¹³

⁷⁰³ Ms C 23r.

⁷⁰⁴ Ms C 23v.

⁷⁰⁵ Ms C 24v.

⁷⁰⁶ Ms C 23r.

⁷⁰⁷ Ms C 4r.

⁷⁰⁸ Ms C 26v.

⁷⁰⁹ Ms C 15r.

⁷¹⁰ Ms A 27r.

⁷¹¹ Ms A 32v.

⁷¹² Ms C 13r.

⁷¹³ Ms C 10v.

Sacrament of Unity

From her earliest days Thérèse was devoted to the Mass and the Holy Eucharist. Each Sunday, she waited for Céline to bring her the Blessed Bread. If there was none left at Church, then Céline at home would take a piece of bread, solemnly pronounce a "Hail Mary" over it and give it to Thérèse; only then would she be satisfied. With Céline, too, she experienced another kind of communion, a communion of spiritual sharing.⁷¹⁴ At her own First Communion, Thérèse felt that she was loved and she wanted to vanish like a drop of water in the immensity of the ocean. On that day, she wanted to imitate Pauline, already in Carmel, "who gave herself irrevocably to Him who gave Himself so lovingly to me."⁷¹⁵ But even this brilliant day was followed by darkness: "Only the day of the . . . unique, the eternal communion of heaven will be endless."⁷¹⁶ During her travels in Italy, she and Céline received Communion in the House of Loreto: "What shall our happiness be when we receive Communion in the eternal abode of the King of Heaven?"⁷¹⁷ There, in heaven, Thérèse hoped to see her joy never ended; there, in heaven, there would no longer be the sadness of departing; there, in heaven, His home will be her home forevermore. But, Communion in heaven begins on earth; in Carmel, Thérèse realized: "Unity must take place in the midst of sacrifices."⁷¹⁸

Communion, both in heaven and on earth, supported her contemplation; for she believed that no one could taste this joy anywhere else but in religious communities.⁷¹⁹ Yet, during their childhood games, Thérèse and Céline played at being hermits at Les Buissonnets. Everything was done with such mutual understanding, silence and so religiously that it was perfect; however, when they walked through the streets with their eyes closed and knocked over a fruiter's stand, their game was put to a stop.⁷²⁰ Thérèse made her most profound meditations in bed before Céline came in to dress her.⁷²¹ On her free afternoons from the Benedictine Abbey, she went behind her bed to an empty space and thought about God, life and eternity. This was the answer given to one of the nuns who asked her; the sister only laughed at Thérèse's simple, profound but true answer.⁷²² Her First Communion filled her with a contemplation of love, but she recognized:

⁷¹⁴ Ms A 7r.

⁷¹⁵ Ms A 35v.

⁷¹⁶ Ms A 35v.

⁷¹⁷ Ms A 60r.

⁷¹⁸ Ms C 9r.

⁷¹⁹ Ms A 33v.

⁷²⁰ Ms A 23r/23v.

⁷²¹ Ms A 31r.

⁷²² Ms A 33v.

There are certain things that lose their perfume as soon as they are exposed to the air; there are deep spiritual thoughts which cannot be expressed in human language without losing their intimate and heavenly meaning.⁷²³

Prayer

She could only describe her prayer in similar terms:

Prayer is an aspiration of the heart; it is a simple glance directed to heaven; it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.⁷²⁴

Thérèse was lifted up by the fervor of her sisters when they recited the Divine Office. Yet, to her shame, she could not pray the rosary without distraction. In times of aridity, an "Our Father" and "Hail Mary" satisfied her.⁷²⁵ The apostolic zeal of a Carmelite embraces the whole world; therefore, desiring to be like her holy mother Teresa, she prayed for the intentions of the Holy Father which surely must have embraced the world. But how could she pray for them, especially for two missionaries entrusted to her care? A simple soul, like herself, wanted a simple means: "Draw me; we shall run after you in the odor of your ointments" (Cant 1:3): "'Draw me' suffices."⁷²⁶ The other souls whom she loved were drawn, likewise, without effort. Moreover, her prayer for those united to her was the Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John 17. She quoted it almost exactly in her manuscript and asked that she might repeat it on her last night in this exile.⁷²⁷

Faith

François Mauriac writes in *Vipers' Tangle*:

In fact nobody goes through life with his face uncovered—nobody at all. Most people ape highmindedness, nobility. Unknown to themselves, they are conforming to types, literary or otherwise. The saints know this: they hate and despise themselves because they see themselves as they really are.⁷²⁸

⁷²³ Ms B 1v.

⁷²⁴ Ms C 25r/25v.

⁷²⁵ Ms C 25v.

⁷²⁶ Ms C 34r/34v.

⁷²⁷ I would like to think this prayer was granted to Thérèse just before she died, because she had an ecstasy that lasted the "space of a Credo" (according to M. Agnes of Jesus: DE, 384); but this is only conjecture; no one else holds this opinion.

⁷²⁸ F. Mauriac, *Vipers' Tangle*, trans. W. B. Wells (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1957), 178.

In her prayer, Thérèse saw herself as she was in God's eyes: a poor little thing, nothing at all—a conviction that the praise of creatures could not change.⁷²⁹ She became convinced of this by passing through many trials: as a child she suffered with sadness; as a Carmelite she suffered with peace and joy, even the temptation against faith.⁷³⁰ More and more, her suffering became interior, less apparent to creatures, despite her beautiful poems which expressed the happiness of heaven and the eternal possession of God in which she wanted to believe.⁷³¹ Yet, she was happy to suffer even this if she could prevent or make reparation for one single sin against faith.⁷³² She desired suffering and this trial of faith mingled a salutary bitterness with all her joys.⁷³³

Love

Even in her struggle of faith, Thérèse's love became constant and continual, without struggling to practice it.⁷³⁴ In the last of her life, God gave her to understand charity in a way she had never understood it before,⁷³⁵ by penetrating its mysterious depths.⁷³⁶ First, the teachings of Jesus are contrary to the feelings of nature; without the help of His grace it would be impossible not only to put them into practice but even to understand them.⁷³⁷ Nevertheless, she began to understand love of neighbor within the context of the Last Supper. How and why did Jesus love His disciples? For those He calls His friends and brothers, He laid down His life. There is no greater love than this (Jn 15:13-15).⁷³⁸ On every page of the Gospel, the Lord explains in what this new commandment consists. Thérèse gives her own commentary on this commandment, by reflecting on her own desire to practice it heroically.

Thérèse understood that charity consisted in bearing with the faults of others, in not being surprised at their weakness, in being edified by the smallest acts of virtue we see them practice and above all in loving them to distraction.⁷³⁹ It is no longer a question of loving one's neighbor as oneself, but of loving him/her as Jesus

⁷²⁹ Ms C 2r.

⁷³⁰ Ms C 4v.

⁷³¹ Ms C 7v.

⁷³² Ms C 7v.

⁷³³ Ms C 31r.

⁷³⁴ Ms C 13v.

⁷³⁵ Ms C 11v.

⁷³⁶ Ms C 18v.

⁷³⁷ Ms C 12r/12v.

⁷³⁸ Ms C 12v.

⁷³⁹ Ms C 12r.

has loved and will love him/her until the consummation of the ages.⁷⁴⁰ Yet, it is by the power of Jesus within her that she loved.⁷⁴¹

Love enabled Thérèse to go against herself. One sister whom she found very disagreeable received prayers and all possible service with a smile; Thérèse would rather take flight from the situation than do otherwise.⁷⁴² Only charity could expand the heart in this way.⁷⁴³ Even the gifts of mind and heart—like a witty remark, or a light in prayer—belong to others, even if they wished to quote it as their own without attributing it to its proper source. Love is nourished, Thérèse saw, only by such sacrifices, and the more a soul refuses natural satisfactions, the stronger and more disinterested becomes her tenderness, rather than if it had concentrated upon one egotistical and unfruitful love.⁷⁴⁴

Furthermore, Thérèse contended that it was easy to love saints, but what about loving those who lack judgment and good manners or are touchy: "I want to be friendly with everybody, to give joy to Jesus, to spread a banquet for my sisters of loving and joyful charity."⁷⁴⁵ Thérèse had to guide old Sister St. Pierre from the chapel to the refectory. The old Sister would grumble continually and it cost Thérèse much. But this little act left her so full of joy and she did it with so much love that she could not have done better had she been guiding Jesus Himself. However, when a small sacrifice like this slipped from her, she was left with less peace, but more vigilant for the next one to come her way.⁷⁴⁶ One sister's clicking sounds in chapel made her break out in a nervous sweat. Another sister splashed her with dirty water, unknowingly, in the laundry. Thérèse did not show consternation at these; rather, she was a little soul and these little sacrifices she offered to God.⁷⁴⁷ But little sacrifices touched by Divine Love have infinite merit.⁷⁴⁸

"So it is not a question of man's willing or doing but of God's mercy" (Rm 9:16). "Your love has gone before me and it has grown within me, and now it is an abyss whose depths cannot be fathomed."⁷⁴⁹ Love attracts love and Thérèse borrowed the love of Jesus in order to love (Jn 17:23). "I cannot conceive a greater

⁷⁴⁰ Ms C 12v.

⁷⁴¹ Ms C 12v.

⁷⁴² Ms C 14v.

⁷⁴³ Ms C 16r.

⁷⁴⁴ Ms C 22r.

⁷⁴⁵ Ms C 28v.

⁷⁴⁶ Ms C 29r.

⁷⁴⁷ Ms C 31r.

⁷⁴⁸ "Unde qui ex maiori charitate laborat, licet minorem laborem patiat plus de praemio essentialis accipiet."—Thomas Aquinas, "Super primam epistolam ad Corinthios," Caput III, Lectio II, N. 143, in *Opera Omnia*, Vol. X (Romae: Marietti, 1953).

⁷⁴⁹ Ms C 35r.

immensity of love than the one which it has pleased you to give me freely, without any merit on my part.”⁷⁵⁰

“Draw me,” she prays, “and we shall run.” “For no man can come after me, unless the Father who sent me draw him” (Jn 6:44).⁷⁵¹ Like an iron rod transformed in the fire of a forge, Thérèse desired to be drawn into the flames of Divine Love, to be united closely with her Beloved, to have Him act in her and thereby draw other souls along with her. She would lift the world, like Archimedes with a lever and a fulcrum: the fulcrum, Jesus Alone; the lever, prayer which burns with a fire of love. Repeating the Publican’s prayer, imitating the Magdalene’s loving audacity, she ends her manuscript:

Yes, I feel it; 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, 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.⁷⁵²

Her Final Poem, on Mary (May, 1897)

All of the above, in regard to Thérèse’s development in faith, love and prayer, sets the context for what follows in regard to Thérèse’s final poem on Mary. Sr. Geneviève noted that this was Thérèse’s swan song, in the full force of the term.⁷⁵³ With her first hemoptysis, on the night of 3 April 1896, Thérèse’s health began to decline.⁷⁵⁴ But as her health declined, she sensed more than ever the role of fraternal charity in Christian life and her mission.⁷⁵⁵ Instinctively she turned to the Blessed Virgin as she had throughout her life. “My heart was entirely filled with a heavenly peace today. I prayed so much to the Blessed Virgin last night, thinking that her beautiful month was about to begin!”⁷⁵⁶

Her poem on Mary is not an outpouring of emotion, nor the recounting of personal favors received through Mary’s intercession, but rather all that she thinks about the Blessed Virgin. For Thérèse, “idea” and “thought” are not the same.⁷⁵⁷ An idea frequently had the sense of project or plan in her writings; but, her

⁷⁵⁰ Ms C 35r.

⁷⁵¹ Ms C 35v.

⁷⁵² Ms C 36v.

⁷⁵³ *Poésies*, Tome I, 238, n. 1.

⁷⁵⁴ Ms C 5r.

⁷⁵⁵ Ms C 11v; DJ 21.V.2; CJ 9.VI.3.

⁷⁵⁶ CJ 1.V.2.

⁷⁵⁷ *Poésies*, Tome I, 238, n. 2.

thoughts are bathed in prayer.⁷⁵⁸ It is with a prayerful attitude that one approaches this almost liturgical hymn of two hundred alexandrines.⁷⁵⁹ It is important to note that Thérèse, at this point in her life, can only nourish herself on the truth.⁷⁶⁰ She desires to see things as they really are.⁷⁶¹ Hence her thoughts on Mary are concerned only with her "real life, not her supposed life."⁷⁶² Yet for previous commentators on Thérèse this was difficult to ascertain, as they did not have the most primitive text. Combes, for example, takes all of these previous commentators to task because they disregarded the text⁷⁶³; sought edification, rather than exegesis; pious lessons, rather than the fullness, nuances, and synthesis of Thérèse's thought.⁷⁶⁴ Combes argues that only this poem is worthy of study, as it reveals all that Thérèse thought about the Virgin. Yet, it has been the thesis of this commentator that her Marian thought develops, matures, and refines itself gradually. This is why this poem has not, more or less, been interspersed throughout the present text. Now it is for Thérèse to sing *Pourquoi je l'aime, O Marie*, to tell us all she thinks of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Stanzas One and Two

Pourquoi je l'aime, O Marie, the title of the poem, is not a question. Rather, the title expresses all that Thérèse was thinking about Mary and the reasons for her love. After some hesitation, the title was retained by Thérèse.⁷⁶⁵ But she had no hesitation about its content. Thérèse is resolved to explain her love and not merely give a catalog of ideas.⁷⁶⁶ Although this is not necessarily the place to speak of Thérèse's epistemology, it bears repeating that Thérèse knows by the connaturality of love; she understands by participation.⁷⁶⁷ In the first stanza, she hands on her

⁷⁵⁸ Ms A 33v.

⁷⁵⁹ *Poésies*, Tome I, 238.

⁷⁶⁰ CJ 5.VIII.4.

⁷⁶¹ CJ 21.VII.4.

⁷⁶² CJ 21.VIII.3.

⁷⁶³ Combes, 77, n. 7.

⁷⁶⁴ Combes, 82-83, nn. 30-35.

⁷⁶⁵ François de Sainte-Marie, "La dévotion mariale de Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: 'Marie plus mère que reine,'" in *La maternité spirituelle de Marie: Rapports doctrinaux [du] VIIIe Congrès Marial National, Lisieux, 5-9 juillet 1961*, 129-148 (Paris, 1962), 138 (hereafter FSM).

⁷⁶⁶ *Poésies*, Tome II, 297-298.

⁷⁶⁷ *Summa Theologica* IIa-IIae, q. 188 a. 6c; Ia IIae, q. 28 a. 2.

contemplation by giving three "pourquoi" (three reasons) for her love. From the above, her first reason is deduced⁷⁶⁸:

*Oh! je voudrais chanter Marie pourquoi je l'aime.*⁷⁶⁹

If Thérèse passes from thought to love, it is to underscore her loving participation in all that she is about to express in her poem. Thérèse writes as a victim of holocaust to Merciful Love⁷⁷⁰; it is this offering that has given her strength in her trials. Heaven is closed to her; it seems like a wall has been thrown up to the sky,⁷⁷¹ a black hole where we can see nothing.⁷⁷² Yet she has "astonishing peace."⁷⁷³ In this, the Blessed Virgin is present; she is not hidden by the night of faith.⁷⁷⁴ Thérèse affirms her love for the Blessed Virgin⁷⁷⁵ and uses her as her commissioner with God, who is not to trouble Himself with His little Thérèse.⁷⁷⁶ Thus, she can truly say her heart is thrilled (a strong verb), laminated by trial,⁷⁷⁷ by a Thérèse who no longer knows any joy in life⁷⁷⁸:

*Pourquoi ton nom si doux fait tressaillir mon coeur.*⁷⁷⁹

The third reason for her love is one of the most fundamental and universal elements of the Little Way:

*Et pourquoi la pensée de ta grandeur suprême
Ne saurait à mon âme inspirer de frayeur.*⁷⁸⁰

Thérèse acknowledges Mary's greatness but does not fear it.⁷⁸¹ If Thérèse desired to articulate her thoughts on Mary, why did she not start with Mary's supreme grandeur? Certainly, she was captivated by it. For, according to Sr. Geneviève, she forgot to eat and drink as she listened to A. C. Emmerich being read in the refec-

⁷⁶⁸ PN 54: 1 and 2.

⁷⁶⁹ "Oh! I would like to sing, *Mary, why I love you*"—English translation from *Poetry* (trans. D. Kinney), 211-220.

⁷⁷⁰ Cf. Ms. Auto. p. 318-320, made 9.VI.95.

⁷⁷¹ Ms C 7v.

⁷⁷² CJ 28.VIII.3.

⁷⁷³ CJ 24.IX.10.

⁷⁷⁴ CJ 8.VII.11.

⁷⁷⁵ CJ 23.VIII.2, 5.

⁷⁷⁶ CJ 10.VI.

⁷⁷⁷ *Poésies*, Tome II, 298, nn. 1, 2.

⁷⁷⁸ CJ 13.VII.17.

⁷⁷⁹ Why your sweet name thrills my heart.

⁷⁸⁰ And why the thought of your supreme greatness / Could not bring fear to my soul.

⁷⁸¹ Cf. LT 226.

tory.⁷⁸² At the same time, many of the nuns were taken with the mystical revelations of Mary of Agreda.⁷⁸³ Yet, Thérèse rejects this approach and others like it:

*Si je contemplais dans la sublime gloire
Et surpassant l'éclat de tous les bienheureux
Que je suis ton enfant je ne pourrais le croire
O Marie, devant toi, je baisserais les yeux!...*⁷⁸⁴

Thérèse's love of Mary is not that of a subject for its Queen, but of a child for its mother. Of course, Thérèse is convinced of the grandeur of the Blessed Virgin; she does not condemn those who contemplate Mary as such. Yet, she feels that this is a contemplation of separation. Thérèse prefers not just union but unity: "in unity there is only one."⁷⁸⁵

We know very well that the Blessed Virgin is Queen of heaven and earth, but she is more Mother than Queen; and we should not say, on account of her prerogatives, that she surpasses all the saints in glory just as the sun at its rising makes the stars disappear from sight.⁷⁸⁶ My God! how strange that would be! A mother who makes her children's glory vanish! I myself think just the contrary. I believe she'll increase the splendor of the elect very much.⁷⁸⁷

Hence, she has no desire for a duality, a separation caused by admiration and veneration. Thérèse cautions that this may cause "estrangement,"⁷⁸⁸ where "one will go off into some little corner."⁷⁸⁹ No, only the child at fault lowers her eyes before her mother.⁷⁹⁰

Thérèse uses the word "child" seven times in this poem; the word "mother" appears twenty-one times (fourteen times in reference to Thérèse, seven times in reference to Jesus). Indeed, "your child" is one of the key words of the entire poem.⁷⁹¹ The underlying sense of this phrase appears throughout the life of Thérèse. It has the same sense as when Thérèse became a child of Mary,⁷⁹² as when at Notre Dame des Victoires she decided to call her "maman,"⁷⁹³ as when she asks "her dear

⁷⁸² FSM, 139.

⁷⁸³ FSM, 139.

⁷⁸⁴ If I gazed on you in your sublime glory, / Surpassing the splendor of all the blessed, / I could not believe that I am your child. / O Mary, before you I would lower my eyes!...

⁷⁸⁵ CJ 23.VII.5.

⁷⁸⁶ Concerning P. Argentan, to whom Thérèse refers here, see DE 575.

⁷⁸⁷ CJ 21.VIII.3.

⁷⁸⁸ CJ 21.VIII.3.

⁷⁸⁹ CJ 21.VIII.3.

⁷⁹⁰ Cf. LT 191.

⁷⁹¹ Cf. *Poésies*, Tome II, 298; 1,7; 2,7; 5,5; 25,8; 2,1; 5,4; 24,8.

⁷⁹² Ms A 40v; LT 23, signed "Thérèse e.M."

⁷⁹³ Ms A, 57r.

mother" to present to the Trinity her "offering of holocaust."⁷⁹⁴ This mother-child relationship is more than an external relationship of dependence, protection, or mediation; rather, it is an intimate bond, a true communion of life, "from union to unity."⁷⁹⁵ It is easy to see that a contemplation of separation would easily damage, if not totally destroy, this intimate bond. In the rest of the poem, Thérèse takes care to explore the nature and depth of such a profound union between mother and child.

In the second stanza, the child of the Virgin who smiled at her does not lower her eyes before Her. She tells Mary plainly that she looks upon her only as her life is revealed in the Gospels. In choosing only the Gospels, Thérèse adopts the common wealth of all Christians. Considering the context of the time, which seemed to rely more on the private revelation and mystical experience, her choice of public revelation—namely, the Gospel—seems unforeseeable and paradoxical.⁷⁹⁶

*Il faut pour qu'un enfant puisse chérir sa mère
Qu'elle pleure avec lui, partage ses douleurs.*⁷⁹⁷

Thérèse offers as a condition, but gives no reason why, a mother must share in the sorrows of her child.⁷⁹⁸ Perhaps Thérèse's own condition of suffering offers a clue: "I understood that she suffered not only in soul, but also in body; she suffered a lot on her journeys from the cold, the heat, and from fatigue . . . yes, she knew what it was to suffer."⁷⁹⁹ Thérèse seems to reason that if the Blessed Virgin could not share our sorrows in this valley of tears, than there is fixed a great abyss between Thérèse and all the Saints. Thérèse resolves to bridge this gap between Mary's glory and the suffering of the human race, not to mention her own. Thérèse emphasizes this communitarian aspect by de-emphasizing her own Marian graces. All come to the Queen of Heaven and witness her goodness and power; through her, all experience a growth in holiness and spiritual progress. Yet, this Queen, who now no longer suffers, shares with her children their tears and sorrow. This precisely is their consolation:

*O ma Mère chérie sur la rive étrangère
Pour m'attirer⁸⁰⁰ à toi, que tu versas de pleurs!...*⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁴ Ms. Auto, p. 318.

⁷⁹⁵ CJ 23.VIII.5.

⁷⁹⁶ Combes, 89; FSM, 138.

⁷⁹⁷ If a child is to cherish his mother, / She has to cry with him and share his sorrows.

⁷⁹⁸ FSM, 141.

⁷⁹⁹ CJ 20.VIII.11.

⁸⁰⁰ Cf. *Poésies*, Tome II, 299; this word appears sixty-five times in Thérèse's writings as the initiative of love.

⁸⁰¹ O my dearest Mother, on this foreign shore / How many tears you shed to draw me to you!...

Combes stresses that this relationship of mother and child is not a matter of Thérèse superimposing her own relationship with her natural mother.⁸⁰² Yet, I think it is an important analogue. This poem is not merely the experience of Thérèse, but the fruit of her evangelical meditation⁸⁰³:

*En méditant la vie dans le saint Evangile
J'ose te regarder et m'approcher de toi*⁸⁰⁴

To have lived in this exile, to have felt tears, to have taken the initiative to desire the love of Thérèse, the Queen knew and chose the method that would attract, like a magnet, this child to herself. The manner of attraction is not a prodigy of miracles,⁸⁰⁵ but the mediation of the Gospels. Just as all are drawn to Mary, the Queen of Heaven, so all can come to the Gospels that reveal the life of the humble Virgin of Nazareth. In the Gospels, Mary's glory has not yet separated her from the human race. Hence, Thérèse confidently, even boldly, approaches her and raises her eyes to her. The Gospels, as they have come to do so in her own life, sustain and nourish the child-like love of this poem.⁸⁰⁶ Moreover, Thérèse makes the point to her sister, Mother Agnes, during the very month that she writes this poem: "As for me, with the exception of the Gospels, I no longer find anything in books. The Gospels are enough."⁸⁰⁷

*Me croire ton enfant ne m'est pas difficile
Car je te vois mortelle et souffrant comme moi....*⁸⁰⁸

Three points, then, are to be noted. As has been already pointed out, the Gospels were all-sufficient for Thérèse at the end of her life. Thérèse senses that the love of the Gospel and the love of Mary are one, like two tuning forks of the same frequency in sympathetic resonance. Thérèse knows the Gospels by heart⁸⁰⁹ and they enlightened her mind.⁸¹⁰ The Gospels, in short, consumed Thérèse.

Secondly, for Thérèse, human impossibilities are resolved by the Gospels, as something revealed to her by faith.⁸¹¹ For example, her elevator image recalls that it is God who draws close to us.⁸¹² This is the "littleness" of her Little Way. Sim-

⁸⁰² Combes, 90.

⁸⁰³ CJ 21.VIII.3: "I have said everything I would preach about her."

⁸⁰⁴ In pondering *your life in the holy Gospels*, / I dare look at you and come near you.

⁸⁰⁵ Jn 6:30, "You look for signs . . ."

⁸⁰⁶ CJ 15.V.3.

⁸⁰⁷ CJ 15.V.3.

⁸⁰⁸ It's not difficult for me to believe I'm your child, / For I see you human and suffering like me....

⁸⁰⁹ CJ 12.IX.

⁸¹⁰ CJ 29.V.

⁸¹¹ Cf. LT 226.

⁸¹² Ms C 3r.

ilarly, the Queen of Heaven draws close to her child in order to heal her, making Thérèse love Mary all the more.⁸¹³ Moreover, the Little Way does not reduce human importance. What is “little” about the Theresian “way” is the distance between God and Man; it pleased God to abolish the distance by the Incarnation of the Second Person. What remains to human beings is to be completely dependent on this divine initiative.

Thus, thirdly, Mary bridged the gap between the Divine and human by offering to God her mortal life and by accepting suffering. But Mary’s gift of self did not excuse Thérèse from the necessary efforts to learn this evangelical truth, nor to scrutinize its depths, nor to assume the heroism of imitation. The proof of offering and acceptance is in this poem’s intense Marian meditation, energetically applied to every aspect of the relationship between the Mother and her child.

In the first two stanzas of her poem, Thérèse has contrasted two spiritualities. On the one hand, there are the great souls who may admire the glories of the Virgin, but, because of this admiration, fear imitation and thus miss out on union with their Queen. On the other hand, others put aside Mary’s glories in order to concentrate on her humble earthly life as it is expressed in the Gospels. These others prepare themselves for eternal glory by deliberately sharing in the human condition of the Incarnation.

In addition to this, Thérèse supposes the Gospels to be what they really are—the Living Word of God, a permanent actuality, more adapted, in a sense, to our daily lives than to the transcendent actuality⁸¹⁴ of heavenly realities. Thérèse uses the Gospels to uncover the most intimate personal problems. The poem reveals the above as it continues. The Gospels are not simply past episodes but a living reality, here and now. In the Gospels, Thérèse has discovered the reason for her love and feels that there could be nothing better than to open up the Gospels and meditate on their Marian themes one by one. In twenty-five stanzas, she thoroughly tells what she thinks about, and why she loves, Mary. However, it is a mistake to believe that each stanza represents a Gospel scene. For example, because the fifth stanza has no mention of the Gospel, some commentators have left it out.⁸¹⁵ Yet, Thérèse is not merely recounting Gospel scenes but her reaction to them, a kind of *cinéma vérité*. These call forth from Thérèse a love for Mary. Because the inner sanctuary of Thérèse is often impenetrable: “to keep the King’s secrets,”⁸¹⁶ it is worth taking the whole poem apart, stanza by stanza, verse by verse. Thus will be revealed how the Gospels inspired Thérèse’s child-like love of Mary.

⁸¹³ Cf. Ms A 30 r, v; 31r.

⁸¹⁴ CJ 6.IV.2.

⁸¹⁵ Combes, 94, n. 60.

⁸¹⁶ Ms B 1v.

Stanzas Three and Four

In these stanzas, Thérèse does not merely recall the Annunciation, she sees the scene as an eye witness. The object of her attention is neither the angel nor the message nor even the divine election of the Mother. Rather, it is the Mother's heart and its mysterious disposition at this extraordinary election.

*Lorsqu'un ange du Ciel l'offre d'être la Mère
Du Dieu qui doit régner toute l'éternité,
Je te vois préférer, ô Marie, quel mystère!
L'ineffable trésor de la virginité.⁸¹⁷*

Earlier in the poem, Thérèse said that the connection between Mother and child was tears and suffering. But, once again there seems to be this unbridgeable gap. Mary is chosen by this divine election to be an instrument of salvation; hence the gap between mother and child seems to widen and the fear mentioned in stanza one (verse four) seems to recur. Yet, even in this, Thérèse discovers her love for Mary. What makes Mary close to Thérèse is that Mary is ready to renounce her proffered election rather than to renounce her professed Virginité. Here, Mary teaches Thérèse the value of this virginal preference.⁸¹⁸ From this preference Thérèse receives two lights:

*Je comprends que ton âme, ô Vierge Immaculée
Soit plus chère au Seigneur que le divin séjour
Je comprends que ton âme, Humble et Douce Vallée⁸¹⁹
Peut contenir Jésus, l'Océan de l'Amour!...⁸²⁰*

First, the Lord is attracted so powerfully by the soul of the Immaculate—so pure, so perfect—that He prefers her to His heavenly abode. Secondly, Mary's humility is such that it can contain an Ocean of Love, Jesus Himself. What remains for Thérèse is to establish once again the rapport between Mother and child:

*Oh! je t'aime, Marie, te disant la servante
Du Dieu que tu ravis par ton humilité.⁸²¹*

⁸¹⁷ When an angel from Heaven bids you be *the Mother* / Of the God who is to reign for all eternity, / I see you prefer, O Mary, what a mystery! / The ineffable treasure of *virginity*.

⁸¹⁸ Cf. LT 122, 124, 129, 130, 134, 149, 161; 182, 183 to Céline; 140, 156 to Pauline; 186 to Léonie; 224 to P. Belliere; RP 6, 1.

⁸¹⁹ Cf. *L'Année Liturgique*, Dom Gueranger, 2 Sat. Advent; *Story of a Soul*, p. 43, n. 40.

⁸²⁰ O Immaculate Virgin, I understand how your soul / Is dearer to the Lord than his heavenly dwelling. / I understand how your soul, *Humble and Sweet Valley*, / Can contain Jesus, the Ocean of Love!...

⁸²¹ Oh! I love you, Mary, saying you are the servant / Of the God whom you charm by your humility.

What delights Thérèse about Mary is the humility of this handmaid which indeed delights God. This is not a metaphor but a reality.

*Cette vertu cachée te rend toute-puissante
Elle attire en ton coeur la Sainte Trinité .⁸²²*

God manifests His absolute initiative in this election announced by the angel. Yet, the heart of the Immaculate Virgin is so laden with virtue that it exercises a powerful influence on the Trinity. Two years earlier, Thérèse had a similar insight in her poem *Vivre d'Amour*: "O Trinity, you are Prisoner of my love."⁸²³ This seems to be an adequate formula for the Trinity's indwelling. In the poem under discussion, Mary is the model of this kind of love and even the reason for it. Yet, Thérèse does not confuse this mystical indwelling with the Incarnation. Thérèse carefully maintains the distinction between the Virgin's humility, which attracts the Trinity, and the Trinity's absolute and sovereign will in the matter of her divine election as the Mother of God. In two lines of rare quality, she evokes this supreme indwelling of the Trinity in the womb of the Virgin:

*Alors l'Esprit d'Amour te couvrant de son ombre
Le Fils égal au Père en toi s'est incarné⁸²⁴*

Who cannot be awed by the "supreme grandeur" of this mystery? How can Thérèse hope to be bonded to the Mother overshadowed by the Spirit, from whose womb the Son, equal to the Father, is made flesh? Here the reality of the dissimilarity between Mother and child seems starkly contrasted. Yet, in this mystery of the Incarnation, Thérèse looks ahead to a multitude of sinners, brothers and sisters to Jesus, whose Savior He is.⁸²⁵ Thérèse is among them. Thus, any separation between Mother and child is overcome as Mary beholds the mystery of her firstborn son.

*De ses frères pécheurs bien grand sera le nombre
Puisqu'on doit l'appeler: Jésus, ton premier-né! . . .⁸²⁶*

Stanza Five

Thérèse "understands" within herself that Mary's heart, like her own heart, is for Jesus "another Heaven which is infinitely dearer to him than the first."⁸²⁷ In

⁸²² This hidden virtue makes you all-powerful. / It attracts *the Holy Trinity* into your heart.

⁸²³ PN 17: 2, 7-8.

⁸²⁴ Then *the Spirit of Love* covering you with his shadow, / *The Son equal to the Father* became incarnate in you.

⁸²⁵ Cf. Rm 8:29; PN 46: 4; Lk 2:7.

⁸²⁶ There will be a great many of his sinner brothers, / Since he will be called: Jesus, your first-born!...

⁸²⁷ Ms A 48v.

this stanza Thérèse explores this mystery of Jesus within, and contrasts her “littleness” and “weakness” with the “Almighty.” One can imagine the little Thérèse looking up at a mosaic dome of the Pantocrator, gazing at her with His terrible aspect, and yet, as the Eastern monks say, see Him smile.

*O Mère bien-aimée, malgré ma petitesse
Comme toi je possède en moi Le Tout-Puissant.*⁸²⁸

Thérèse makes no mention of the rapport between Mother and child, based on tears and suffering, here. Rather, Thérèse states that they are alike not only in their virginity but also in their possession of the Almighty. What counts here is not tears and suffering but the grace of the embrace of the self-same God.

*Mais je ne tremble pas en voyant ma faiblesse:
Le trésor de la mère appartient à l'enfant.*⁸²⁹

Like an inscription on a monument, Thérèse chisels this short, precise, and elegant word. Earlier, Thérèse explained that she has no fear to approach Mary because “I see her mortal and suffering like me” (2:8). If “like me” was a key word in stanzas one and two, “like you” is the key word in stanzas three, four and five. The treasure of both has been personified: it is Jesus. Jesus is all love, the perfection of every virtue:

*Et je suis ton enfant, ô ma Mère chérie
Tes vertus, ton amour, ne sont-ils pas à moi?*⁸³⁰

Thérèse feels herself not belittled but elevated by such a sublime inheritance. Since this belongs to Thérèse, this treasury of love and virtue, and since the communion between her and Mary is so real, even Jesus is taken in.

*Aussi lorsqu'en mon coeur descend la blanche Hostie
Jésus, ton Doux Agneau, croit reposer en toi!*⁸³¹

“It seems to me that when Jesus descends into my heart He is content to find Himself so well received, and I, too, am content.”⁸³² Thence, this “mistake” of Jesus is no illusion for Thérèse. She says in these verses exactly what she thinks. Not only is the expression concise, it also represents a stage in her spiritual journey. For nine or ten months, she knows herself to be at the heart of her mother, the Church.⁸³³ Thérèse, yielding to the Holy Spirit without reserve, alludes to her union. Far from lessening the value of the Gospel, stanza five shows forth its fruitfulness and underscores the littleness of her way.

⁸²⁸ O beloved Mother, despite my littleness, / Like you I possess The All-Powerful within me.

⁸²⁹ But I don't tremble in seeing my weakness: / The treasures of a mother belong to her child.

⁸³⁰ And I am your child, O my dearest Mother. / Aren't your virtues and your love mine too?

⁸³¹ So when the white Host comes into my heart, / Jesus, your Sweet Lamb, thinks he is resting in you!...

⁸³² Ms A 80r.

⁸³³ Ms B 3v.

Stanzas Six, Seven, and Eight

Not only is Mary “Queen of Saints,” she is also the Mother of Jesus, Brother to all sinners. The exceptional example of Mary, under the influence of grace, traces out the narrow way (perhaps Thérèse associated this topology with the hill country of Ain Karim); her example lights up the way with its brilliance. Thus, Thérèse begins the sixth stanza:

*Tu me le fais sentir, ce n'est pas impossible
De marcher sur tes pas, ô Reine des élus,
L'étroit chemin du Ciel, tu l'as rendu visible
En pratiquant toujours les plus humbles vertus.*⁸³⁴

With such a lesson, Thérèse chooses to remain little, like Mary, after whom she measures the greatness of the world to be nothing but emptiness.⁸³⁵ In short, Thérèse follows Mary on the Little Way.

*Auprès de toi, Marie, j'aime à rester petite,
Des grandeurs d'ici-bas je vois la vanité.*⁸³⁶

“To remain little” and “practicing humble virtues” are the same thing.⁸³⁷ She follows this with her only comment on the Visitation. Once again Thérèse is not merely recalling but participating in each evangelical episode. Thérèse herself is the one who receives Mary and learns to practice charity:

*Chez Sainte Elisabeth, recevant ta visite,
J'apprends à pratiquer l'ardente charité.*⁸³⁸

Thérèse will write in June of 1897 of what she probably already understood when she wrote her poem in May: “the grace of penetrating into the mysterious depths of charity.”⁸³⁹ Her image of ardent charity evokes two illustrations. First, she writes to her novice, Sr. Marie of the Trinity, about the “burning lamp of fraternal charity”⁸⁴⁰ at the same time she was writing manuscript C: “It seems to me that this lamp represents charity which must enlighten and rejoice not only those who are dearest to us but all who are in the house, without distinction.”⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁴ You make me feel that it's not impossible / To follow in your footsteps, O Queen of the elect. / You made visible the narrow road to Heaven / While always practicing the humblest virtues.

⁸³⁵ CJ 23.VIII.9, Thérèse quotes these lines; cf. LT 191, 226, 257.

⁸³⁶ Near you, Mary, I like to stay little. / I see the vanity of greatness here below.

⁸³⁷ CSG, 41.

⁸³⁸ At the home of Saint Elizabeth, receiving your visit, / I learn how to practice ardent charity.

⁸³⁹ Ms C 18v.

⁸⁴⁰ LT 246.

⁸⁴¹ Ms C 12r.

Secondly, this image of the burning lamp of charity seems to stem from an incident in her own life, noted earlier.⁸⁴² She related it to another novice, her sister Céline, or Sr. Geneviève. Thérèse was required to prepare a night lamp for some visitors. She was put-out that those responsible could easily have done this themselves. “Suddenly, however, divine light invaded my soul, and I was inspired to place myself at the service of the Holy Family at Nazareth.” Thérèse no longer considers the burden of her task and the interior grumbling it aroused, but rather the “Infant Jesus” and her “heart overflowing with fervor and consolation.” “Ever since that memorable night, when I find myself in a tight spot, I have recourse to this practice and it never fails to restore my peace.”⁸⁴³

In stanza seven, Thérèse remains there and listens to the Magnificat, springing from the heart of Mary. The word “heart” enjoys a central place in this poem and is mentioned fourteen times (ten times concerning the Virgin Mary, three times concerning Thérèse, once concerning Jesus).

*Là j'écoute ravie, Douce Reine des anges,
Le cantique sacré qui jaillit de ton coeur.*⁸⁴⁴

If Mary seems more “Queen of Angels” than “humble mother” in her exaltation of God, Thérèse is neither surprised nor dismayed by the appearance of another “gap” between Mother and child. Rather, she draws a new lesson from this maternal joy and re-establishes her rapport: she, too, will glorify Jesus her Savior.

*Tu m'apprends à chanter les divines louanges
A me glorifier en Jésus mon Sauveur.*⁸⁴⁵

Thérèse underlines this verse in order to render its full meaning. Her only glory is Jesus.⁸⁴⁶ Yet, she returns quickly to Mary's prophecy about the ages to come.

*Tes paroles d'amour sont de mystiques roses
Qui doivent embaumer les siècles à venir.*⁸⁴⁷

The image of the rose bower is a very Theresian image.⁸⁴⁸ Mary's words, like roses, will sweetly scent the ages. Both mother and child will recount the great things He has done for them.

⁸⁴² CSG, 100; CJ 12.VII.97.

⁸⁴³ CJ 12.VII.1.

⁸⁴⁴ There, Sweet Queen of angels, I listen, delighted, / To the sacred canticle springing forth from your heart.

⁸⁴⁵ You teach me to sing divine praises, / To glory in Jesus my Savior.

⁸⁴⁶ Cf. LT 109.

⁸⁴⁷ Your words of love are mystical roses / Destined to perfume the centuries to come.

⁸⁴⁸ LT 124, 127, 141, 172, 182, 224, 246; CJ 9.VI.3; CJ 14.IX.

*En toi le Tout-Puissant a fait de grandes choses
Je veux les méditer, afin de l'en bénir.*⁸⁴⁹

Such praise was habitual with Thérèse: "Do not think that it is humility that prevents me from acknowledging the gifts of God. I know He has done great things in me and I sing of this each day with joy," as she writes to Fr. Belliere.⁸⁵⁰ In fact, in all her autobiographical manuscripts, Thérèse's only desire to write is "to sing of the mercy of the Lord."⁸⁵¹

The eighth stanza brings into closer view the mystery of the Nativity. Thérèse ponders not only the great things of the Lord, but also on their mysterious characteristics, which, in the first place, include suffering.

*Quand le bon Saint Joseph ignore le miracle
Que tu voudrais cacher dans ton humilité
Tu le laisses pleurer tout près du Tabernacle
Qui voile du Sauveur la divine beauté!....*⁸⁵²

Thérèse treats this difficult subject with sobriety. What is striking about this suffering caused by the trial of Joseph's ignorance is its silence.⁸⁵³ Mary is silent about the mystery of the Incarnation not only for the sake of humility, but also, as Thérèse would have it, because of her exclusive confidence in God.

The rapport of Mother and child is of one accord here: in God, both have absolute confidence and this silence was its guardian.⁸⁵⁴ Sr. Geneviève revealed many times the admiration of Thérèse for the silence of Mary in this circumstance.⁸⁵⁵ Thérèse was never troubled by what others might be thinking about her, even when there was a question of apparent disedification. Even when an explanation would exonerate her, Thérèse would not give it. Her model in this was Our Lady who preferred to lose her good name than to reveal her secret to St. Joseph.⁸⁵⁶

Thérèse often conversed about this simple, heroic and inspiring conduct.⁸⁵⁷ Like Mary, silence was her great weapon. Such silent confidence was the source of Mary's grandeur and power. The melody of silence enchants Thérèse as much as the Magificat:

⁸⁴⁹ In you the Almighty has done great things. / I want to ponder them to bless him for them.

⁸⁵⁰ LT 224.

⁸⁵¹ Cf. Ms A 2r; Ms B 1r; Ms C 3r.

⁸⁵² When the good Saint Joseph did not know of the miracle / That you wanted to hide in your humility, / You let him cry close by the *Tabernacle* / Veiling the Savior's divine beauty!....

⁸⁵³ Cf. *Poésies*, Tome II, 301, on how Thérèse followed St. Bernard here.

⁸⁵⁴ *Poesies*, Tome II, 302, "le silence et l'espérance" as expressed in the Rule of Carmel.

⁸⁵⁵ CSG, 27.

⁸⁵⁶ Cf. Ms A 61v; PN 3.

⁸⁵⁷ CSG, 27.

*Oh! que j'aime, Marie, ton éloquent silence,
Pour moi c'est un concert doux et mélodieux
Qui me dit la grandeur et la toute-puissance
D'une âme qui n'attend son secours que des Cieux.....*⁸⁵⁸

Stanzas Nine and Ten

Added to this silence are common trials, like finding no room in the inn.

*Plus tard à Bethléem, ô Joseph et Marie!
Je vous vois repoussés de tous les habitants
Nul ne veut recevoir en son hôtellerie
De pauvres étrangers, la place est pour les grands.....*⁸⁵⁹

While adding nothing to this episode, Thérèse, nevertheless, adds a chastising verse about the pride of Man, the humility of God, and the holy indignation of Thérèse at this scandal of universal refusal:

*La place est pour les grands et c'est dans une étable
Que la Reine des Cieux doit enfanter un Dieu.*⁸⁶⁰

A major concern of Thérèse throughout her life was not only the refusal of unbelievers⁸⁶¹ but also the indifference of believers.⁸⁶² Jesus has so few who will receive Him into their own lives. Thérèse can hardly believe that anyone could refuse so sweet a guest, until she began to eat bread, not in the House of Bread, Bethlehem, but at the table of sinners.⁸⁶³ Yet, this child is surrounded by the love of His mother, more than ever “dear,” because she submits to ever-increasing and almost cruel humiliations. Thérèse is not so much concerned with the trappings of Christmas as much as she is with the symbol of the stable. “Such a poor place” reveals to her both the emptiness of human pomp and the admirable compassion of Mary.

*O ma Mère chérie, que je te trouve aimable
Que je te trouve grande en un si pauvre lieu!....*⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁵⁸ Oh Mary! how I love *your eloquent silence!* / For me it is a sweet, melodious concert / That speaks to me of the greatness and power / Of a soul which looks only to Heaven for help....

⁸⁵⁹ Later in Bethlehem, O Joseph and Mary! / I see you rejected by all the villagers. / No one wants to take in poor foreigners. / There's room for the great ones....

⁸⁶⁰ *There's room for the great ones, and it's in a stable / That the Queen of Heaven must give birth to a God.*

⁸⁶¹ E.g., LT 137: “Has He not set up His abode in your heart to console Himself for the crimes of sinners?”

⁸⁶² E.g., LT 122: “giving to others a heart that belongs to Him.”

⁸⁶³ Ms C 6r.

⁸⁶⁴ O my dearest Mother, how Lovable I find you, / How great I find you in such a poor place!....

If the ninth stanza is one side of a diptych on the Nativity, then the tenth stanza is the other side. Thérèse prepares a vigorous antithesis in this stanza to the preceding stanza. Here, Thérèse views the Word in swaddling clothes from the level of the angels:

*Quand je vois L'Eternel enveloppé de langes
Quand du Verbe Divin j'entends le faible cri
O ma Mère chérie, je n'envie plus les anges
Car leur Puissant Seigneur est mon Frère chéri!...*⁸⁶⁵

These verses reveal the contrast of the place to the Person whom the angels adore, of feeble cries to the ineffable Word, of swaddling clothes to the Lord whom the whole world cannot contain. They reveal and recall the littleness of her way. Her first impulse is not toward Mary, but to Mary's Child who came down from heaven, thus raising up Thérèse and, indeed, the whole human race to the level of the angels. Here, she verifies one more time the dignity of Man over the superiority of angels. They know Him as their almighty Lord. But, by the fact of the Incarnation, Thérèse can rightfully call Him "my dear Brother." Once again, Thérèse returns to Mary because in some measure she is the cause of this joy, these terms of endearment.

*Que je t'aime, Marie, toi qui sur nos rivages
As fait épanouir cette Divine Fleur!.....*⁸⁶⁶

She sees the joy on Mary's face, who, like any young mother, delights in others' admiration of her Child.

*Que je t'aime écoutant les bergers et les mages
Et gardant avec soin toute chose en ton coeur!...*⁸⁶⁷

Céline recounts a brief scene of Thérèse's imitation of this Marian and characteristic silence: "with a serious and gentle look, I don't recall any longer the occasion, but she had been misunderstood: 'The Blessed Virgin did well to keep all these things in her "little" heart . . . They can't be angry with me for doing as she did.'"⁸⁶⁸

Stanzas Eleven, Twelve, and Thirteen

The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple brings forth two new reasons for her love.

⁸⁶⁵ When I see the Eternal God wrapped in swaddling clothes, / When I hear the poor cry of the Divine Word, / O my dearest Mother, I no longer envy the angels, / For their Powerful Lord is my dearest Brother!...

⁸⁶⁶ How I love you, Mary, you who made / This Divine Flower blossom on our shores!.....

⁸⁶⁷ How I love you listening to the shepherds and wisemen / *And keeping it all in your heart with care!*...

⁸⁶⁸ CJ 8.VII.10; CSG, 27.

*Je l'aime te mêlant avec les autres femmes
 Qui vers le temple saint ont dirigé leurs pas
 Je l'aime présentant le Sauveur de nos âmes
 Au bienheureux Vieillard qui le presse en ses bras.*⁸⁶⁹

Thérèse is charmed by the simplicity of Mary's life at Nazareth and the familiarity of the women who would come to join her in the Temple ceremony with the same familiarity. They would ask Mary if her child could "play with my little boy."⁸⁷⁰ Yet, "with reference to the Aged Simeon's prophetic words," ". . . it wasn't for the present"—as if the Virgin constantly had before her eyes the Passion of her Son—but, "it was a general prediction for the future."⁸⁷¹ Both walked by faith each day, with trouble enough of its own.⁸⁷² Thus, Thérèse is present not only in the stable in Bethlehem and the home in Nazareth, but also at the Temple in Jerusalem. The smiles and cooing of the women give way to Simeon's prophecy of tears and sorrow. Here, Mary becomes the Queen of Martyrs.

*D'abord en souriant j'écoute son cantique
 Mais bientôt ses accents me font verser des pleurs.
 Plongeant dans l'avenir un regard prophétique
 Simeon te présente un glaive de douleurs.*

*O Reine des martyrs, jusqu'au soir de ta vie
 Ce glaive douloureux transpercera ton coeur.*⁸⁷³

In these first two verses from stanza twelve, nothing can efface the sorrow of the Cross and many are the saints who have felt this compassion for their Savior long after his glorification. Her pierced heart makes Mary the Queen of Martyrs. Step by step, Thérèse follows this martyrdom beginning with Herod's reign of terror.

*Déjà tu dois quitter le sol de ta patrie .
 Pour éviter d'un roi la jalouse fureur.*⁸⁷⁴

This is the fourth time that Thérèse writes about the Flight into Egypt.⁸⁷⁵ This repetition could be explained on one hand by the permanent threat of expulsion

⁸⁶⁹ I love you mingling with the other women / Walking toward the holy temple. / I love you presenting the Savior of our souls / To the blessed Old Man who pressed Him to his heart.

⁸⁷⁰ CJ 20.VIII.14.

⁸⁷¹ CJ 21.VIII.3.

⁸⁷² CJ 21.VIII.3.

⁸⁷³ At first I smile as I listen to his canticle, / But soon his tone makes me shed tears. / Plunging a prophetic glance into the future, / Simeon presents you with a sword of sorrows. / / O Queen of martyrs, till the evening of your life / That sorrowful sword will pierce your heart.

⁸⁷⁴ Already you must leave your native land / To flee a king's jealous fury.

⁸⁷⁵ 875. Cf. RP 2, 2r; PN 24: 5; RP 6.

that hovered over Religious Orders at that time.⁸⁷⁶ But to flee with Jesus was not a true exile and this possible persecution fueled Thérèse's desire for martyrdom. With liveliness, Thérèse represents the scene.

*Jésus sommeille en paix sous les plis de ton voile
Joseph vient te prier de partir à l'instant.*⁸⁷⁷

Between this contrast of tranquility and disturbance, Thérèse emphasizes the obedience of Mary which neither delays nor questions how:

*Et ton obéissance aussitôt se dévoile
Tu pars sans nul retard et sans raisonnement.*⁸⁷⁸

From her earliest years, Thérèse was impressed with this kind of obedience: ". . . a tranquil, a joyful, a prompt acquiescence / To the highest call of my Holy Will, / With no hesitation . . . with no reasoning."⁸⁷⁹ The impression lasted until the end of her life. "It always gives God a very little pain when we rationalize a very little about what Mother Prioress has said; and it gives Him much pain when we rationalize much, even in our heart."⁸⁸⁰ On the day of her death, Mother Prioress indicated that she might suffer for yet another few more months. Asked if she could accept this, she faltered only for a moment in her agony. "But checking herself immediately she said with a tone of sublime resignation, falling back on her pillows: 'I really will it!'"⁸⁸¹

Stanza twelve is a result of Simeon's prophecy. The sorrows Mary experiences begin with the last verse, unquestioned obedience, continuing with the Flight into Egypt and leading up to the Boy Jesus lost in Jerusalem. Both episodes pierce the heart of Mary. Thérèse joins them together and yet explains their essential difference. The Flight into Egypt only seems to pierce the heart of Mary; losing the Boy Jesus in Jerusalem really does.

The Gospel says nothing about the Holy Family in Egypt and Thérèse responds to the silence, unlike her pious recreation "The Flight into Egypt,"⁸⁸² inspired by Fr. Faber.⁸⁸³ Even though the Family is exiled, Mary has lost nothing of her joy.

⁸⁷⁶ CSG, 68; *Poésies*, Tome II, 303, note on stanza 12.

⁸⁷⁷ Jesus sleeps in peace under the folds of your veil / Joseph comes begging you to leave at once.

⁸⁷⁸ And at once your obedience is revealed. / You leave without delay or reasoning.

⁸⁷⁹ CG II, 1166; Ms A 31v; 34v.

⁸⁸⁰ DE, 778.

⁸⁸¹ CJ 30.IX.

⁸⁸² RP 6.

⁸⁸³ FSM, 139, n. 41.

*Sur la terre d'Égypte, il me semble, ô Marie
Que dans la pauvreté ton cœur reste joyeux.*⁸⁸⁴

For, as Thérèse reasons, Mary remains in her true homeland.

*Car Jésus n'est-Il pas la plus belle Patrie,
Que l'importe l'exil, tu possèdes les Cieux?...*⁸⁸⁵

This thought, expressed in a few words, expresses Thérèse's own view of life. This earth is exile; our true home is heaven. The first word she could read was heaven.⁸⁸⁶ "Earth seemed to be a place of exile and I could only dream of heaven."⁸⁸⁷ She felt drawn into real prayer when she accompanied her father on his fishing outings. At the sea, seeing the sun glint on the waters and marking out the way of a sail boat, Thérèse was determined never to swerve from Jesus, "traveling in peace toward the Homeland of Heaven."⁸⁸⁸ To possess heaven means to possess Jesus. No earthly exile can change that. The *Imitation*, which Thérèse knew by heart, is echoed here perhaps: "*Esse cum Iesu dulcis paradisis.*"⁸⁸⁹

Thérèse abruptly moves to Jerusalem to make the contrast between Egypt and true exile more striking. She writes nothing about the twelve years of the Holy Family's life in Nazareth. In Jerusalem, Mary experiences a true piercing of her heart, even a submersion, into what is real sorrow, pain, and sadness, in what is real exile—she loses Jesus:

*Mais à Jérusalem, une mère triste
Comme un vaste océan vient inonder ton cœur.*⁸⁹⁰

A few days after she completes this poem, Thérèse will have revealed to her Prioress, Mother Marie Gonzague, "the thick darkness"⁸⁹¹ which "penetrates and envelops her soul."⁸⁹² Thérèse, too, has lost her Jesus.

*Jésus, pendant trois jours, se cache à ta tendresse
Alors c'est bien l'exil dans toute sa rigueur!...*⁸⁹³

Thérèse notes every facet of this mystery, like a jeweler turning a diamond over and over again, and she devotes a considerable portion of her poem, three stanzas, to its appraisal.

⁸⁸⁴ O Mary, it seems to me that in the land of Egypt / Your heart remains joyful in poverty.

⁸⁸⁵ For is not Jesus the fairest Homeland, / What does exile matter to you? You hold Heaven...

⁸⁸⁶ Ms A 13r.

⁸⁸⁷ Ms A 14v.

⁸⁸⁸ Ms A 22r.

⁸⁸⁹ Combes, 107, n. 84.

⁸⁹⁰ But in Jerusalem a bitter sadness / Comes to flood your heart like a vast ocean.

⁸⁹¹ Ms C 5v.

⁸⁹² Ms C 6v.

⁸⁹³ For three days, Jesus hides from your tenderness. / That is indeed exile in all its harshness!...

Stanzas Fourteen, Fifteen, and Sixteen

Thérèse makes an austere play on words “*se cacher*” and “*chercher*” (14, 4, 7; 15, 8) in these stanzas.⁸⁹⁴ The meditation deepens until it fathoms with profound patience what yielding to abandonment means (16, 5-8). This echoes a similar attitude admirably expressed in another poem, written at the same time as the present one under discussion, “*Une Rose Effeuillée.*”⁸⁹⁵ The autobiographical value of these verses is underlined by a verse Thérèse scratched out on the rough draft: “*La parole divine, o Mère! est bien pour moi.*”⁸⁹⁶ Thérèse feels herself drawn to this felt “mystery of the Temple.” She, too, feels that Jesus has hidden His tenderness from her.⁸⁹⁷

Mary’s rigorous and harsh, yet authentic, exile lasts but three days. Yet, even the joy of finding Jesus is suffused with the mystery of His actions:

*Enfin tu l’aperçois et la joie te transporte,
Tu dis au bel Enfant qui charme les docteurs:
«O mon Fils, pourquoi donc agis-tu de la sorte?
«Voilà ton père et moi qui cherchions en pleurs.»⁸⁹⁸*

Thérèse does not depart from the characteristics of her spiritual life, nor from the Gospel record of the difficult question offered in response to the mother’s anguish.

*Et l’Enfant Dieu répond (oh quel profond mystère!)
A la Mère chérie qui tend vers lui ses bras:
«Pourquoi me cherchez-vous?... Aux oeuvres de mon Père
«Il faut que je m’emploie; ne le savez-vous pas?»⁸⁹⁹*

Thérèse does not pretend to understand these “hidden words” either. For Thérèse, these words are proof that Mary “lived by faith just like ourselves.”⁹⁰⁰

She leaves this conversation as it is, as does the Gospel, and moves on in stanza fifteen to the Holy Family’s life at Nazareth, and the docility of Jesus under his parents.

⁸⁹⁴ *Poésies*, Tome II, 303.

⁸⁹⁵ PN 51.

⁸⁹⁶ *Poésies*, Tome II, 294 (15,6).

⁸⁹⁷ PN 54: 13,7.

⁸⁹⁸ At last you find him and you are overcome with joy, / You say to the fair Child captivating the doctors: / “O my Son, why have you done this? / Your father and I have been searching for you in tears.”

⁸⁹⁹ And the Child God replies (O what a deep mystery!) / To his dearest Mother holding out her arms to him: / “Why were you searching for me? I must be about / My Father’s business. Didn’t you know?”

⁹⁰⁰ CJ 21.VIII.3.

*L'Évangile m'apprend que croissant en sagesse
A Joseph, à Marie, Jésus reste soumis.*⁹⁰¹

Having re-established the patriarchal hierarchy within the Holy Family, she considers that this obedience illuminates the mystery of the Temple. In the Temple, Jesus is not merely independent of, nor insubordinate to, nor autonomous from, nor difficult with, nor indifferent to his parents, because the character of his submission to them at Nazareth prevents this misunderstanding. That Jesus so readily obeys, endears him all the more to Thérèse. Her own obedience to Superiors was legendary, and even in matters of small importance, "I have made it a point to obey everybody in a spirit of faith as though God Himself were manifesting His Will to me."⁹⁰²

*Et mon cœur me révèle avec quelle tendresse
Il obéit toujours à ses parents chéris.*⁹⁰³

Moreover, in the lines "The Gospel teaches" (15,1) and "my heart reveals" (15,3), Thérèse rapidly yet profoundly renders the Carmelites' life of prayer.⁹⁰⁴

Why did Jesus put his parents, especially Mary, through the anguish of losing him? To anyone not familiar with the stage in Thérèse's life in which this poem was written, her interpretation seems odd, even obscure. But, to anyone who knows of Thérèse's own suffering in body and soul, it makes perfect sense.⁹⁰⁵

*Maintenant je comprends le mystère du temple,
Les paroles cachées de mon Aimable Roi.*⁹⁰⁶

This scene, dramatic and enigmatic, illumines the grace Jesus gave to His mother.

*Mère, ton doux Enfant veut que tu sois l'exemple
De l'âme qui Le cherche en la nuit de la foi.*⁹⁰⁷

Jesus wants Mary to experience the night of faith. In June of 1897, Thérèse describes in veiled terms the night of faith which began in April of 1896. For more than a year, Thérèse profits from this trial, never giving into despair, even though a wall hides heaven,⁹⁰⁸ she comes to understand, in her fraternal charity, the trial of unbelievers. Yet the rampart of Thérèse, whose eyes are fixed on Mary, is the great

⁹⁰¹ The Gospel tells me that, growing in wisdom, / Jesus remains subject to Joseph and Mary.

⁹⁰² CSG, 154.

⁹⁰³ And my heart reveals to me with what tenderness / He always obeyed his dear parents.

⁹⁰⁴ *Poésies*, Tome II, 304 (15:1,3).

⁹⁰⁵ Cf. DE, 32-55; G. Gaucher, *The Passion of Thérèse of Lisieux: 4 April - 30 September 1897* (New York: Crossroads, 1989).

⁹⁰⁶ Now I understand the mystery of the temple, / The hidden words of my Lovable King.

⁹⁰⁷ Mother, your sweet Child wants you to be the example / Of the soul searching for Him in the night of faith.

⁹⁰⁸ Ms C 7v.

silence of her contemplative life, a Marian silence so much admired.⁹⁰⁹ Now more than ever before, Thérèse imitates her mother; once again the rapport between mother and child is reconfirmed.

In stanza sixteen, she comes as close as she will to any disclosure of her physical, moral, and spiritual suffering. In fact, the near absence of this in the present poem makes it all the more moving.⁹¹⁰ Thérèse, her condition much like that of a building falling down, is edified by her discovery. "For an instant, Thérèse interrupts her meditation on the Gospel in order to sculpt, as in an infinitely precious marble, a stanza, admirable in every way, where she successfully condenses, in thought and form most rare, all the substance of her faith and the secret of her fidelity."⁹¹¹ To 15:7-8, she gives a logical and solemn conclusion.

*Puisque le Roi des Cieux a voulu que sa Mère
Soit plongée dans la nuit, dans l'angoisse du coeur;
Marie, c'est donc un bien de souffrir sur la terre?*⁹¹²

Her personal experience helps her to discover in the life of Mary the same law which regulated her Son's life: it is necessary that she suffer so as to enter into her glory. Jesus wants this for His mother, because, mysteriously, "it is well to suffer here on earth" (16,3). Mary is not content to submit to this condition, "mortal and suffering" (2,8) equal to ours; rather she fully chooses this solidarity with us, "if not affirmed explicitly, understood in the entire poem."⁹¹³

She phrases the third verse as a question and in the fourth answers herself. "Her response, it is true to say, makes precise in a mystical fashion this austere doctrine, while including, within a verse of such admirable density and equilibrium, the essential condition that transforms all suffering into sweetness."⁹¹⁴

*Oui, souffrir en aimant, c'est le plus pur bonheur! . . .*⁹¹⁵

This is not just a flight of imagination for Thérèse, nor is it a verbal exaggeration. This strong, personal, delicate, even Marian attitude, Thérèse maintained throughout her life. After Céline chose one of Leonie's dolls, Thérèse chose all. Upon reflection, Thérèse realized that one chooses how one will respond to the Lord's advances. The incident summarized her whole life; "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:

⁹⁰⁹ CSG, 30.

⁹¹⁰ Cf. *Poésies*, Tome I, 240.

⁹¹¹ Combes, 110.

⁹¹² Since the King of Heaven wanted his Mother / To be plunged into the night, in anguish of heart, / Mary, is it thus a blessing to suffer on earth?

⁹¹³ *Poésies*, Tome I, 239.

⁹¹⁴ Combes, 111.

⁹¹⁵ Yes, to suffer while loving is the purest happiness!...

to keep my own will; so take it, for 'I choose all' that You will!"⁹¹⁶ And again: "It's what He does that I love."⁹¹⁷

*Tout ce qu'Il m'a donné Jésus peut le reprendre.*⁹¹⁸

Jesus' "unspeakable sweetness" did indeed "change all the consolations of this earth into bitterness for her."⁹¹⁹

Thérèse, stripped of wants, naked in her need, asks their common Mother to relay her requests to Jesus.

*Dis-lui de ne jamais se gêner avec moi. . . .*⁹²⁰

Thérèse asks this of a Mother with whom she shares the "mystery of the Temple" (15,5), if not in intensity, at least in duration. She does not ask that her trial be shortened. "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."⁹²¹

With rare heroism, with her secret expressed in beauty of thought and splendor of form, she concludes with an inspiration which is "one of the most beautiful ever written by a human pen"⁹²²; with a paroxysm of hope and faith, she declares:

*Il peut bien se cacher, je consens à l'attendre
Jusqu'au jour sans couchant où s'éteindra ma foi.....*⁹²³

All that is necessary to extinguish the faith of Thérèse is not the harassment of doubt but the happiness of "Day." This finally is the benefit of the trial of the Temple. Thérèse remains unconquered in this trial. One day when she was particularly under attack, she quoted this stanza.⁹²⁴ Moreover, on this day she asked her sister to end her autobiography with the story of the converted sinner.⁹²⁵

Stanzas Seventeen and Eighteen

Having plumbed these depths, Thérèse re-emerges to Nazareth, contrasting Mary's "fullness of grace" with the poverty of the place.

⁹¹⁶ Ms A 10v.

⁹¹⁷ CJ 27.V.4.

⁹¹⁸ All that He has given me, Jesus can take back.

⁹¹⁹ Ms A 36v, quoting the *Imitation of Christ* III, 26:3.

⁹²⁰ Tell him not to bother with me.....

⁹²¹ Ms C 6r.

⁹²² Combes, 112

⁹²³ He can indeed hide from me, I'm willing to wait for him / Till the day without sunset when my faith will fade away.....

⁹²⁴ CJ 11.VII.1; CSG, 60-61.

⁹²⁵ CJ 11.VII.6.

*Je sais qu'à Nazareth, Mère pleine de grâces
Tu vis très pauvrement, ne voulant rien de plus.*⁹²⁶

But her real interest is not this difference between spiritual perfection and material poverty, but rather, that nothing extraordinary “embellished” the life of the Queen of the Elect.

*Point de ravissements, de miracles, d'extases
N'embellissent ta vie, ô Reine des Elus! . . .*⁹²⁷

Thérèse underlines her thought here. Mary's life, like hers, was devoid of sensible phenomena. Yet, Thérèse is not so much concerned with Mary's interior life, who for her is always “full of grace,” but by the great army of little souls who could not follow after a Mother who was far away from them. “I am sure her life was very simple.”⁹²⁸

*Le nombre des petits est bien grand sur la terre
Ils peuvent sans trembler vers toi lever les yeux.*⁹²⁹

Surely, Thérèse ranks herself among them, but this is not her point. She turns toward her mother, who chooses the common way to save at least some of her Son's brothers and sisters.

*C'est par la voie commune, incomparable Mère
Qu'il le plaît de marcher pour les guider aux Cieux.*⁹³⁰

“The Blessed Virgin knows what it is to suffer.”⁹³¹ She is the replica, in her maternal rank, of the Suffering Servant⁹³² which, Thérèse emphasizes, is “what attracts me to you” (2,4).

What Thérèse wants is to live constantly with Mary and in this way to follow her each day. She introduces this in the eighteenth stanza.

*En attendant le Ciel, ô ma Mère chérie,
Je veux vivre avec toi, te suivre chaque jour.*⁹³³

Passing from the Gospel to Mary herself, Thérèse discovers her heart as an inexhaustible object of outstanding quality.

⁹²⁶ Mother full of grace, I know that in Nazareth / You live in poverty, wanting nothing more.

⁹²⁷ No rapture, miracle, or ecstasy / Embellish your life, O Queen of the Elect!....

⁹²⁸ CJ 21.VIII.3.

⁹²⁹ The number of little ones on earth is truly great. / They can raise their eyes to you without trembling.

⁹³⁰ It is by the ordinary way, incomparable Mother, / That you like to walk to guide them to Heaven.

⁹³¹ CJ 20.VIII.11.

⁹³² Cf. *Poésies*, Tome I, 239; Is 53:3; LT 108; RP 2, 3r.

⁹³³ While waiting for Heaven, O my dear Mother, / I want to live with you, to follow you each day.

*Mère en te contemplant, je me plonge ravie
Découvrant dans ton coeur des abîmes d'amour .⁹³⁴*

As ever, there is a paradox here: it would seem that this abyss of love, like her supreme grandeur (1,3), would separate Mother and child. Yet it does not. Together they communicate in the very language of love; that is, they share tears and laughter.

*Ton regard maternal bannit toutes mes craintes
Il m'apprend à pleurer , il m'apprend à jouir .⁹³⁵*

Mary teaches by example and purifies Thérèse's sorrows of their sorrowful element.

*Au lieu de mépriser les joies pures et saintes
Tu veux les partager, tu daignes les bénir.⁹³⁶*

Thus, Thérèse learns in the Marian school of love; it is an exchange of loving gazes. Thérèse "contemplates" her Mother; Mary beholds her child. Hence, the vicissitudes of life are less threatening. In fact, Thérèse revels in such blessings, a sustaining fact up until the end of her life.⁹³⁷ Finally, with "pure and holy joys," she hints at the wedding feast of Cana. These joys represent all the best that humans may rightfully "taste under the eye of God."⁹³⁸

Stanzas Nineteen, Twenty, Twenty-one and Twenty-two

Thérèse returns to the Gospel and explicates the wedding feast of Cana which begins stanza nineteen.

*Des époux de Cana voyant l'inquiétude
Qu'ils ne peuvent cacher, car ils manquent de vin
Au Sauveur tu le dis dans ta sollicitude
Espérant le secours de son pouvoir divin.⁹³⁹*

The remembrance of this simple petition, "they have no more wine," inebriated Thérèse with a complete and utter confidence in God. "She was always telling us that we can never desire too much nor ask too much when we are asking of God."⁹⁴⁰ Yet, the apparent refusal of Jesus seems to try Mary's trust.

⁹³⁴ Mother, contemplating you, I joyfully immerse myself, / Discovering in your heart *abysses of love*.

⁹³⁵ Your motherly gaze banishes all my fears. / It teaches me *to cry*, it teaches me *to rejoice*.

⁹³⁶ Instead of scorning pure and simple joys, / You want to share in them, you deign to bless them. .

⁹³⁷ CJ 21-26.V.11; 13.VII.17; 17.VII.7; 29.VII.14; LT 254.

⁹³⁸ LT 159.

⁹³⁹ At Cana, seeing the married couple's anxiety / Which they cannot hide, for they have run out of wine, / In your concern you tell the Savior, / Hoping for the help of his divine power.

⁹⁴⁰ CSG, 54.

*Jésus semble d'abord repousser la prière
«Qu'importe», répond-Il, «femme, à vous et à moi?»⁹⁴¹*

But after the trial, what a reward; Thérèse knows that the hearts of Mother and Son beat as one. Jesus' response seems gruff, even harsh; yet, later he does as his Mother asked.

*Mais au fond de son coeur, Il le nomme sa Mère
Et son premier miracle, Il l'opère pour toi....⁹⁴²*

The very roughness of the Son polishes the Mother's perspective. In fact, Thérèse enlarges on this theme by cutting away from the wedding feast to the hillside of Matthew 12:

*Un jour que les pécheurs écoutent la doctrine
De Celui qui voudrait au Ciel les recevoir
Je te trouve avec eux, Marie, sur la colline
Quelqu'un dit à Jésus que tu voudrais le voir.⁹⁴³*

In this scene "on the hillside," Mary appears only indirectly, seems to accomplish nothing, and says not a word. Yet, the words of her Son, Savior of sinners, strike a deep chord within her who knows no sin. The same sound echoes in the heart of Thérèse. "This year . . . the grace to understand . . . to love neighbor as Jesus loves him."⁹⁴⁴ She "penetrates the mysterious depths of charity,"⁹⁴⁵ "the abyss of love" (18,4), the very "secrets of" Mary's "maternal heart" (22,6). Thérèse does not glide over this episode, but, like the mystery of the temple (14,15,16), thoughtfully considers its implications and develops this new reason of rapport between Mother and Child.

On the hillside, Jesus, called "Master of the Doctors" (in a first draft),⁹⁴⁶ dispenses his "doctrine" (20,1) to sinners—a nomenclature none of the Gospels give. On another hillside, he dispenses "his life" (21,2) also to sinners. There, Jesus "gives all" (22,2), even His Mother as "Refuge of Sinners" (22,7). "You love us, Mary, as Jesus loves us" (22,1). This is a central theme of the poem, the depths of which Thérèse fathoms in the rest of the stanza quoted above and in stanzas twenty-one and twenty-two.

⁹⁴¹ Jesus seems at first to reject your prayer: / "Woman, what does this matter," he answers, "to you and to me?"

⁹⁴² But in the depths of his heart, He calls you his Mother, / And he works his first miracle for you....

⁹⁴³ One day when sinners are listening to the doctrine / Of Him who would like to welcome them in Heaven, / Mary, I find you with them on the hill. / Someone says to Jesus that you wish to see him.

⁹⁴⁴ Ms C 11v, 12v.

⁹⁴⁵ Ms C 18v.

⁹⁴⁶ *Poésies*, Tome II, 294 (15,7).

As ever, Thérèse is present—seeing, hearing, wondering. Jesus is surrounded by sinners. When His Mother asks for Him, He does not get up and leave them. Here again, as at “the mystery of the temple,” His obedience to His Mother at Nazareth must be recalled; there, as here, the character of His submission prevents misunderstanding. It is much like Cana, both in the mother’s simple request and the Son’s searing response. Jesus shows Himself here not as Teacher and Wonder-Worker, but as Savior.

*Alors, ton Divin Fils devant la foule entière
De son amour pour nous montre l’immensité.*⁹⁴⁷

This love seems to sacrifice His mother.

*Il dit: «Quel est mon frère et ma soeur et ma Mère,
«Si ce n’est celui-là qui fait ma volonté?»*⁹⁴⁸

For some years, Thérèse has been captivated by this question. “Yes, the one who loves Jesus is His whole family.”⁹⁴⁹ In that 23 July 1891 letter to Céline, Thérèse also records the words of the synoptics: “He who does the will of my Father, he is my mother, my brother, and my sister.” Likewise, in letters dated 6 July 1893⁹⁵⁰ and 17 November 1894,⁹⁵¹ she quotes Matthew 12:50. She even wrote these words on two pictures in her breviary, emphasizing the word “Mother,” sometime between 1896-1897.⁹⁵² But, here she does not. Attention to the text reveals that Jesus is speaking: “my will.” By this, Thérèse emphasizes the divinity of Jesus, bonding Himself to that band of sinners gathered around Him, whom He transforms by His words and works. The sinners, now disciples, are linked to Jesus not by physical descent nor by physical nearness, but by doing His will. As at Cana, this apparent harshness calls Mary to open her heart even more.

Mary does not jealously guard her unique condition as “Mother” of Jesus. Jesus’ searing response causes no sadness within her.

*O Vierge Immaculée, des mères la plus tendre
En écoutant Jésus, tu ne l’attristes pas.*⁹⁵³

Mary does not force a smile in the face of a seeming public embarrassment, perhaps even a brutal rebuff. She is not stripped of her rank and privileges, but rather, they are now extended to sinners.

⁹⁴⁷ Then, before the whole multitude, your Divine Son / Shows us the immensity of his love for us.

⁹⁴⁸ He says: “Who is my brother and my sister and my Mother, / If not the one who does my will?”

⁹⁴⁹ LT 130.

⁹⁵⁰ LT 142.

⁹⁵¹ LT 172.

⁹⁵² LT 130, note 5.

⁹⁵³ O Immaculate Virgin, most tender of Mothers, / In listening to Jesus, you are not saddened.

*Mais tu te réjouis qu'Il nous fasse comprendre
Que notre âme devient sa famille ici-bas.*⁹⁵⁴

Thus the link that bonds Mother and Son ought to be universal. This recalls the fourth and fifth stanzas on the Incarnation. All that brotherhood, sisterhood or motherhood requires is to do the will of Jesus. For the faithful soul the reward is beyond measure.

*Oui, tu te réjouis qu'Il nous donne sa vie,
Les trésors infinis de sa divinité...*⁹⁵⁵

Now, indeed, the "treasures of the mother" (5,4) belong to all her children. For a long time Thérèse was sure of her intuition (15,3).⁹⁵⁶ Thérèse is also "mother," because she does the will of the Son. "Because of this" she possesses His life and His divinity. "His goods are mine."⁹⁵⁷ Now the rapport of mother and child is no longer shrouded in tears, but enveloped in love and in doing God's will.

*Comment ne pas l'aimer, ô ma Mère chérie,
En voyant tant d'amour et tant d'humilité?*⁹⁵⁸

Does not Mary perfectly follow her Son who, though he was rich, made himself poor for our sake, in order to enrich our poverty?⁹⁵⁹

It is precisely this kind of self-sacrificing, humble love of Mary on our behalf that captivates the loving gaze and this long meditation of Thérèse. Mary does not hesitate to leave her Son so that sinners may draw near. Perhaps the "bitter sadness" of Jerusalem has prepared her for this separation. Perhaps her "solicitude" (19,3) has prepared her for being in the background.

*Tu nous aimes, Marie, comme Jésus nous aime
Et tu consens pour nous à l'éloigner de Lui.*⁹⁶⁰

Perhaps, instead, "such love and such humility" has prepared her for this distance in the Public Life of Jesus. The end of the stanza seems to indicate that this "solicitude" continues for the community of the redeemed after the Ascension. In the love of Son and Mother for sinners, Thérèse discovers "an exact definition of love and an adequate explanation of her own life."⁹⁶¹

*Aimer c'est tout donner et se donner soi-même.*⁹⁶²

⁹⁵⁴ But you rejoice that He makes us understand / How our souls become *his family* here below.

⁹⁵⁵ Yes, you rejoice that He gives us his life, / The infinite treasures of his divinity!...

⁹⁵⁶ Cf. Ms B.

⁹⁵⁷ LT 258.

⁹⁵⁸ How can we not love you, O my dear Mother, / On seeing so much love and so much humility?

⁹⁵⁹ Cf. II Cor. 8:9.

⁹⁶⁰ You love us, Mary, as Jesus loves us, / And for us you accept being separated from Him.

⁹⁶¹ Combes, 118.

⁹⁶² *To love is to give everything. It's to give oneself.*

For this, Thérèse turns neither to philosophy nor theology, but to her own experience, the Gospels, and her Little Way. She knows the truth of her verse from the time of her First Communion.⁹⁶³ Her poem *Vivre d'amour*,⁹⁶⁴ composed before the Blessed Sacrament, "comprises the sum of the Saint's aspirations."⁹⁶⁵ She underlines, literally, the example of Jesus and Mary. Mary generously, and without limits, proves it.

*Tu voulais le prouver en restant notre appui.*⁹⁶⁶

Precisely because of this measureless love of the Mother for her Son, can the Crucified and Risen One entrust to her, the Refuge of sinners, His brothers and sisters, until the end of the world.

*Le Sauveur connaissait ton immense tendresse
Il savait les secrets de ton coeur maternel,
Refuge des pécheurs, c'est à toi qu'Il nous laisse
Quand Il quitte la Croix pour nous attendre au Ciel.*⁹⁶⁷

Stanza Twenty-three

As ever, Thérèse sees, hears, wonders at the mystery, now present to her, of Calvary. In a hieratic vision, where the sobriety of expression only serves to sharpen and intensify Mary's grief, she states that "the martyrdom of the heart is not less fruitful than the pouring out of one's blood."⁹⁶⁸ In that same 26 December 1896 letter to her first missionary brother, Fr. Bellière, Thérèse links that kind of martyrdom to the mystery under consideration: "To save our souls, He left His Mother; He saw the Immaculate Virgin standing at the foot of the Cross, her heart transpierced by a sword of sorrow."⁹⁶⁹

*Marie, tu m'apparais au sommet du Calvaire
Debout près de la Croix, comme un prêtre à l'autel.*⁹⁷⁰

⁹⁶³ Ms A 35r.

⁹⁶⁴ PN 17.

⁹⁶⁵ CSG, 86.

⁹⁶⁶ You wanted to prove this by remaining our support.

⁹⁶⁷ The Savior knew your immense tenderness. / He knew the secrets of your maternal heart. / *Refuge of sinners, He leaves us to you | When He leaves the Cross to wait for us in Heaven.*

⁹⁶⁸ LT 213.

⁹⁶⁹ LT 213.

⁹⁷⁰ Mary, at the top of Calvary standing beside the Cross / To me you seem like a priest at the altar.

Without resolving the technicalities, in carefully chosen words, Thérèse likens Mary to a priest at the altar, and by extension, it may be said, the Sacrifice of the Cross to the Sacrifice of the altar.

*Offrant pour apaiser la justice du Père.
Ton bien-aimé Jésus, le doux Emmanuel...⁹⁷¹*

Mother and Son suffer together, the primordial image for Christians “who used to join together in order to give each other more courage in the hour of trial.”⁹⁷²

As this poem developed, Thérèse became more and more concise. She placed the allusion to Isaiah 7:14 here at Calvary, instead of at the Annunciation (in stanzas three and four). By alluding to this prophecy of “sweet Emmanuel,”⁹⁷³ by echoing the sweetness of the “Lamb’s” residing in her soul after Holy Communion (in stanzas five and eight), she makes all the more heart-searing the aspect of the Victim and the appeasement of the Father’s Justice. This justice is the object of Thérèse’s “joy and confidence,” because God not only “punishes the guilty” but “recognizes right intentions” and “rewards virtue.”⁹⁷⁴ This justice “which frightens so many souls” is not vindictiveness, but the victory of God’s compassion. “How can we doubt that God will open the doors of His kingdom to His children who loved Him even to sacrificing all for Him?”⁹⁷⁵

The “sweet,” “Beloved Jesus” hangs upon the Cross. The contrast renders the sorrowful Mother all the more desolate.

*Un prophète l’a dit, o Mère désolée,
«Il n’est pas de douleur semblable à ta douleur!»⁹⁷⁶*

Thérèse departs from the Gospel, but not the Scripture. In fact, this phrase from Lamentation 1:12 is doubly sacred, because the Liturgy itself used it in the Office for Friday of Passion Week.⁹⁷⁷ The abyss of sorrow reminds Mary of the Presentation’s prophecy, and the truth of her title, “Queen of Martyrs” (12:1), is effected at Calvary. Likewise, Mary discovers the bitterness and desolation of her exile (stanza 12). This exile, this Calvary, is the moment of her all-embracing motherhood, where she sheds her heart’s blood as her Son’s Body shed His.

*O Reine des Martyrs, en restant exilé
Tu prodigues pour nous tout le sang de ton coeur!⁹⁷⁸*

⁹⁷¹ Offering your beloved Jesus, the sweet Emmanuel, / To appease the Father’s justice...

⁹⁷² LT 167; LT 213.

⁹⁷³ Cf. LT 108.

⁹⁷⁴ LT 226.

⁹⁷⁵ LT 226; Ms A 6r; 7r.

⁹⁷⁶ A prophet said, O afflicted Mother, / “There is no sorrow like your sorrow!”

⁹⁷⁷ *Poésies*, Tome II, 307 (23, 6).

⁹⁷⁸ O Queen of Martyrs, while remaining in exile / You lavish on us all the blood of your heart!

Mary obtains the palm of victory for all who suffer and witness, for all who are martyrs. "Since she loves us and since she knows our weakness, what have we to fear"⁹⁷⁹ from God's justice? She continues this 9 May 1897 letter, contemporaneous with the present poem, to her second missionary brother, Fr. Roulland: "If there remains in their soul, at the moment of appearing before God, some trace of human weakness, the Blessed Virgin obtains for them the grace of making an act of perfect love, and then she gives them the palm and crown that they so greatly merited."⁹⁸⁰

Stanzas Twenty-four and Twenty-five

At the beginning of stanza twenty-four, concision again rules Thérèse. She does not recount the conversation of committal in the words of John 19:25-27; rather, she starkly contrasts the Son of God with the "son of Zebedee."

*Le maison de Saint Jean devient ton seul asile
Le fils de Zébédée doit remplacer Jésus.....*⁹⁸¹

It ought to be noted that "son of Zebedee" is a correction of Mother Agnes which Thérèse accepted. However, Thérèse wanted to continue St. Bernard's contrasts: John/Jesus; servant/Lord; disciple/Master; son of Zebedee/Son of God, in order to conclude bitterly: "what an exchange."⁹⁸² Yet, this bitterness for Mary is a sweetness for John and, by extension, for all the children of Carmel.

Here the veil falls over Mary's existence. Hence, Thérèse stops her Marian meditation. For example, she says nothing of the descent from the Cross. "Ah! I don't know how she stood it," she said, asking her sister, Mother Agnes, if she could stand it if she [Thérèse] were brought to her in such a state.⁹⁸³ No, Thérèse stops for three reasons. First, it is obvious that the Gospel says nothing more about Mary.

*C'est le dernier détail que donne l'Evangile
De la Reine des Cieux il ne me parle plus.*⁹⁸⁴

Secondly, Thérèse no longer thinks of Mary as the "humble and sweet valley" of the Annunciation (3,7), nor as the "mother full of grace" at Nazareth (17,1), nor as the "Queen of Martyrs" at Calvary (12,1), but as the "Queen of Heaven" (23,7)—just as she began her poem. Thirdly, someone else, more qualified, takes the place of Thérèse, child of Mary. That Someone is none other than the Son of Mary. Taken

⁹⁷⁹ LT 226.

⁹⁸⁰ LT 226.

⁹⁸¹ Saint John's home becomes your only refuge. / Zebedee's son is to replace Jesus.....

⁹⁸² *Poésies*, Tome II, 308 (24, 2).

⁹⁸³ CJ 25.VII.6.

⁹⁸⁴ That is the last detail the Gospel gives. / It tells me nothing more of the Queen of Heaven.

up into her homeland from this land of exile, her "Heaven" Himself (13,4) sings her praises to all those in heaven.

*Mais son profond silence, ô ma Mère chérie
Ne révèle-t-il pas que Le Verbe Eternel
Veut Lui-même chanter les secrets de la vie
Pour charmer les enfants, tous les Elus du Ciel?⁹⁸⁵*

Thérèse hopes to be among those "children," to hear for herself the "charming" words of the "Eternal Word" concerning Mary whom she sought to love in her own words.

With nothing more to say, Thérèse presses for the fulfillment of her desires in stanza twenty-five.

*Bientôt je l'entendrai cette douce harmonie
Bientôt dans le beau Ciel, je vais aller te voir.*⁹⁸⁶

The repetition of "*bientôt*"⁹⁸⁷ is significant and gives a beautiful balance to this stanza of hope in the midst of her worst suffering. Mother Agnes found this couplet delightful.⁹⁸⁸ For, in their common life, Mary and Thérèse shared sorrow and suffering, pain and tears. Now, Thérèse desired to share in that sweet harmony of heaven. In fact, only a few months separate her from the consummation of her ardent desire for which she so generously prepared.

The end of her poem does not end her own night of faith, but for a moment it seems to offer some relief, as she will tell Mother Agnes on June 9: "Has your trial of faith passed?" "No, but it seems to be suspended; the ugly serpents are no longer hissing in my ears."⁹⁸⁹ In this last stanza, for the first time in her poem, Thérèse recalls a personal grace—the healing smile of the Virgin—and asks Mary to smile upon her once again.

*Toi qui vins me sourire au matin de ma vie
Viens. me sourire encore... Mère... voici le soir!...*⁹⁹⁰

The statue that smiled at Thérèse on 13 May 1883⁹⁹¹ was brought into the infirmary on 8 July 1897, from where it stood in an antechamber at Thérèse's cell,

⁹⁸⁵ But, O my dear Mother, doesn't its profound silence / Reveal that *The Eternal Word Himself* / Wants to sing the secrets of your life / To charm your children, all the Elect of Heaven?

⁹⁸⁶ Soon I'll hear that sweet harmony. / Soon I'll go to beautiful Heaven to see you.

⁹⁸⁷ Cf. Ms B 2r: "Oui, bientôt, bientôt, . . . je vous le promets."

⁹⁸⁸ *Poésies*, Tome II, 308, note on stanza 25.

⁹⁸⁹ CJ 9.VI.2.

⁹⁹⁰ You who came to smile at me in the morning of my life, / Come smile at me again... Mother... It's evening now!...

⁹⁹¹ Ms A 30r.

and before which she prayed with glowing fervor.⁹⁹² The statue was brought from Les Buissonnets when Céline entered on 14 September 1894.⁹⁹³ To the amazement of the nuns, Thérèse easily picked up this statue; before it, she encouraged the confidences of the novices.⁹⁹⁴ Now in her extreme suffering, this statue again brings her consolation. Her own sister, Sr. Mary of the Sacred Heart, gives an account of the July day.⁹⁹⁵

On that day, Thérèse repeated these verses (25,3-4) of her poem as the statue was placed near her. Her features changed in an instant and her eyes filled with tears. Sr. Mary of the Sacred Heart wondered what was wrong, and approached her sister, but Thérèse said nothing to her. Only later did she indicate that her silence stopped her welling sobs: "Never has she [Mary] appeared more beautiful to me." "It is then tears of consolation?" "Yes." "And you are however in the night of faith?" "I am." Sr. Mary of the Sacred Heart concludes her reminiscence of this scene by recalling in detail the "true vision" of 13 May 1883. One hour before her death on 30 September 1897, she fixed her gaze on this statue of the Smiling Virgin for a long time.⁹⁹⁶

Thus, Thérèse makes this request without the least hesitation. As she shared in her suffering, so she will share in Mary's glory. Thérèse expresses this elevating grace to an intimate degree. For, now, the rapport between Mother and Child is that of a singing child bouncing on her mother's knees.

*Je ne crains plus l'éclat de la gloire suprême
Avec toi j'ai souffert et je veux maintenant
Chanter sur les genoux, Marie, pourquoi je t'aime
Et redire à jamais que je suis ton enfant!.....*⁹⁹⁷

(signed) *La petite Thérèse...*

Thérèse has come full circle. She knows why she loves Mary, despite the paradoxes of her greatness and Thérèse's littleness. It began because the Queen of Heaven first shortened the distance. Mary, thus, reflects the insight of the Gospel: it is the Trinity who first loved us (Jn. 15:16). Mary and Thérèse are of the same spirit. Mary loves us as Jesus loves us. This humble love is enveloped in silence and invites silence. In Mary this love is more sure than just knowledge; she does not fear what she does not understand—for example, Joseph's ignorance of the Incarnation (8),

⁹⁹² Ms C 36r; CSG, 121.

⁹⁹³ CSG 121.

⁹⁹⁴ Ms C 25v/26r.

⁹⁹⁵ Cf. DE, 455.

⁹⁹⁶ DE, 383.

⁹⁹⁷ I no longer fear the splendor of your supreme glory. / With you I've suffered, and now I want / To sing on your lap, Mary, why I love you, / And to go on saying that I am your child!.....

the rough treatment at Bethlehem (9-10), her amazement at Jesus' "hidden words" in Jerusalem (14-15) and "on the hillside" (20-21). In every situation, Mary yields to silence, because in her faith, vexed by trials, she emerges victorious by gradually coming to understand their meaning and value. "Profound Silence" (24,5) which bathed her earthly existence, speaks more eloquently than any word, until "the Word" (24,6) Himself will reveal the "secrets of her life" (24,7). Hence, what really matters is not merely two or three reasons for Thérèse's love for Mary, nor simply her reaction to this or that Gospel scene, but that Jesus Himself finds it difficult to distinguish between His Mother and her child, Thérèse. Both of them "did well to keep these things hidden in their hearts."⁹⁹⁸ By the example of Mary, Thérèse is assured that her "night of faith" is compatible with the fullness of her love. She has learned of Mary's example from the Gospel, where the Word of God reveals it to her heart, and thus, in turn, illumines her interior trials. In a way, "little Thérèse"⁹⁹⁹ has joined the elect to chant the praises of Mary begun by the Word made Flesh *ex Maria Virgine*, by writing down all she "thinks" about her "dear Mother": *Why I love you, O Mary*.

⁹⁹⁸ CJ 8.VII.10.

⁹⁹⁹ *Poésies*, Tome II, 309 (Thérèse signed the poem this way a few days before her death).

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Chapter four will attempt to synthesize the gradual development of and appropriation of the role of Mary within the life of St. Thérèse, "giving proofs from the Gospels." At least five conclusions can be drawn about the originality of Thérèse who has been considered both "a living word of God,"¹⁰⁰⁰ and a "ravishing miniature of the Blessed Virgin."¹⁰⁰¹ First, what Thérèse taught and wrote about the Blessed Virgin Mary, she learned from the Gospels. Second, what Thérèse learned from the Gospels, she learned gradually; such gradualness will be examined by means of the threefold way of the spiritual life (purgative, illuminative, and unitive) and will refer, briefly, to the mystical aspect of Thérèse's holiness. Fourth, the originality of Thérèse's understanding of Mary will be compared and contrasted with the teaching of Pope Leo XIII and J.-B. Terrien, her contemporaries, and with two more recent authorities. Finally, the under-developed aspect of doing the will of God as constitutive of Mary's role in the life of Thérèse will be examined.

The Words and Works of St. Thérèse

Throughout her own story, St. Thérèse makes constant references to the Gospels, the gradual stages of her conversion and the process of her discipleship. Regarding the Gospels, for example, she used Mark 3:13, the passage where Jesus calls his disciples, as the point of departure to reflect on the mystery of her vocation, of her whole life, of the privileges she had received.¹⁰⁰² Because she saw herself as weak and little like a child, she claims: "He lowered Himself to me and instructed me secretly in the things of love."¹⁰⁰³ If the clever and the wise would come to her (Mt 11:25), she would tell them of secrets revealed only to those who are poor in spirit, of revelation found only in the Gospels.¹⁰⁰⁴ She also knew and understood for

¹⁰⁰⁰ Pius XI, Discours 11 February 1923, in *The Story of the Canonization of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (London: Burnes, Oates and Washbourne, 1934).

¹⁰⁰¹ P 241, n. 3: "ravissante miniature de la T. Ste. Vierge" (l'abbé Hodierne, aumônier du Carmel, juste après la mort de Thérèse; citation d'une lettre à Mère Marie de Gonzague, 1899).

¹⁰⁰² Ms A 2r.

¹⁰⁰³ Ms A 49r.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ms A 71r.

a long time that the Kingdom of God is within¹⁰⁰⁵ (Lk 17:20). She ends her life story by quoting John 17, the priestly prayer of Jesus.¹⁰⁰⁶ These four references culled from her autobiographical manuscripts serve to underscore the following:

But it is especially the *Gospels* (her own italics) which sustain me in my hours of prayer, for in them I find what is necessary for my poor little soul. I am constantly finding in them new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings.¹⁰⁰⁷

Her story represents the power of the Word in the wordless.

In writing her story, St. Thérèse has only this desire: to sing the mercies of the Lord,¹⁰⁰⁸ to give her thoughts on the graces God deigned to grant her,¹⁰⁰⁹ to publish the totally gratuitous gifts of Jesus.¹⁰¹⁰ Thérèse wrote her autobiography through obedience and most of her other writings were done at the request of someone else. This obedience and obliging the request of others is an important point. For, the root of obedience is *audire*, to listen. Faith itself comes through listening, through hearing (Rm 10:17) and "Happy are those who hear the word of God and live it out" (Lk 11:28). Moreover, her own deafness was shattered by the sledge hammer of suffering; her soul matured in the crucible of exterior and interior trials.

In the midst of the greatest trials, Thérèse desired to follow the example of St. Cecilia who sang in the midst of her martyrdom, not surprising to St. Thérèse because: "The Gospels *rested on her heart* and in her heart reposed *the Spouse of Virgins!*" (her own italics).¹⁰¹¹ Through the Gospels she learned her Little Way of spiritual childhood, that is, utter confidence in Divine condescension, profound humility, total self-surrender, complete thanksgiving amid trials. All of this dawned upon her like the sun upon the day: "The Ray did not act all at once, but sweetly and gently it raised the little flower and strengthened her in such a way that . . . she was blossoming on the fertile mountain of Carmel."¹⁰¹² As in the Gospels, so with Thérèse, conversion and the suffering true discipleship entails, happened gradually. Likewise, each of these gradual stages has its Marian dimension with an evangelical cast: "For a sermon on the Blessed Virgin to please me and to do me any good, I must see her real life . . . as imitable . . . saying that she lived by faith just like ourselves, giving proofs of this from the Gospel . . ." ¹⁰¹³

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ms A 83v.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ms C 34r, v.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ms A 83v.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ms A 2r.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ms A 3r.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ms A 3v.

¹⁰¹¹ Ms A 61v.

¹⁰¹² Ms A 30v.

¹⁰¹³ CJ 21.VIII.3.

Thérèse and the Gospels

Thérèse was Mary's child before she knew herself to be such. Her task was to let this mystery unfold in her life. Thérèse depended only on the Gospels for her knowledge of Mary when she spoke and wrote to others about her. The Gospels established the principles of internal coherence and judgments concerning her thoughts on the Virgin. Yet, this approach itself was marked by development. In Manuscript A, begun in 1895 and completed in 1896, Thérèse writes, within the context of her Christmas conversion (1886), that the *Imitation of Christ* nourished her: "for as yet I had not discovered the treasures hidden in the Gospels."¹⁰¹⁴ At the end of that same manuscript, within the context of her profession and "Offering to Merciful Love," she writes: ". . . it is the *Gospels* (her own italics) which sustain me during my hours of prayer, for in them I find what is necessary for my poor little soul."¹⁰¹⁵ In her last conversations with her sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus, she repeats the same theme: "As for me, with the exception of the Gospels, I no longer find anything in books. The Gospels are enough. I listen with delight to these words of Jesus which tell me all I must do: 'Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart' . . ." ¹⁰¹⁶ She said much the same again in May, 1897, the month in which she wrote her final poem, *Pourquoi je l'aime, ô Marie*. She underscores her point by explaining this poem in an August, 1897, conversation with her sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus. Thérèse only wants to learn about Mary by ". . . giving proofs from the Gospel"¹⁰¹⁷

Thérèse supposes the Gospels to be what they really are—the Living Word of God, a permanent actuality, more adapted, in a sense, to our daily lives than to the transcendent actuality of heavenly realities.¹⁰¹⁸ Thérèse's meditation on them is so vital, so real, that the Gospels are written on her quotidian experience and illuminate it. In the Gospels, then, Thérèse discovers the reasons why she loves Mary. Thérèse senses that the love of the Gospel and the love of Mary are one in the sense that two tuning forks of the same frequency are in sympathetic resonance. Thérèse knows the Gospels by heart¹⁰¹⁹ and they enlighten her mind.¹⁰²⁰ The Gospels, in short, consume Thérèse.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ms A 47r.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ms A 83v.

¹⁰¹⁶ CJ 15.V.3.

¹⁰¹⁷ CJ 21.VIII.3.

¹⁰¹⁸ CJ 6.IV.2.

¹⁰¹⁹ CJ 12.IX.

¹⁰²⁰ CJ 29.V.

Thérèse and the Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive Ways of the Spiritual Life

In writing her autobiography, Thérèse distinguished the following three separate periods:

In the story of my soul, up until my entrance into Carmel I distinguish three separate periods. The first is not the least fruitful in memories in spite of its short duration. It extends from the dawn of my reason till our dear Mother's departure for heaven [1875-1877].¹⁰²¹

As I have already said, it's from the end of this first phase in my life that I entered the second period of my existence, the most painful of the three, especially since the entrance into Carmel of the one whom I chose as my second "Mamma." 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 [1877-1886].¹⁰²²

On that *night of light* began the third period of my life, the most beautiful and the most filled with graces from heaven. The work I had been unable to do in ten years was done by Jesus in one instant, contenting himself with my *good will* which was never lacking [1886-1895].¹⁰²³

Although the life-stages given above do not correspond exactly to the traditional threefold way of the spiritual life (purgative, illuminative and unitive), they do indicate that Thérèse recognized within her own life a gradual sense of development. For, as it was noted earlier, "the Ray did not act all at once but sweetly and gently."¹⁰²⁴ It is likewise important to note, "as in any evolution, the stages intermingle, with regressions as well as advances heralding future features."¹⁰²⁵ Keeping in mind such matters, what follows is an exposition of the gradual development of the appropriation of Mary's role in the life of Thérèse according to the traditional threefold development of the spiritual life.

Thérèse's Purgative Way

According to Tanquerey, the characteristic of the purgative way, or that state of beginners, is the purifying of the soul in view of attaining to intimate union with God. Thérèse would qualify as one of those beginners who lived habitually in a state

¹⁰²¹ Ms A 4r.

¹⁰²² Ms A 13r.

¹⁰²³ Ms A 45 v.

¹⁰²⁴ Ms A 30r.

¹⁰²⁵ *Poetry* (trans. D. Kinney), 20.

of grace, having refused God nothing since she was three, having been assured by her confessor that she had never committed a mortal sin. From the beginning, she was an innocent soul who desired to grow in the spiritual life, not only wanting to avoid mortal sin at all costs but to do something more for God and to become perfect. Thérèse desired to be united with God through love, but her purification was imperfect inasmuch as it was motivated by fear and hope but tended toward more perfect purification because her ruling desire was to love God, to please Him and to avoid offending Him even slightly.¹⁰²⁶

Along the purgative way, Thérèse had to discover the difference between her sense of God and the God of Jesus Christ. The events surrounding her Christmas conversion bear out that she made this discovery. Thérèse's sense of God came from her father; for, "of the symbols with which we spontaneously, but uncritically, express our life story, a privileged place is occupied by parental imagery."¹⁰²⁷ The grace of her Christmas conversion enabled Thérèse to distinguish between her papa and "Papa, God"; it is interesting to note that even in her abandonment at the end of her life, beset by physical and spiritual suffering, as did Jesus in His Passion (Mk. 15:34), so did Thérèse hold firm to this conviction of "Papa, God"¹⁰²⁸—an image completely purified and thoroughly appropriated.

This conversion had a Marian dimension. Out of the pressures on her own psychic and physical limitations, a vague image of Mary emerges in the life of Thérèse. That is to say, she needed to distinguish between her own mother, the maternal influence of her sisters, Pauline and Marie, and her sense of the Mother of God. Mme. Martin died in 1877 when Thérèse was four-and-a-half-years-old. It affected her deeply, and when her uncle began to speak of her mother on the Easter evening of 25 March 1883, Thérèse fell into a strange sickness. It was only after the fervent prayers of her sisters that Thérèse was cured on Pentecost, 13 May 1883: "The Blessed Virgin appeared *beautiful* to me . . . but what penetrated to the very depths of my soul was the '*ravishing smile of the Blessed Virgin.*'"¹⁰²⁹ Yet, the memory of "The Smile" was a trial for Thérèse, not resolved until four years later, on 4 November 1887, at Notre Dame des Victoires, where she knew herself to be the child of her "Mamma," Mary.¹⁰³⁰

It is important to note that her understanding of her cure at Notre Dame des Victoires comes after her Christmas conversion of 1886. It seems that the logic of

¹⁰²⁶ Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*, trans. Herman Branderis (Tournai: Desclée & Co., 1932), 305-309 (hereafter Tanquerey).

¹⁰²⁷ John Navone, *Tellers of the Word: Nine Moments in the Theology of Story* (Rome: privately published, 1981), 51, 125.

¹⁰²⁸ CJ 5.VI.4.

¹⁰²⁹ Ms A 30r.

¹⁰³⁰ Ms A 30v.

grace is operating here; for, "Neither the Trinity nor the whole plan of salvation can be selfishly manipulated. Fervent souls are willing to do almost anything for God except the one thing he wants: total trust; anything but surrender into his loving hands. 'You must become as little children' (Mk 9:33-37) whose one virtue is that they know they are unimportant."¹⁰³¹ Within the context of that statement, could not Thérèse's statement to Mary in the sanctuary of Notre Dame des Victoires ("I am your child"), be the bud that blossomed into the way of Spiritual Childhood, of total trust in God?

"Much of what John of the Cross has to say on mystical suffering has to do with this: the uncovering of this basic anguish—feeling unimportant—that we may surrender to God in poverty."¹⁰³² Could this not explain—the psychological aspects notwithstanding—the second stage of Thérèse's existence (1877-1886) as "the most painful of the three," because she was deprived of significant others like Mme. Martin and Pauline who made her feel important? If "all Marian mysteries have this quality: they surpass the mere understanding, but can very well be grasped by the believing spirit,"¹⁰³³ then it is easy to understand why Thérèse cannot express fully the grace of the Virgin's smile and her subsequent feelings about her new "Mamma." "The Smile," as Thérèse refers to her miraculous cure, and the struggle she endured for four years in order to understand it, exposes a limited appropriation of the role of Mary.

Thérèse's Illuminative Way

According to Tanquerey, the illuminative way of the spiritual life has the great aim of imitation, the following of Christ, by the positive exercise of Christian virtues. Those travelling along the illuminative way have acquired purity of heart, have mortified their passions, and have formed profound convictions on all the great truths. In such persons, the Holy Spirit inspires more affective than discursive prayer and a great longing for union with our Lord. While the purgative way is the struggle against sin, the illuminative way is the struggle to adorn oneself with the virtues of Christ. Thérèse struggled to make our Lord the center of her life and love, not only within the Church but also in the world.¹⁰³⁴ What follows first is Thérèse's

¹⁰³¹ Ruth Burrows, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1976), 84.

¹⁰³² Burrows, *Guidelines*, 85.

¹⁰³³ Adrienne von Speyr, *Handmaid of the Lord*; trans. E. A. Nelson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 21.

¹⁰³⁴ Tanquerey, 453-457.

struggle to imitate Jesus, "learning to sing," within the Church; Thérèse's struggle to make Jesus the center of her actions within the world, "singing the Magnificat," will be treated later.

Learning to Sing

Along the illuminative way, Thérèse had to discover her place within her own family, "the domestic church"; her religious family of Carmel; and the family of God, the Church universal. Within each of these ecclesial contexts, Thérèse learned what it meant to live the life of the baptized in community. Thérèse likened the experience of learning from each of these communities to birds that teach their young to sing: "So do children learn the science of virtues, the sublime song of Divine Love from souls responsible for forming them."¹⁰³⁵ In each of those communities, she discerned the presence of Jesus and learned to attend to the needs of "the least."

Thérèse's illuminative way had its Marian dimension. Mary had a unique role to play in fulfilling the Law and the Prophets. Yet this attained a deeper significance, as her life represents the total gratuity of Jesus' call and the paramount importance of an immediate and total response. The Virgin-Mother Mary, wholly dedicated and obedient to God, carried in her flesh Emmanuel, the Messiah, who brought salvation to all people. Her physical situation of being His mother is transformed into a deeper religious attitude the rest of her life. She understood the call of Jesus as doing the will of the Father (Mt 12:45-50). Thérèse is such a lover of these verses that they appear over and over in her writings.¹⁰³⁶ To be a disciple of Jesus means to be little (Mt 18:3-4). Thérèse considers that it is such littleness, that is, the humility of Mary, that attracts the divine King.¹⁰³⁷ Such was Mary's love of littleness that she hesitated to surrender its sign, her virginity, to the sublime dignity of divine Maternity.¹⁰³⁸ Yet at her consent, the Word of God passed from the womb of the Father to the womb of Mary, Jesus' second heaven.¹⁰³⁹ Just as the Mother nourished, defended and loved her Child, so did she watch over the first steps of Thérèse in religious life.

Thérèse inherited a great deal of tradition from the intimate circle of her family, from her religious family at Carmel and from the whole Church. Each of those contributed to her formation in Marian piety. Yet, Thérèse's Marian piety, formed within her family circle and by Carmel itself—*Totus marianus est*, contained a chal-

¹⁰³⁵ Ms A 53r.

¹⁰³⁶ Blat, "La espiritualidad mariana," 36; CG I, 644, 701, 798; PN 54: 20-21.

¹⁰³⁷ RP 1:20 .

¹⁰³⁸ LT 130 23.VII.91; PN 54.

¹⁰³⁹ Blat, "La espiritualidad mariana," 30.

lenge for her: "When a disciple experiences a conflict of loyalties to Jesus or to his own family, he must choose to follow Jesus."¹⁰⁴⁰ Within the context of her family, both natural and religious, Thérèse chose to follow Jesus. To follow Jesus means to move between enthusiasm and fear, faith and doubt, understanding and misunderstanding, suffering and hope, failure and mission.

Thérèse does experience these tensions but remains secure "under the Veil of the Virgin." Under the veil of the Virgin, Thérèse became a "true child of our Lady," by remaining hidden, silent, and interior by preference. By such means, she learned to be wholly dedicated and obedient to God.

Singing the Magnificat

As noted above, the illuminative way is above all the imitation of Christ. Thérèse desires to follow Jesus with her whole heart and Mary is there guiding her steps along the Way. Thérèse labored to make Jesus the center of her prayer, her action, even her recreation. Along the Little Way, Thérèse will strive to practice every theological and moral virtue to a perfect degree. Thérèse is that fervent soul who is more humble and more generous, distrustful of self and confident in God, habituated to the practice of self denial, but whose virtue has not been solidified by trial.¹⁰⁴¹ Just as her first poem prompted a painting, executed by Sr. Mary of the Angels,¹⁰⁴² so Thérèse no longer seems satisfied with mere sketches of the Blessed Virgin Mary but wants to paint a portrait of Mary on the canvas of her own life. Just as a portrait artist takes time to get to know his or her subject, so Thérèse will carefully observe her model of the Little Way—Mary, so as to render a truthful likeness.¹⁰⁴³

Along the illuminative way, Thérèse began to sense the impact her life, her prayer and her actions were to have on others: What does it mean to proclaim the Gospel in this world which is so unaware of it, so full of different ideas and traditions? Thérèse strives to give a mature response to the ways of the world with her own Little Way. She seeks to explain and to elucidate, in reflexive and nuanced language, and with humility, the reasons for her way of life and the meaning and value it can have for the existence of every human being. Thus, for her sister Marie, Thérèse marks out in Manuscript B the signposts of the Little Way: divine condescension, spiritual childhood, abandonment, suffering, hidden virtues.

¹⁰⁴⁰ William Thompson, "Matthew's Portrait of Jesus' Disciples," *The Bible Today* 19 (1981): 18.

¹⁰⁴¹ Tanqueray, 458-460.

¹⁰⁴² DE 463; cf. *Poésies*, Tome II, 48.

¹⁰⁴³ Cf. Nicolas, "La Vierge Marie," 519; Blat, "La espiritualidad mariana," 81.

This Little Way has its Marian dimension. In the Gospels, Mary shows herself as a prayerful woman of the Torah, who articulates the promises of the Lord to His people, reflects on her role in salvation events, and prays within and for a community. In fact,

Reading Thérèse's description of Mary's life, we cannot help noticing how well that life corresponds with her own, and how well the Little Way of spiritual childhood resembles the life of the Mother of God. This is so true that we are tempted to ask ourselves whether the Saint did not interpret Mary's life according to her own life and her Way of Childhood, until we realize that the traits she describes are taken from the Gospels.¹⁰⁴⁴

Moreover, in discovering the depths of the Lord's mercy contained in the Gospels, she understood better the meaning of her whole life.

Through the many different sufferings that she recounts she states that love never abandoned her. Not when her mother died nor when her sisters left home, not during her illness, her emotional difficulties or her scruples, not during her father's agony, not when she met with the thorns in her early days in Carmel, never in any circumstances had God forsaken her."¹⁰⁴⁵

He remembers his promises of mercy.

If the Lord's "Merciful Love" is the bedrock of the Little Way, then Marian episodes from the Gospels can be its signposts. Mary in the Annunciation responds with a whole-hearted yes to "Merciful Love": divine condescension. In Mary's Visitation, love for her neighbor integrates Mary's relationships: hidden virtues. At the birth of Jesus, a life completely dedicated to God bears the fruit "of the Holy One": spiritual childhood. At the Presentation, the sword of sorrow and aloneness is hers: suffering. Finding Jesus in the temple meant God is ever near even when we think we have lost him: abandonment. As Mary was the perfect, prayerful model of the Little Way—praying in community, reflecting on the deed and word of God, articulating God's mercy within her Jewish tradition, so Thérèse sings of one reality, "the mercies of the Lord," and her pages—her life—voice her Magnificat.

Thérèse's Unitive Way

According to Tanqueray, the simple unitive way is marked by the cultivation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Prayer becomes more simple. Experience shows that there are fervent souls living in habitual union with God, generously and persever-

¹⁰⁴⁴ F. Jamart, *The Complete Spiritual Doctrine*, 278.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Gaucher, *The Story of a Life*, 144.

ingly, and at times heroically practicing all the virtues.¹⁰⁴⁶ Thérèse was such a fervent soul.

Along the unitive way, Thérèse understands the Gospel and the conversion it entails by the connatural judgment of love. Her conversion is the transformation of the soul's very depths into love. This love is so dense, so full of meaning, that it is given as the only commandment to the disciple of Jesus. Thérèse herself writes in Manuscript C, at the very end of her life, "God has given me the grace to understand what charity is . . . I had never fathomed the meaning of these words of Jesus '*the second commandment is LIKE the first . . .*' (moreover) '*. . . a new commandment . . . THAT AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER.*'"¹⁰⁴⁷ For her, it was a mystical experience, inasmuch as it was an experience of the community of faith. Thérèse would lift the world, like Archimedes, with a lever and a fulcrum: the fulcrum, Jesus Alone; the lever, prayer which burns with the fire of love. The contemplative response to the lived Christian experience can be summed up as: "The Father has given us the Son."

This stage also has its Marian dimension; for, the Son has given us His Mother, who, at Cana and at Calvary, understood what it meant to love Jesus and to live His commandment of love. In regard to Mary at this stage, Thérèse can only be nourished on the Truth.¹⁰⁴⁸ It is necessary for her that she see things as they really are.¹⁰⁴⁹ Hence, concerning the Virgin Mary, her only interest is Mary's real life, not her supposed life.¹⁰⁵⁰ Instinctively, Thérèse turns to the Gospels, her overriding source of inspiration, her all-sufficient book.¹⁰⁵¹ Her method of Marian meditation is simple: "The Gospel teaches me . . . and my heart reveals to me."¹⁰⁵² From the Gospels, she wonders at all Mary did and taught.¹⁰⁵³ "I must do something before I die. I have always wanted to express in a poem to the Blessed Virgin all that I think of her," said Thérèse, already gravely ill, to her sister Céline.¹⁰⁵⁴ Likewise, her sister Marie had asked Thérèse to write a poem about Mary and to tell her all she thought about her.

In response, Thérèse said that her poem, completed during the month of May, 1897, expressed all she thought and what she would preach about the Blessed Vir-

¹⁰⁴⁶ Tanqueray, 607.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ms C 11v.

¹⁰⁴⁸ CJ 5.VIII.4.

¹⁰⁴⁹ CJ 21.VII.4.

¹⁰⁵⁰ CJ 21.VIII.3.

¹⁰⁵¹ CJ 15.V.3; LT 226.

¹⁰⁵² PN 54: 15.

¹⁰⁵³ Cf. Acts 1:1.

¹⁰⁵⁴ PA 268.

gin if she were a priest.¹⁰⁵⁵ Marie, who was also responsible for manuscripts A and B and also “the Blessed Virgin’s smile,”¹⁰⁵⁶ urged Thérèse to consummate her own desire to write all she thought about Mary in the poem *Pourquoi je l’aime O Marie*.¹⁰⁵⁷

In sum, the poem states that it is enough to say that Mary believed, loved and lived like us.¹⁰⁵⁸ Indeed, such is the rapport between Mother and child that Jesus Himself finds it difficult to distinguish between the two. Both Mother and child know that “to suffer while loving, is the purest happiness,”¹⁰⁵⁹ that “to love is to give all and to give oneself.”¹⁰⁶⁰ Mary and Thérèse are like two tuning forks in sympathetic resonance, set to the frequency of Divine Love manifested in the Word made flesh. As Mary loves, so does Thérèse. Thérèse was Mary’s child before she knew herself to be such. Her task was to let this mystery unfold in her life. Such gradual unfolding has been the thesis of this paper. That is to say, each stage of development within the life of Thérèse—purgative, illuminative and unitive—was marked by an ever-deepening conversion in Christ, and each stage had its Marian dimension with a decidedly evangelical cast. Thérèse depended only on the Gospels for her knowledge of Mary when she spoke and wrote to others about her. The Gospels established the principles of internal coherence and judgments concerning her thoughts on the Virgin.

In regard to the mystical aspects of her holiness, Thérèse travelled along the apophatic way rather than the cataphatic way. The cataphatic way is the way of light and would frequently include locutions, visions and ecstasies. The apophatic way, or way of darkness, generally lacks such phenomena but reveals and relies on naked faith. Although Thérèse did experience some mystical phenomena in life—such as being “under the veil of the Virgin” (in July 1889), and the “wound of love” (while making the Stations of the Cross, 11 June 1895, just two days after making her “offering to Merciful Love”), she said of herself that she would rather pick up a pin for love than to experience all ecstasies. Her model of that kind of holiness and the source of strength which it entails was the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thérèse makes it clear in her final poem that they were both women who lived by faith which was purified by every sort of physical and spiritual trial, and that they both suffered, by preference, in silence.

¹⁰⁵⁵ DE, 649; varia/Ms C; DE, 439.

¹⁰⁵⁶ *St. Thérèse . . . Last Conversations*, 101.

¹⁰⁵⁷ PN 54.

¹⁰⁵⁸ CJ 21.V111.3; PN 54: 17.

¹⁰⁵⁹ PN 54: 16.

¹⁰⁶⁰ PN 54: 22.

The Originality of Thérèse

Originality here is understood not so much as creating something new, but rather as a return to the sources. In this context, the words of Jesus could be applied to Thérèse: "Every scribe who is learned in the reign of God is like the head of a household who can bring from his storeroom both the new and the old." As has already been pointed out, Thérèse returned to the Gospels for the source of her mariology. It was there that she discovered that Mary is "more Mother than Queen."¹⁰⁶¹ Thérèse herself reveled in Mary's maternal tenderness. Although this is a very important aspect of Thérèse's insight into Mary, I think another aspect of this motherhood has been forgotten, or, at least, underdeveloped.

That aspect is paralleled in all three of the Synoptics and implicit in John: "Whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me" (Mk 3:35); "Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is brother and sister and mother to me" (Mt 12:50); "My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it" (Lk 8:21); "If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:31b-32). By divine election, Mary had a unique role in the plan of salvation, but this was not a passive role; Mary actively, consciously, and willingly participated in this plan. Thérèse intuited this kind of active, conscious, willing participation from her meditation on the Gospels, and, in her writings and sayings, she passed on the fruit of her contemplation, namely, that Mary is a "perfect disciple of Jesus, who offers to us a paradigm for our own discipleship."¹⁰⁶²

What follows are references to two of Thérèse's contemporaries, Pope Leo XIII and the theologian Jean-Baptiste Terrien, and to two more recent commentaries on Thérèse's Marian insights by two leading authorities. The former will help to establish the contemporaneous context of the Marian aspects of Thérèse's spirituality; the latter will help to establish that Mary is indeed more mother than queen and yet, at the same time, they demonstrate that Thérèse's appreciation of "doing the will of God" as an aspect of Mary's motherhood has been forgotten or, at least, underdeveloped by the students of Thérèse.

Titles Given to Mary Our Mother by Leo XIII and Terrien

In an unpublished monograph,¹⁰⁶³ Fr. Theodore Koehler, S.M., mentions St. Thérèse of Lisieux at the beginning of his article. He states that Thérèse referred

¹⁰⁶¹ CJ 21.VIII.3.

¹⁰⁶² Bertrand Buby, *Mary, the Faithful Disciple*, 13.

¹⁰⁶³ Théodore Koehler, S.M., "Les Titres donnés à Marie notre Mère, au 19^e et au 20^e siècles: avant le concile Vatican II," monograph dated 30 December, 1987, presented at the 10th International

to Mary as more mother than queen. She protested against a presentation that would show Mary distant; rather, she wanted one that would make her accessible. Thérèse was not alone in her desire. Her contemporary, Leo XIII, from whom she had sought an exception for her entrance into Carmel at the age of fifteen in 1887, emphasized the spiritual maternity of Mary in his encyclicals on the rosary. In 1897—the year of her death, the year of her poem on Mary, the year of her saying “more mother than queen”—the Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Terrien, in a remarkable study, referred to Mary’s spiritual maternity. It is worth quoting from Fr. Koehler’s monograph at length concerning the ordinary magisterium of Leo XIII and the theological insights of J.-B. Terrien.

Leo XII

In *Supremi Apostolatus* (1 September 1883), Leo XIII said that Our Lady of the Rosary is above all the Mother of God, Our Sovereign, Our Queen, whose help is well attested by the titles: *Auxiliatricem, Opiferam, Salvatricem, bellorum Potentem, Victricem, Paciferam*.¹⁰⁶⁴ But the faithful love to find their refuge “in her maternal goodness.”¹⁰⁶⁵ This goodness has been given to Mary because God wanted for His Son a very loving Mother: “*maternos plane indidit sensus, aliud nihil spirantes nisi amorem et veniam*”; it is such a mother whom Jesus, dying, confided to our race, in the person of John; and Mary, following upon this, has taken charge of all her maternal functions (*materna officia*).¹⁰⁶⁶ At the outset of the encyclical *Magnae Dei Matris* (8 September 1892), the Pope prays to Mary to help us without ceasing, like a mother (*in modum matris*); he asks that he show himself with the will of a son entirely dedicated to her.¹⁰⁶⁷ If Christ is our brother, we have “the right to call God our Father”; and likewise, “we have the very loving right to have and to call Mary our mother.” In her, charity is ineffable; she is “mother for us, not humanly, but by Christ”; she is a mother full of mercy more than any other mother; we are her “very dear children”; let us pray to her in the name of these “maternal bonds which so closely unite her to Jesus and to us”; we are “under the protection of the best of

Mariological/Marian Congress in Kevelaer, 1987. (What follows is my own translation of the article from the French.)

¹⁰⁶⁴ Leo XIII, *Supremi Apostolatus*, in *Documentos Marianos*, ed. H. Marin (Madrid: Editorial Catolica, 1956), 331 (hereafter DM).

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, DM 329.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, DM 377.

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Id.*, *Magnae Dei Matris*, DM 389.

mothers" (*in tutela optima matris*).¹⁰⁶⁸ Thus, the Pope is full of hope in this "powerful and benevolent mother" (*potente et benigna matre*).¹⁰⁶⁹

In *Laelitiae sanctae* (8 September 1893), there appears one time the title "mother of God and mother of men."¹⁰⁷⁰ *Jucunda semper* (8 September 1894) recalls that Mary, at Calvary, "offered her Son to divine justice with an immense charity for us: in order to receive us as sons."¹⁰⁷¹ In *Adjutricem populi* (5 September 1895), Leo XIII, in giving his reasons for confidence in Mary, began with the last words of Jesus to His mother: "*Ecce filius tuus*. In John . . . Christ designated symbolically the person of mankind." Mary is "the mother of those whom Christ has deigned to call father and brother" (Pseudo-Anselm of Canterbury. *Orat.* 47); Mary began her mission in the Cenacle, being "truly the mother of the Church"; in heaven, she is the mother present and favorable to us (*nobis adesse et favere mater*), who administers the graces of the mystery of redemption with which she cooperated; also the faithful confide themselves to her like sons (*filiorum more*).¹⁰⁷²

By the rosary we will commemorate the mysteries by which Mary became "both mother of God and our mother" (*simul mater Dei, simul mater nostra*). The rosary makes us appreciate the grandeur of these two dignities, the fruits of these two ministries; it incites us to show ourselves worthy of such a mother (*tanta matre*).¹⁰⁷³ It is necessary to pray the rosary for the unity of the Church, a union which has been made part of this function of the spiritual maternity of Mary: those who belong to Christ. Mary could only bring them to birth within the same faith, the same love; "she must again in some way bring to birth in Christ those who are separated from its unity; she awaits from us the help of the rosary."¹⁰⁷⁴

In conclusion, the Pope uses a transformed sense of "*Monstra te esse matrem*": we address this supplication to her who is in turn "the Mother of God and ours." Proclaiming his devotion to the rosary in *Fidentem piumque animum* (20 September 1896), he calls Mary "mother of men . . . full of mercy, full of grace."¹⁰⁷⁵ In *Augustissimae Virginis* (12 September 1897), the "*Ecce mater tua*" is for the Pope himself an invitation to receive Mary, seeing that Christ takes her as His representative on earth. He desires that his teaching may make Mary loved so that each of the faithful may take Mary "as his own" (*in sua*, Jn 19:27).¹⁰⁷⁶ However, the title

¹⁰⁶⁸ Ibid., DM 392.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ibid., DM 397.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Id., *Laelitiae sanctae*, DM 408.

¹⁰⁷¹ Id., *Jucunda semper*, DM 412.

¹⁰⁷² Id., *Adjutricem populi*, DM 426, 427.

¹⁰⁷³ Ibid., DM 435.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Id., *Fidentem piumque*, DM 441.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Id., *Augustissimae Virginis*, DM 450.

which Leo XIII inscribed into the Litany of Loretto is that of "Queen of the Most Holy Rosary."¹⁰⁷⁷ His insistence of basing the spiritual maternity of Mary on the text of John will be followed by his successors. It seems that for Leo XIII it is about a maternity of adoption: at Calvary, Mary has become our mother in adopting us as children; but that is the will of God.

Jean-Baptiste Terrien

If Leo XIII represents the ordinary magisterium of the Church at the time of St. Thérèse, then J.-B. Terrien represents those theologians who sought to articulate that Mary is the Mother of God and the mother of the human race. Fr. Koehler writes that J.-B. Terrien was well prepared for his study *La Mère de Dieu et la Mère des hommes d'après les Pères et la Théologie* (1899-1902), which is a study of the maternity of grace (another term for spiritual maternity), by a remarkable study, *Grace and Glory*, published in 1897. That same year, Thérèse wrote her final poem on Mary. That same year, she was to die. In his study, J.-B. Terrien bases himself on the doctrine of the Mystical Body:

The whole Christ, to use the language of St. Augustine, is Jesus Christ and his mystical body . . . Thus Mary, in order to be fully the mother of the Word Incarnate, in order to have a maternity which corresponds to the person of her Son, must concur in the birth of his members as well as in the birth of its Head. The Mystical Person of Jesus Christ is in the blossoming of the divine plan and the complement to his physical person. Thus also, in a similar measure, the spiritual maternity of Mary crowns and completes her maternity of nature. Consequently, just as the full comprehension of the Son claims knowledge of the rapport which binds Him to His Church, so knowledge of the divine maternity will be absolutely incomplete, if [Mary's] spiritual maternity would be left in the shadows.¹⁰⁷⁸

The point of quoting Leo XIII and J.-B. Terrien from the monograph of Fr. Koehler was to show that Thérèse's Marian insight—"more mother than queen"—was in line with contemporary, ordinary magisterium and theological thinking. Both pope and theologian based themselves on John 19:25-27. Although Thérèse does not deny or neglect this fundamental insight into Mary's maternity, she does give it a certain refraction in light of her evangelical meditations. However, before exploring this refraction, it is worth turning to two of her leading commentators.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Id., *Diuturni temporis* (5 September 1898), DM 460.

¹⁰⁷⁸ J.-B. Terrien, *La Grace et la Gloire* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1897).

Two Leading Authorities

François de Sainte-Marie, O.C.D., ranks as one of the great scholars of the life and works of St. Thérèse, because he edited the facsimiles of the *Manuscrits Autobiographiques*. In his article¹⁰⁷⁹ for the Marian Congress of Lisieux, he explores the Marian devotion of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus: "more mother than queen." His introduction is a rapid survey of the role of Mary in the life of Thérèse.¹⁰⁸⁰ In the first part, he explores the poem *Pourquoi je l'aime, ô Marie*, by emphasizing its importance, by describing its structure, and by contextualizing it within the physical agony and spiritual desolation of Thérèse.¹⁰⁸¹ He continues with Thérèse's meditation on Mary's role in the Gospels, which results in the love of a child for her mother, understanding their sharing in suffering and in a life very simple and ordinary.¹⁰⁸² He highlights the Marian atmosphere of the last months of Thérèse.¹⁰⁸³ He concludes that one should have no fear of judgment, since the Virgin knows our weakness and prays for us.¹⁰⁸⁴

François de Sainte-Marie mentions in his article another leading authority, Msgr. Combes, who was charged by Mother Agnes of Jesus (in 1947) to examine systematically the writings of Thérèse: "Monseigneur André Combes has underlined very happily the importance of the Canticum "*Pourquoi je l'aime, o Marie*" in a chapter in his work *Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: Contemplation et apostolat*.¹⁰⁸⁵ However, Msgr. Combes takes a different view. In *Marie pour Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux*, Combes repudiates the praise of François de Sainte-Marie, because he claimed to have followed to the last detail the movement of Thérèse's thought all along the two hundred alexandrines.¹⁰⁸⁶ He takes to task the article of François de Sainte-Marie because, in the Carmelite's eyes, there are only two axes in the poem, the sharing of suffering and a life ordinary and simple.¹⁰⁸⁷ Combes then proceeds with a line analysis of Thérèse's great poem on Mary. He concludes "that it is the conviction of Thérèse, and it is her profound joy, that [Jesus Himself] finds it difficult to distinguish between Mother and child. By the example of Mary, Thérèse is assured that her actual trial attenuates nothing, not her faithfulness, not her perfec-

¹⁰⁷⁹ FSM, 129-148.

¹⁰⁸⁰ FSM, 129-134.

¹⁰⁸¹ FSM, 134-138.

¹⁰⁸² FSM, 138-145.

¹⁰⁸³ FSM, 145-147, n. 47.

¹⁰⁸⁴ FSM, 148.

¹⁰⁸⁵ André Combes, *Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: Contemplation et apostolat* (Paris, 1950), 251-170; he cites 102 of the 200 verses.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Combes, *Sainte Thérèse . . . Contemplation et apostolat*, 83.

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

tion, not her hopes. The night of faith is perfectly compatible with the fullness of Love.”¹⁰⁸⁸

Yet, to my mind neither author developed “doing the will of God” as an aspect of Mary’s motherhood, nor do they say much about Mary’s discipleship. It seems to me that it is the Marian qualities of discipleship that Thérèse specifically appropriated as she pondered the Gospels and Mary’s role in them.

Doing the Will of God

Although Thérèse did not herself parallel Mark 3:35, Matthew 12:50, Luke 8:21, and John 8:31b-32, such a practice is not foreign to her way of thinking: “Above all, she took spiritual nourishment from the Holy Scriptures and principally from the Gospels . . . she copied passages from the Gospel in order to coordinate and better comprehend the facts recorded by each of the Evangelists.”¹⁰⁸⁹

Indeed, so great was her love of Holy Scripture, that she declared to her sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus: “It’s only in heaven that we will see the whole truth about everything. It is impossible on earth. Thus, regarding Holy Scripture, isn’t it sad to see so many different translations! Had I been a priest, I would have learned Hebrew and Greek, and wouldn’t have been satisfied with Latin. In this way, I would have known the real text dictated by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁹⁰ In the above passages, Thérèse pondered the faithful disciple, Mary, who did the will of God.

For years, Thérèse had been captivated by the question these passages pose. In her letters¹⁰⁹¹ she refers to doing the will of my Father; in her last poem¹⁰⁹² she refers to “my will,” that is to say, the will of Jesus. It is not physical descent that links sinners to Jesus; rather, it is doing the will of Jesus, (here Thérèse emphasizes His Divinity) who transforms sinners by His words and works. What happens here, as well, is that the rank and privileges of the Mother of Jesus are now extended to sinners who become His disciples, His mother and brothers and sisters, by doing His will. Hence, Thérèse can rightly claim: “His goods are mine.”¹⁰⁹³ It is precisely this kind of self-sacrificing love of Jesus on behalf of sinners that captivates the loving gaze and meditation of Thérèse. Mary does not hesitate to leave her Son in these passages, so that sinners may draw near to become His disciples. “Such love and

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰⁸⁹ NPPA/G, quoting *La Bible avec Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris: Cerf/DDB, 1979), 183.

¹⁰⁹⁰ CJ 4.VIII.5.

¹⁰⁹¹ LT 130, 142, 172; LT 130, n. 5.

¹⁰⁹² PN 54: 20, 8.

¹⁰⁹³ LT 258.

such humility”¹⁰⁹⁴ enables Mary to “love us as Jesus loves us”¹⁰⁹⁵ and to be prepared for the distance to which she consented in the Public Life of Her Son.¹⁰⁹⁶ In the love of Son and Mother for sinners, Thérèse discovered an adequate explanation of her own discipleship and an exact definition of love: “To love is to give all and to give oneself.”¹⁰⁹⁷

Mary as the perfect disciple of Jesus offered Thérèse a paradigm for her own discipleship. A paradigm is a central thematic idea “rich and powerful enough to provide a vantage point from which to view all the other great truths about Mary.”¹⁰⁹⁸ Thérèse reflected deeply on the evangelical texts which refer to Mary. With such a paradigm of discipleship derived from the Gospels, Thérèse understood all of Mary’s titles and attributes given to her throughout the history of the Church. Hence, Mary as *immaculata, virgo, mater, assumpta* is the splendor and glory of humanity, because her different roles and attitudes are but a kaleidoscope of doing the will of God as his faithful disciple. In Mary, the paradigm of discipleship attains its highest quality, “the art of God.” Mary, the faithful disciple, radiates and manifests God’s *charis*. “In Mary, trinitarian love becomes visible and is experienced; likewise, she expresses the very essence of the Church as archetype and model, the true configuration of *anima ecclesiastica*, the highest realization of human holiness”¹⁰⁹⁹

The last written words of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face summarize the role of Mary in her life. On the birthday of Mary, 8 September 1897, Thérèse wrote with a trembling hand, on the back of an image of Our Lady of Victories where she had pasted the little flower plucked from the garden wall of Les Buissonnets by M. Martin, the following words: “*O Marie, si j’étais la Reine du Ciel et que vous soyez Thérèse, je voudrais être Thérèse afin que vous soyez la Reine du Ciel.*”¹¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁹⁴ PN 54: 21, 8.

¹⁰⁹⁵ PN 54: 22, 1.

¹⁰⁹⁶ PN 54: 22, 2.

¹⁰⁹⁷ PN 52: 22, 3.

¹⁰⁹⁸ P. J. Bearsley, “Mary the Perfect Disciple: A Paradigm for Mariology,” *Theological Studies* 41 (Sept. 1980): 469.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Johann G. Roten, “Mary and Beauty,” *The Marian Library Newsletter*, n.s. 19 (Summer 1989): 6.

¹¹⁰⁰ Cf. FSM, 147.

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