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From Mother to Sister:

The Development in the Understanding of Mission in the Life and Writings of St Thérèse of Lisieux and its Contemporary Relevance

By
Michelle Jones

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

of Master of Theology from the University of Notre Dame, Australia

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- ABSTRACT -

This dissertation analyses the development in the understanding of mission in the life and writings of St Thérèse of Lisieux and considers its contemporary significance. The thesis is that Thérèse progressed from a 'mother missiology' to a 'sister missiology.' This missiological evolution is intrinsically united to Thérèse's transcendence of the faith-categories of her era.

Initially, with her Catholic contemporaries, Thérèse regarded it as her duty to 'mother' unbelievers into divine life. This 'mother missiology' gradually became 'sister missiology' as two movements of grace, namely the emergence of the 'little way' and Thérèse's intensifying union with Jesus, the kenotic Christ, took Thérèse beyond her era's vision of faith. The paradigm of 'sister missiology' has an entwined dual dynamic: radical solidarity with unbelievers and radical receptivity to the gratuitous outpouring of God's love.

Sister missiology is demonstrated to be a potentially vital enabler of the Church's missionary agenda in the twenty-first century. It is able to facilitate the realisation of the missionary objectives of the Second Vatican Council and offers a road-map for the Church's engagement with postmodernity.

- DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP -

This dissertation is the candidate's own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of the candidate's knowledge, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the dissertation.

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Michelle Jones Date

- INTRODUCTION -

On the fourteenth of December 1927, Pope Pius XI proclaimed St Thérèse of Lisieux 'Principal Patroness of Mission.' At least implicit in this appointment was the acknowledgement that St Thérèse and the message of her life have some direct bearing on the theology of mission so that indeed she might, by extension, be identified as a theologian of mission. The significance of Thérèse of Lisieux for the theology of mission is the subject of this dissertation. More precisely, the focus is upon the development in the conceptualisation of mission that occurred within the life and writings of Thérèse and the contemporary relevance of the Saint's ultimate missiological perspective. The ternary structure of this study reflects these core concerns. The first chapter approaches Thérèse as a woman of her times; originally imbibing the ecclesiology, and hence missiology, of late nineteenth century France, Thérèse's initial missionary stance indicates her participation in this vision of faith. At this incipient stage of her missiological development, Thérèse considered herself a 'mother' in relation to unbelievers. The next chapter traces two interrelated and crucial trajectories in Thérèse's life that led to a maturation in her faith and consequently to a fundamental re-visioning of her understanding of the meaning of mission. Within this later missiological paradigm, Thérèse regarded herself as a 'sister' in a radical, loving solidarity with her 'siblings' – unbelievers. A survey of the significance of Thérèse's 'sister missiology' for the Church of the twenty-first century is the topic of the third chapter. The body of the dissertation is preceded by an analysis of the experience-based theological method to be employed in the thesis and an appraisal of the ostensible paradox of deeming an enclosed Carmelite nun a theologian of mission.

Methodology.

(i) St Thérèse as a 'classic.'

From the outset it must be noted that while St Thérèse is presented in this dissertation as a 'theologian' of mission, never in her twenty-four years did she formally study theology or purport to write a 'theological' work. Evidently, a paradigm shift is at work here whereby Thérèse is designated a 'theologian' through a criterion other than that of professional qualifications.

David Tracy speaks of the 'classic' – the function of which is 'the disclosure of a reality we cannot but name truth.'[1] Through her life and writings Thérèse has been rightly identified as such a classic[2] and it is precisely as thus that she can be considered a theologian. The identity of a classic may be conceptualised as constituted by two interrelated dimensions.

Firstly, the teaching of a classic is contained within the 'text' of an individual's personal life-experience. This experience may be 'read' directly from the lived witness of the person, or through the medium of his or her writings. Hans Urs Von Balthasar underscores this aspect of Thérèse when he comments that, 'it is...her life itself that is her doctrine.'[3] The description of Thérèse as 'a narrative theologian'[4] further reinforces the

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[1] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 108.
[2] See Mary Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: "Doctor for the Third Millennium?"' in *New Theology Review* 12 (May 1999), p. 36.
[3] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, trans. Donald Nichols and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), p. 30.
[4] Eugene McCaffrey, 'Saint Thérèse of Lisieux' in *Spirituality* 3:13 (1997), p. 208. In this article, McCaffrey observes that there is something distinctively feminine about Thérèse's trust in, and narration of, 'her own experiences and insights' (p. 209). He considers Thérèse's distinctly feminine theological

didactic value of the 'story' of her life-experience. For all except the handful of people who knew her intimately,[5] the instructive life-experience of Thérèse is accessible through means of her written word - primarily the three autobiographical manuscripts constituting *Story of a Soul*[6] and the two volumes of *General Correspondence*,[7] and to a lesser extent, her poems[8] and plays.[9]

The second feature of the classic is that what is taught through the text of experience has a universal, and thus enduring, significance. Von Balthasar deems the definitive contribution to theology of the classic to be that of 'representative sanctity:' 'a special type of sanctity, by which God singles out some individual for the good of the Church and the community as a model of sanctity.'[10] In other words, through manifesting a truth that transcends personal historical existence, the life-experience of the classic - or the saint - speaks a message of communal, and not merely individual, relevance.[11] Indeed, by so vitally embodying God's word, the figure of the classic effects a 'blood transfusion'[12] within the corpus of theology; new life is injected 'into failing structures, challenging set

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expression – which has been ratified by the Church through its elevation of Thérèse to the rank of 'Doctor of the Church' – 'a welcome antidote to a male, rational expression of the Gospel and a timely challenge to a Church that has for so long ignored its own feminine roots' (ibid.).

[5] In fact, as Ida Görres highlights, even those closest to Thérèse were often unaware of the content of her life-experience, hidden as it was behind a 'veil of ordinariness, averageness, commonplaceness.' Ida Friederike Görres, *The Hidden Face: A Study of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), p. 304.

[6] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. John Clarke (Third Edition; Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996).

[7] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume I*, trans. John Clarke (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1982) and St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume II*, trans. John Clarke (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1998).

[8] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Poems*, trans. Alan Bancroft (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996).

[9] Partially cited in Mary Frohlich, *St Thérèse of Lisieux: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003).

[10] Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, p. 22.

[11] For an interesting discussion of how the early Church considered personal encounter with God an essentially communal affair, see Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 39-89.

[12] Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, p. 39.

ideas and ageing formulas.'[13] Highlighting the remarkable universal import of St Thérèse's personal experience, Von Balthasar notes that 'it is contrary to all expectation that the simple, modest story of this little girl should eventually culminate, as it irrefutably does, in the enunciation of theological truths.'[14] Moreover, the Church's 1997 pronouncement of Thérèse as Doctor of the Church emphasises the enduring authority of truth spoken through the particularity of her life. Clearly, through being a classic - an authentic, lived articulation of God's word - Thérèse is appropriately considered a theologian. The more specific designation of 'theologian of mission,' then, means that whatever she teaches about mission proceeds from the context of her own life-experience, yet these missiological insights have a universal resonance and applicability.

Two final comments are necessary at this juncture. Firstly, given that Thérèse's theological contribution is the contribution of a classic, it is crucial that her works be read accordingly. Critical textual analysis of the Thérèsian corpus, therefore, must ultimately look to the phenomenological 'beyond' – that is, to the quality and spirit of Thérèse's lived experiences – rather than the medium of the 'not... very *systematic*'[15] writings themselves in order truly to perceive Thérèse's theological import. The very topic of this dissertation demonstrates this need to interpret Thérèse as a classic; never does the phrase 'theology of mission' appear in Thérèse's *oeuvre*, yet through the window of these writings her missiology, and the developments therein, are discernible within the text of her life-experience.

[13] McCaffrey, 'Saint Thérèse of Lisieux,' p. 209.
[14] Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, p. 29.
[15] Conrad de Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, trans. Susan Conroy (New York: St Pauls, 1998), p. LIV. Emphasis original.

Secondly, it is important to distinguish between Thérèsian missiology – unarticulated, yet nevertheless readable from the Saint's life-experience – and the personal sense of 'mission' of which Thérèse was increasingly conscious and specific, particularly in the last months of her life. Exemplifying the latter is Thérèse's reported death-bed proclamation: 'I feel... that my mission is about to begin;'[16] moreover, this intuition is reinforced by Pope Pius XI's reference soon after her canonization to the 'new mission'[17] of St Thérèse. Von Balthasar explicates that Thérèse's particularized mission, or vocation, consisted in her conscious and posthumous (through the agency of her sisters) promulgation of the 'little way.'[18] While Thérèse's developing theology of mission certainly contains her announcement of the 'little way,' the two are not precisely identifiable.

(ii) The problem of the 'two texts.'

In accessing Thérèse's classical theological contribution, this dissertation draws upon the critical English translation of the *authentic* Thérèsian texts. As this specification intimates, the posthumous treatment of Thérèse's original writings, particularly the three manuscripts which constitute *Story of a Soul*, has been the subject of some contention. In fact, the heart of this controversy is essentially connected with the novelty of Thérèse's missiological insights. It is worthwhile, then, to survey the historical handling of Thérèse's written works; such an overview will reveal the necessity of referring to the Saint's original manuscripts in this dissertation and indeed in any serious Thérèsian scholarship.

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[16] *St Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Last Conversations*, trans. John Clarke (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1977), p. 102.
[17] Pope Pius XI, cited by Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, p. 32.
[18] See ibid., p. 31.

Convinced of the sanctity of their youngest sister – 'though probably for the wrong reasons'[19] – and so compelled to make her known, Thérèse's three elder Carmelite sisters, Marie, Céline and principally Pauline, or Mother Agnes as she was known in Carmel, conceived to circulate Thérèse's autobiographical manuscripts amongst the Carmels in France after her death. In preparing these three manuscripts for publication, Mother Agnes made several thousand editorial 'cuts, stylistic corrections and insertions'[20] to her sister's original writings. These changes were made without scruple; the primary maternal figure in Thérèse's life since the death of their mother when Thérèse was only four and a half, Mother Agnes believed that 'she knew Thérèse's thought as well as Thérèse, if not better than Thérèse herself, so she wanted to make her accessible to the Carmelites and Catholics of her time.'[21] Furthermore, given that the three manuscripts were essentially personal reflections written under obedience and specifically directed to Mother Agnes, Sister Marie and Mother Marie de Gonzague (the prioress of the Lisieux Carmel for a number of years) respectively, Mother Agnes considered it necessary that she 'censor' Thérèse's works to render them appropriate for widespread distribution.

On the thirtieth of September 1898, the edited autobiographical manuscripts, supplemented by a selection of Thérèse's letters and poems and a section named 'Counsels and Recollections' which was composed by Thérèse's sister Céline, were published under the title *Histoire d'une Ame*. The volume was an immediate success and in the ensuing years, many further editions of the text were required. John Clarke

[19] Ruth Burrows, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1980), p. 120.
[20] Görres, *The Hidden Face*, p. 25.
[21] Jean-François Six, *Light of the Night: The Last Eighteen Months in the Life of Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996), p. 2.

comments that 'as the fame of St. Thérèse of Lisieux grew and special studies of her works were undertaken, it was only natural that theologians would be satisfied only with her original, unedited manuscripts.'[22] Foremost among these scholars was André Combes – 'a pioneer in real research into Thérèse and a great theorist on the spiritual life.'[23] While his request to the Lisieux Carmel for all of the authentic Thérèsian manuscripts was denied, he did succeed in obtaining several fragments of these writings. After observing the differences between *Histoire d'une Ame* and the original work of Thérèse, Combes in 1950 proposed the hypothesis that 'there are two texts, that of Thérèse and that of Pauline.'[24]

The entire text of Thérèse's authentic autobiographical manuscripts was not to become publicly available until several years after the death of Mother Agnes in 1951; indeed, Mother Agnes had responded to a letter from the Very Reverend Marie-Eugène, Definitor General of the Discalced Order, in which he officially requested the release of the complete original texts of Thérèse in order 'to avoid and to refute partial or mistaken interpretations of her doctrine and in order that her doctrine and her soul should be still more deeply understood,'[25] by obtaining from Rome a postponement of the directive until after her death. In 1957, François de Sainte Marie published Thérèse's complete autobiographical manuscripts in all of their authenticity. His work contained 'no additions, no deletions, practically no paragraphs, no division into chapters, no prologue, no epilogue;'[26] at last 'the real Thérèse appeared "stripped," not sweetened.'[27] The work

[22] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. xix.
[23] Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 1.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Very Reverend Marie-Eugéne, cited in St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. xx.
[26] Ibid.
[27] From the website of the Sanctuaire de Sainte Thérèse, located online at:

of François de Sainte Marie was substantially reproduced, this time in a format more accessible to the reader, in a critical edition of the entire Thérèsian corpus that was published to mark the centenary of her birth in 1973. It is from the English translation made by John Clarke from the Institute of Carmelite Studies of this critical centenary edition that this dissertation accesses the authentic, 'unedited,' Thérèse of Lisieux.

So what comes to light as Thérèse's complete original autobiographical manuscripts are compared with Mother Agnes' edited version of her sister's story? Firstly, as Combes heralded, the two accounts are not equivalent; they are two distinct texts. Six intensifies this notion when he argues that Mother Agnes' text makes 'a travesty of Thérèse.'[28] As Ruth Burrows agrees, 'it is just not true to say [Thérèse's] message in no way suffered through the editing and expurgating of her writings.'[29] Clearly then, Mother Agnes' editorial work failed to communicate the essence of Thérèse's life-experience. Why is this so? The two texts issue from 'two spiritualities, that of Mother Agnes and that of Thérèse.'[30] Mother Agnes participated

> in the spirituality universal among the Carmels in nineteenth-century France. This was a spirit that was clearly more ascetical than mystical, in which the emphasis was constantly put on the misdeeds committed against God and the reparation that the Carmelites had to accomplish, offering themselves as public victims for the sins of men.[31]

The hallmark of Thérèse's spirituality, on the other hand, is abandonment to divine love made in the darkness of faith. So where Mother Agnes fearfully calculates her spiritual

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http://therese-de-lisieux.cef.fr/ang/sesecritsang.htm

[28] Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 2. Mary Frohlich's comment on Jean-François Six is worth mentioning here. She notes that 'Six has been consistently ostracized by Lisieux "insiders" because of his very negative attitude toward Mother Agnes… His scholarship and his interpretations are generally worthy of attention, but the vitriol that repeatedly surfaces must be taken with many grains of salt.' Mary Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux' in *Theological Studies* 61:2 (2000), p. 270, fn. 42.

[29] Burrows, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*, p. 130.

[30] Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 5.

[31] Ibid., p. 7.

merits, Thérèse rejoices in her absolute spiritual poverty as pure capacity for God; where Mother Agnes sought the certitude of spiritual status, Thérèse could do nothing but abandon all claims to status and rely on God's goodness. When it comes to handling Thérèse's autobiographical manuscripts, then, Mother Agnes' editorial hand instinctively wrenches Thérèse back from the freefall of surrender. In other words, Mother Agnes 'edited Thérèse's manuscript so that it better fit the preconceptions of popular spirituality of that era.'[32] This was no small task given that Thérèse wrote two of her three manuscripts when she was in the dark night of faith of her last eighteen months in which abandonment to love was her sole guiding light. The missiological implications immanent in Mother Agnes' editing work are patent here: Mother Agnes will make Thérèse communicate a nineteenth century spirituality's missiology, that which will be elaborated in Chapter One as 'mother missiology,' whereas Thérèse herself develops and expresses a missiology which emanates from her Gospel spirituality of poverty, confidence and love in solidarity – sister missiology. Evidently, both this dissertation with its specific missiological concerns, and any study of Thérèse's theological import, must draw upon the authentic Thérèsian manuscripts in order truly to imbibe the new wine that is Thérèse of Lisieux.

A note of caution remains to be sounded regarding using the *Last Conversations* as a means of accessing the 'real' Thérèse. In the words of Guy Gaucher, 'sound criticism cannot put the words reported by witnesses on the same level as what Thérèse wrote.'[33] Six points out that a further factor compounds the dubious status of the *Last*

[32] Mary Frohlich, 'Christian Mysticism in Postmodernity: Thérèse of Lisieux, A Case Study' in David B. Perrin (Ed.), *Women Christian Mystics Speak to our Times* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 2001), p. 162.
[33] Guy Gaucher, cited in Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 11.

Conversations.[34] The main constituent of the critical edition of this work is the 'Yellow Notebook' of Mother Agnes. Far from being her original log of the words uttered by the dying Thérèse, the Notebook is a revised version of this bedside reportage that Mother Agnes formulated twenty-five years after Thérèse's death. Given Mother Agnes' attempts to mould Thérèse's autobiographical manuscripts into the contours of nineteenth century spirituality, it is unlikely that the 'Yellow Notebook' escaped this process. Accordingly, it is with due caution that the *Last Conversations* is drawn upon in this dissertation as a witness to Thérèse.

A credible authority on mission?

It is impossible for a thesis purporting to expound the development of a theology of mission in the life and writings of St Thérèse of Lisieux to avoid addressing what, at least at first glance, seems to be a paradox: how can an enclosed Carmelite nun be an authority on mission? Does Thérèse's cloistered life, her deliberate physical separation from unbelievers, nullify the credibility of her missiology?

As the first chapter of this dissertation will detail more explicitly, Thérèse had a sense of connection to the missionary work of the Church from childhood. Indeed, she once mentioned in a letter that before her birth her parents had held the hope that she would be a son who would eventually become a missionary priest.[35] What is of import here is that it was precisely this orientation towards mission that prompted Thérèse's quest to enter the enclosed Carmelite monastery of Lisieux.[36]

[34] See ibid., pp. 11-15.
[35] See St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume II,* p. 1094.
[36] Noteworthy here is Thérèse's recourse to the intercession of the apostles on the day she had chosen to inform her father of her desire to enter Carmel. Expounding her rationale, she later wrote: 'shouldn't they

From the variety of scholars commenting on Thérèse's perceptivity of the internal consistence between the contemplative life and the missionary work of the Church, it is perhaps the voice of Von Balthasar that is the most cogent and eloquent. He explains that with unique perspicacity Thérèse regarded contemplation as the font of apostolic fruitfulness and thus the key locus for facilitating an awakening to faith within the heart of the unbeliever.[37] 'It is not the essence of her contemplation that is different,' Von Balthasar elaborates,

> but the insight into its effects, the thoroughly ecclesiastical and soteriological vision, which has perhaps never before in the history of spirituality manifested itself so radically and with such purity.[38]

What is it about contemplation that makes it so intrinsically missionary? Essentially, the contemplative life flows from the passion of Jesus.[39] The definitive 'yes' to the Father spoken by Jesus, on behalf of all people, in the silence and solitude of the Cross is both the origin and end of humanity's reorientation to God. Through being solely focussed upon union with God rather than active ministry, the contemplative life, then, is an ongoing participation in that 'yes' spoken in the name of all; hence the very meaning of a life of contemplation is missionary – concerned with the openness of the human heart to God's gratuitous offer of a relationship of love. Summarising the conjunction of these elements in the life of Thérèse, Von Balthasar writes that she

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help the timid child who was chosen by God to be the apostle of apostles through her prayers and sacrifices in Carmel?' St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 107.

[37] See Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, p. 194. Of course, it is unrealistic to understand here that Thérèse possessed such depth of insight at the time of applying to, and then entering, Carmel; while it was certainly her impetus into the cloister, this appreciation of the vital link between contemplation and missionary activity deepened as she progressed in the religious life.

[38] Ibid., p. 195.

[39] See ibid., p. 9.

> understood the act of total surrender to the triune God as the highest possible form of engagement on behalf of the world's salvation. [She] knew that this calling burrowed itself into hiddenness even as roots disappear into the ground. Above ground the visible church and her activity feed from these roots.[40]

Manifestly, in a paradox so characteristic of the Gospel, an eminently credible witness to the meaning of mission is discovered in the location that expressly contradicts what might be people's initial expectation.[41] From the enclosure of Carmel, Thérèse's missiology emanates with an authority that demands attention and research.

[40] Ibid. p. 11.

[41] This is not to deny that the People of God have traditionally appreciated that enclosed communities are connected to the missionary work of the Church through prayer, but rather to emphasise the paradox that one removed from the most explicit manifestation of mission – concrete encounters between believers and non-believers – is able to penetrate to the essential meaning of such encounters.

- CHAPTER ONE -

MOTHER MISSIOLOGY: IMPRINT OF AN ECCLESIAL CONTEXT

Marie-Françoise-Thérèse Martin 'was very French, she was very bourgeois, and she was very much a child of the later nineteenth century, with its pieties and its devotions, and its tendency to think that God, too, must be a Frenchman.'[42] Given that she was so firmly located within her cultural milieu, it is not surprising that St Thérèse's initial view of what it meant to convey the faith of the Church to unbelievers – her missiology - was forged from the raw material of late nineteenth century French ecclesiology. What was the nature of this ecclesial self-understanding? What was its stance towards unbelievers, both locally and abroad? And how did these concepts mould a theology of mission within Thérèse that can aptly be named 'maternal'? These queries are the concern of this chapter.

The landscape of the Church in France in the late nineteenth century.

The thorny issue of the nature of Church-State relations is threaded throughout Christian history. In Thérèse's historical and geographical context the matter was particularly volatile. Specifying this unease, Mary Frohlich explains that 'devout French Catholics of the late nineteenth century were still reacting to the shock of the French revolution.'[43] In order to appreciate the ecclesiastical air that Therese breathed, then, it is necessary to widen the scope of enquiry and consider those decisive events of almost a century before her birth whose repercussions resonated into her day.

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[42] Nivard Kinsella, 'Homage to Saint Thérèse: A personal view of the new Doctor of the Church' in *Spirituality* 3:14 (1997), p. 279.
[43] Frohlich, *Essential Writings*, p. 17.

Historian Leopold Glueckert details that 'before 1789, that is, before the Revolution, both the monarchy and the established church had been considered the two venerable pillars of society.'[44] To be sure, those in authority within the French Church did little to emphasise the distinct nature of the two institutions. Remarkably, 'every single one of the bishops in 1789 was from a noble family.'[45] At that time, the continuation of dynasties of aristocratic prelates was prized over faithful leadership and genuine care of the lowly flock of Christ; perhaps the shepherds, not the sheep, had gone astray. Given the kinship between France's monarchy and Church, it is not surprising that after the National Assembly moved to reform the former at the beginning of the Revolution it soon resolved to challenge the ecclesial *status quo*.

The impact of the Revolution on the Church was destabilising, bloody, and as comprehensive as the lived expressions of French Catholicism. In 1789, laws sanctioning the overthrow of the Church's political power were passed and all Church property was confiscated and sold to recompense the national debt. At the grassroots level, while Church institutions of obvious social value were permitted, the secularist and often atheistic philosophies of the Enlightenment-schooled revolutionaries could not tolerate the apparent obscurantism of other Church traditions. Practices such as sacraments, penance and prayer were regarded as 'valueless... and possibly even dangerous, insofar as they promoted ignorance and misunderstanding among credulous people about the

[44] Leopold Glueckert, 'The World of Thérèse: France, Church and State in the Late Nineteenth Century' in John Sullivan (Ed.), *Carmelite Studies V: Experiencing Thérèse Today* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1990), p. 12.
[45] Ibid., p. 13.

scientifically perfect universe;'[46] accordingly, contemplative communities were officially eradicated[47] and 'priests were ordered to take an oath to the state.'[48] This persecution of the Church culminated in the execution of hundreds of clergy and religious – including the renowned sixteen Carmelite nuns of Compiègne – in a manifestation of 'pent-up rage against the church for real and imagined offenses from the past.'[49]

Upon asserting leadership in France after the Revolution, Napoleon was well aware of the need to forge some form of reconciliation between the State and the Catholic Church. Thus, in 1801 he signed the Concordat between France and Pope Pius VII. This agreement both re-established the French government's effectively peaceful stance towards the pope and the French bishops and precipitated compromises on the part of the Church in matters such as the concession of Church land and the participation of the State in the selection of bishops. As Glueckert notes, however, 'the Concordat... did not help the religious orders one bit.'[50] Still considered predominantly irrelevant and potentially subversive by the State, and largely excluded from the purview of the bishops, religious orders were forced to maintain a wounded silence in the post-Revolution French Church. Furthermore, the emergence of two diverse ecclesiological trends compounded the fractures within the body of the Church.[51] On the one (left) hand, under the banner of promoting the relevance of the Church to contemporary society, adherents of Gallicanism

[46] Ibid., p. 14.
[47] Glueckert reports that 'the Carmelites, as a religious family, were wiped out in the Revolution.' While underground activities ensured the eventual revival of the Discalced branch, the Ancient Observance was decisively eliminated from France. Ibid., p. 15.
[48] Ibid., p. 15.
[49] Ibid., p. 16.
[50] Ibid., p. 17.
[51] For further details on these ecclesiological trends see A Gough, *Paris and Rome: The Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign, 1848-1853* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); C. Berthelot du Chesnay and J. M. Gres-Gayer, 'Gallicanism' in Berard Marthaler (Director), *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Second Edition; Farmington Hills, Michigan: Thomson Gale, 2003), Vol. 6, pp. 73-78; and J. M. Gres-Gayer, 'Ultramontanism' in Marthaler (Director), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14, pp. 283-286.

'favored a strongly national church which was relatively independent of Rome, although technically "in communion" with the pope.'[52] The Ultramontanists, however, asserted that the post-Revolution society called for 'a strongly centralized church, uniform in doctrine, clerical lifestyle, discipline, and governed by an infallible pope and a watchful Roman Curia.'[53]

The fall of Napoleon's Empire in 1815 ushered in the three-phased period, successively constituted by the Bourbon monarchy, the Orleanist monarchy and the Second Empire (briefly preceded by the Second Republic), which is collectively referred to as 'the Restoration.'[54] 'All three of these regimes,' Glueckert explains, 'restored the principle that the monarchy (or the empire) protected and supported the Catholic Church.'[55] The religious orders were included within the sweep of civil acceptance and thus were finally able to emerge from their Revolution-imposed trenches; interestingly, many of the restored religious houses were officially illegal as they had not surmounted the bureaucratic hurdles requisite for legalisation – the authorities, however, tended to overlook this detail.[56] Though once again allied with the monarchy, the Church of the Restoration era was not the image of the institution that had proven so irksome to the revolutionaries; it was a body more set upon the Kingdom of God than upon the kingdom of prelates. Thus renewed in vision, the Church healed its wounds and gradually 'regained... confidence and political power, especially in more conservative provinces

[52] Glueckert, 'The World of Thérèse,' p. 17.
[53] Ibid., p. 18.
[54] For further details on this period see Reginald F. Walker, *An Outline History of the Catholic Church* (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1939), pp. 169-172.
[55] Ibid., p. 19.
[56] Glueckert observes that the Lisieux Carmel was one of the illegal religious houses, however because the 'solidly religious' people of Normandy 'liked the idea of having sisters nearby, praying for them and their needs... they could overlook the legal niceties.' Ibid., p. 21.

like Thérèse's Normandy.'[57] The Church, however, was not entirely unfettered from the worldly. In the words of Glueckert, 'the church (the hierarchy in particular) continued to identify with hopeless royalist causes... and promote anti-republican sentiment... [It] could not seem to let go of that old idea that royalism was essential to a free church.'[58] This did not augur well for the Church's adaptation to future political developments.

In 1871, two years before Thérèse's birth, the Third Republic began to emerge. Ironically, this republic was crafted by monarchists who were seeking a crowned head to fill the vacancy left by the demise of Napoleon III's Second Empire; unable to agree on an ascendant to the throne, they decided that a republic was the least divisive option. Though initially quite conservative, the new 'regime turned into a somewhat more radical republic, which... means more anticlerical and anti-church.'[59] This is not, in fact, surprising given that this 'moment of history coincided with the climax of a certain kind of vehement atheism'[60] which sought articulation in public life. In Thérèse's lifetime, many laws against the Church came into force: religious were excluded from teaching in public universities; religious orders were once again restricted in their operations, and secular education for children became mandatory. Moreover, bloody persecution akin to that of the French Revolution was not outside the realm of possibility. As Frohlich notes, in response to this situation the pope himself 'was advocating the *ralliement* – a policy of working with the secularized governments rather than attempting to dislodge them.'[61]

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[57] Ibid., p. 20.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., p. 23.
[60] Michael Paul Gallagher, *St Thérèse and Today's Crisis of Faith* (Dublin: Avila, 1998), p. 3. Bridget Edman elaborates, 'the development which began with the Renaissance, continued in the Enlightenment, and then into German Idealism was now ripe in an explicit, militant atheism.' Bridget Edman, 'St. Thérèse and the Dark Night' in *Spiritual Life* (Fall 1997), p. 172.
[61] Frohlich, *Essential Writings*, p. 17. Leo XIII wrote an encyclical specifically for France entitled: *Au Milieu des Sollicitudes*.

Yet, however unrealistic, anti-republicanism remained firmly imprinted on the Revolution-scarred psyche of the French Church; dialogue with the secular republican leaders seemed scandalous and it 'clung fiercely to hope of a return to the "good old days" when monarchy and Church were two arms of a single power structure committed to maintaining France in its proud role of ecclesiastical and imperial leadership.'[62]

Inevitably, the mentality of resistance to the political *status quo* that informed the Church of Thérèse's times became incarnate in its lived expression. 'Embattled against powerful forces of "lay" or atheistic thought, and… view[ing] this scene in a dualistic fashion of black and white,'[63] or 'us-and-them,' the Church withdrew into a puritanical and ghettoised manner of articulating the faith; the ecclesiastical institution stood for the antitype of everything represented by the republic. As Barbara Corrado Pope points out, 'withdrawal, of course, did not necessarily mean silence.'[64] Some Catholics protested vociferously and militantly to the secularists' apparent corruption of the social order. 'The leading voice of this reaction,' Pope explains, 'was the nationally distributed Assumptionist newspaper, *La Croix*, which was virulently anti-modern, anti-Republican, and anti-Semitic.'[65] Parenthetically, Thérèse's uncle, Isidore Guérin, promoted *La Croix* in the Normandy region and was a key personality in the local Catholic press. Further demonstrating the Church's stance of opposition to its secular contemporaries was its propagation of the phenomena of miracles. This 'belief in miracles represented a direct

[62] Ibid. It is germane to note an observation of Glueckert here: referring to the shape of the Gallicanism and Ultramontanism of this era he comments that 'both of them were beginning to wither and die, or more accurately, blend together.' Glueckert, 'The World of Thérèse,' p. 18.
[63] Gallagher, *St Thérèse and Today's Crisis of Faith*, p. 3.
[64] Barbara Corrado Pope, 'A Heroine Without Heroics: The Little Flower of Jesus and Her Times' in *Church History* 57 (1988), p. 55.
[65] Ibid., pp. 55-56.

confrontation with the modern world's captivation with science and human progress.'[66] Manifestly then, currents of resistance and determination, fear and tacit vulnerability blew in the ecclesiastical air that Thérèse breathed; the French Church considered itself a bastion of truth, yet was ever alert to the threat posed by its secular compatriots' fiery darts of unbelief.

The late nineteenth century French Church abroad.

In an 1884 speech to the Chamber of Deputies, the French prime minister Jules Ferry asserted that eschewing involvement in foreign affairs 'and seeing as a trap, an adventure, all expansion into Africa or the Orient - for a great nation to live this way…[is] to sink from the first rank to the third and fourth.'[67] In fact, Thérèse's era was indeed marked by an enthusiastic expansion of the French colonial empire. This enterprise was accompanied by an equally zealous flourish of missionary[68] activity; for the French Church, the nation's annexation of 'new lands' meant a widening of the boundaries of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Missionaries themselves – many of whom belonged to the numerous missionary congregations that were spawned by these times – became somewhat heroic figures in the eyes of their fellow French Catholics: robust and daring, these generous Christians ventured into a dark unknown, returning home occasionally 'to regale their audience with tales about conversions and mortal dangers, not averse to a bit of melodrama to shake loose the listeners' purses in support of the missions.'[69]

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[66] Ibid., p. 55.
[67] Jules François Camille Ferry, 'Speech Before the French Chamber of Deputies, March 28, 1884' in Paul Robiquet (Ed.), *Discours et Opinions de Jules Ferry* (Paris: Armand Colin and Cie, 1897), p. 218.
[68] In this context, the terms 'mission' and 'missionary' are used in the pre-Vatican II sense of the *missio ad gentes* - the work of evangelisation in 'Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania, all the continents except Europe and North America, which are considered already Christianized.' Peter C. Phan, 'Proclamation of the Reign of God as Mission of the Church: What for, to Whom, by Whom, with Whom, and How?' located online at: www.sedos.org/english/phan.htm
[69] Ibid.

Of particular interest here is the missiology, that is to say, the approach to unbelief, which informed the French Church in its foreign operations. Peter Phan captures this approach well when he speaks of an 'ecclesiocentric theology of mission.'[70] According to this perspective, missionaries were sent 'to the "pagans" who were considered to be living outside the sphere of God's grace and on the way to eternal damnation.'[71] The missionaries' task, at heart, was to save these 'lost souls;' as Adolphe Roulland, the missionary in China with whom Thérèse corresponded, wrote: his duty was 'to obtain the conversion of infidels in this country.'[72] Most importantly, within the ecclesiocentric missiological paradigm it was understood that the sole means of realising the missionaries' aim was the institution of the Catholic Church, 'the only ark of salvation.'[73] Hence, the missionary priority was to plant churches on the foreign soil and urge baptism, that rite by which the heathen crossed the threshold from the darkness of paganism into the light of truth. Thus, in Phan's words, 'the success of mission, not unlike the body count in war, [was] measured by the number of the sacraments administered, dioceses established, churches built, and money collected.'[74] Essentially, then, the French Church took the same stance towards unbelief abroad as it did at 'home.' While it may be said that the Church was on an 'offensive' footing in the former situation and on the 'defensive' in the latter, in both contexts the world was regarded with a sharp dualism: those *outside* the Church were evil, corrupt and 'other' whereas those *within* the Church were righteous, custodians of the truth and 'insiders.'

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume II,* p. 1089.
[73] Phan, 'Proclamation of the Reign of God as Mission of the Church.'
[74] Ibid.

The formation of a 'mother' theology of mission within Thérèse.

The concerns and attitudes of the institutional Church of Thérèse's day found domestic expression in the lives of 'ordinary' French Catholics such as the Martin family. The Martins, like many of their Catholic contemporaries, lived as '*émigrés de l'intérieur*.'[75] 'Emigrating' from the corruption they perceived in the world about them, they created a separate, purified existence constituted by home, family and Church; as Thérèse's sister Céline commented, 'life, at home, was simple and patriarchal; we avoided the agitation of worldly relations there and we tended to remain alone as a family.'[76]

The spirituality that permeated the Martin residence reflected this sense of the household being a 'haven in an unheavenly world.'[77] Frohlich observes that there was a

> conviction that the duty of a good Catholic was to 'repair' the damage done by the blasphemers by engaging in the maximum number of pious acts. Taking this one step further, the truly holy person was seen as one who prayed to take on the fullest form of reparation by becoming a 'victim soul' whose personal suffering would make up for the horrors committed against God and the Church.[78]

Alternatively expressed, in the Church's war against unbelief, the political militarism of the 'public' Catholics became spiritual militarism within the family circle. Furthermore, the Martin family had a keen solicitude for the work of the foreign missions. Playing their part in what they considered to be the quest to save hell-bound (usually black) souls, the Martins contributed regularly to associations such as the Pontifical Mission Societies.[79] They additionally expressed personal support to missionaries whom they happened to encounter. This is exemplified by a remark Thérèse's mother, Zélie, made in a letter

[75] Görres, *The Hidden Face*, p. 34.
[76] *Procès de l'Ordinaire de Thérèse de L'Enfant-Jesus et de la Sainte Face, 1910-1911* (Rome: Teresianum, 1973), p. 264.
[77] Pope, 'A Heroine Without Heroics,' p. 56.
[78] Frohlich, *Essential Writings*, pp. 17-18.
[79] See St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 54.

regarding two missionaries who were giving three sermons a day in Alençon: 'in my opinion, they both preach badly. We go to listen to them just the same out of duty.'[80]

It was through the conduit of this familial cocoon that the spirit of Thérèse's era made its distinctive impact upon her. The ecclesiology of the late nineteenth century French Church, with its dualistic approach to unbelief, shaped a missiological disposition within Thérèse whereby she considered herself something of a mother-figure in relation to unbelievers. Within this paradigm, Thérèse subtly, yet assuredly, thought of herself as firmly grounded in the 'camp' of the religious and righteous; from this secure position of spiritual superiority, she was able to regard unbelievers with loving condescension and seek to 'birth' divine life in them through her prayers and sacrifices. It is important to note at this juncture that the mother missiology which is discernible in the life and writings of Thérèse is not always synonymous with Thérèse's description of herself as a 'mother;' the latter is not homogeneous in meaning within the Thérèsian corpus, and thus cannot be traced with precision.[81]

As with most imprints made by the branding-iron of one's cultural context, Thérèse's maternal theology of mission was initially manifested passively. Her sense of dwelling within the secure zone of sanctity was a natural outcome of living in a household focussed on the quest for spiritual perfection. Referring to her fifth or sixth year, Thérèse narrates that each night upon going to bed she would ask her elder sister Pauline: '"was I very good today?"… The answer was invariably "yes," otherwise I would have cried the

[80] Zélie Martin, cited in Guy Gaucher, *The Story of a Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), p. 20.

[81] In the words of de Meester, 'with Thérèse, the meaning of a word or the significance of an image is linked closely to the immediate context and to the time of her life in which she uses it.' De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, p. LV.

whole night.'[82] Further, Thérèse's childhood 'fantasies were captured by the stories of heroic martyrs performing reparative acts on behalf of their people.'[83] In particular, she was thrilled by 'the accounts of the patriotic deeds of French heroines, especially the *Venerable* JOAN OF ARC,' whom she 'had a great desire to imitate.'[84] Thérèse's wholehearted admiration of the era's cultic figures and her desire somehow to participate in their stories are revelatory of the vision of mission that was being shaped within her: just as Joan in her day fought for the victory of goodness over evil in France, Thérèse in turn would bring forth a nation of believers through her efforts. The young Thérèse found a means for expressing her aspirations to heroism in that practice of her times of making closely accounted sacrifices. Ida Görres recounts that at Thérèse's beatification trial, Pauline produced a notebook containing '"evidence" of [the] 818 sacrifices and 2,773 "acts"'[85] which Thérèse made in the three month preparatory period for her First Holy Communion. On the actual day of her First Communion, Thérèse demonstrated her personal, if unconscious, participation in the triumphalistic approach to spreading the Gospel abroad which permeated her milieu. 'I made a spectacle of myself among my companions,' Thérèse narrates, 'by wearing a *big crucifix* Léonie had given me and which I held in my cincture like the missionaries.'[86]

After her 'Christmas conversion'[87] of 1886, Thérèse articulated her appropriation of the missiology of her day – her mother missiology – more consciously. Referring to this event, Ernest Larkin explains that 'the inbreaking of God with the gift of charity made the

[82] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 43.
[83] Mary Frohlich, 'Thérèse and the Sacred Heart: History and Theology' (Suenens Centre Lecture. Presented at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome, November 2003), p. 16.
[84] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 72. Here, and in all subsequent quotations from the Thérèsian corpus, the emphasis is Thérèse's, unless otherwise noted.
[85] Görres, *The Hidden Face*, p. 88.
[86] Ibid., p. 76.
[87] For Thérèse's account of this defining moment see her *Story of a Soul*, pp. 97-99.

difference. Charity broke her out of narcissism and freed her life [for] God and others.'[88] With the advent of this new-found solicitude for others, the stage was set for the blossoming of Thérèse's hitherto nascent attitude towards unbelievers. An experience Thérèse had one Sunday in 1887 while looking at a picture of the crucified Christ is illustrative here. It is profitable to record the Saint's own lengthy description of this event. She writes:

> I was struck by the blood flowing from one of the divine hands. I felt a great pang of sorrow when thinking this blood was falling to the ground without anyone's hastening to gather it up. I was resolved to remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross and to receive the divine dew. I understood I was then to pour it out upon souls. The cry of Jesus on the Cross sounded continually in my heart: '*I thirst!*' These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a *thirst for souls*. As yet, it was not the souls of priests that attracted me, but those of *great sinners*; I *burned* with the desire to snatch them from the eternal flames.[89]

Without negating the truly laudable spiritual fervour expressed in this passage, it is important to identify Thérèse's participation in the limitations of her era which is discernible therein. Manifestly, the fourteen year old Thérèse regarded herself as dwelling in a sphere entirely distinct from that of the 'great sinners.' Accordingly, she was able to be a repository of God's grace, a womb through which divine life could be generated in unbelievers. This maternal stance towards unbelievers is most explicit in Thérèse's concern for the unrepentant condemned criminal Henri Pranzini. Assuming personal responsibility for the redemption of Pranzini, Thérèse tells that she 'employed every means imaginable'[90] in order to 'convert [her] sinner.'[91] Upon reading in *La Croix* that

[88] Ernest Larkin, 'Love Responding to Presence: The daily life of Thérèse of Lisieux' in *Spirituality* 5:27 (1999), p. 357.
[89] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 99.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., p. 100.

Pranzini did indeed show signs of conversion just before his execution, Thérèse delighted in the birth of her '*first child*.'[92]

As the 'mothering of souls' became her consuming passion, Thérèse sought a means to completely embody this cause. Although she had a 'yearning for the life of the missions,'[93] Thérèse believed her desires could only be comprehensively realised within the enclosure of Carmel since there she could 'suffer more through the monotony of an austere life and thereby win more souls for God.'[94] In fact, Thérèse envisioned Carmel's cloisters as embracing the work of the foreign missions. As she explained to Céline, 'our mission as Carmelites is to form evangelical workers who will save thousands of souls whose mothers we shall be.'[95] Astutely summarising the universal scope of Thérèse's vision for her life-project, and inadvertently highlighting its maternal orientation, Conrad de Meester notes that 'Thérèse wanted to bring the entire world with her to the Carmel of Lisieux as if to a workshop where she could *labor* for the very soul of humanity.'[96]

Adopting the parlance of her new milieu, Thérèse came to use self-effacing terms such as 'a poor little soul'[97] with which to describe herself. Nevertheless, the division between 'the sinners' and 'the saved' remained embedded in her stance towards unbelievers. This distinction is evident, for example, in a comment she made about a priest who directed a retreat in the Carmel. 'It seemed to me,' Thérèse candidly remarks, 'that the preacher would not be able to understand me since he was supposed to do good to *great sinners*

[92] Ibid.
[93] Sr Geneviève of the Holy Face, *A Memoir of my Sister St Thérèse* (Dublin: Gill, 1959), p. 146.
[94] Ibid., p. 147.
[95] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume II,* p. 753.
[96] Conrad de Meester, *With Empty Hands: The Message of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Mary Seymour (New Revised Edition; London: Burn and Oates, 2002), p. 8. Emphasis added.
[97] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume II,* p. 753.

but not to *religious souls*;'[98] clearly, 'Thérèse did not class herself among the former, but among the "religious souls."'[99] This dualism is further evident in Thérèse's description of those to whom foreign missionaries are sent as 'poor savages.'[100]

Truly a child of her era, Thérèse demonstrated her participation in the 'us-and-them' character of the late nineteenth century theology of mission by her maternal regard for 'sinners.' First discernible in childhood and then more consciously articulated in her early teenage years, this missiology became embodied as Thérèse took on the life of a Carmelite nun. Just as the political certainties of the day began to crumble, however, as bishops and major prelates 'finally stood up and declared that they agreed in principle with the efforts at reconciliation'[101] with the republicans, cracks gradually appeared in Thérèse's missiological presumptions. As Thérèse became increasingly docile to God's work within her, unexpected missiological horizons began to emerge.

[98] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 173. Emphasis added.
[99] Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 23.
[100] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 14.
[101] Glueckert, *The World of Thérèse*, p. 26.

- CHAPTER TWO -

FROM MOTHER TO SISTER

The Saint of Lisieux 'was, is, a work of God, perfect or almost perfect.'[102] The masterpiece of Thérèse was, however, no instantaneous creation; through yielding daily to the hand of the Divine Artist,[103] Thérèse gradually allowed the canvas of her life radiantly to reflect God's glory. As she progressed in the pilgrimage of the spiritual life, two crucial and interrelated movements of grace, namely her lived discovery of the 'little way' and her intensifying personal union with the kenotic Christ, broke Thérèse out of the secure cocoon of the late nineteenth century vision of faith which had characterised her life till then. Already profoundly oriented to mission as she was, this transformation in Thérèse's faith inevitably led to a transformation in her theology of mission: Thérèse came to regard herself no longer as a *mother*, but as a *sister*, to unbelievers. This chapter will first of all give the revolutionary trajectories in Thérèse's faith the thorough consideration which they demand. It will then turn to an exposition of the missiological implications implicit in Thérèse's revisioning of faith.

The discovery of the 'little way.'

In Manuscript C of *Story of a Soul*, Thérèse declares that she has 'always wanted to be a saint'[104] yet has long felt too 'little' to fulfil her aspiration. The 'little way,' was the path that she discovered after some years in Carmel for reaching the goal of sanctity, or 'love

[102] Noel O'Donoghue, *Adventures in Prayer: Reflections on St Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross and St Thérèse of Lisieux* (London: Burns and Oates, 2004), p. 199.
[103] 'We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life.' *Eph* 2:10 (Jerusalem Bible)
[104] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 207.

in full maturity;'[105] it was at the same time her path into a living solidarity with the 'littleness' of humanity. In order to appreciate the innovation this 'way' wrought in her life, it is necessary first to examine how Thérèse conceived the pursuit of holiness before the dawn of her discovery.

Thérèse entered the Carmel of Lisieux with an almost athletic vision of sanctity. She found her young heart increasingly captivated by the person of Jesus, and in response to his love she wanted to 'love Him more than He has ever been loved... to dry away the little tears that sinners make Him shed… to convert *all* the sinners of this earth and to save all the souls in purgatory!'[106] Indeed, de Meester posits that Thérèse was here 'aiming at a kind of world record (so to speak) in loving God.'[107] In the early years of her religious life, loving God perfectly, both personally and on behalf of humankind, was both Thérèse's ultimate spiritual ambition and her path towards realising this aspiration; she espoused a '"do-it-yourself," ideal'[108] of holiness whereby climbing to the summit of sanctity depended upon the strength of her own efforts. Accordingly, she utilised every means possible to demonstrate her love. Just as her entrepreneurial parents enjoyed financial security through constant and meticulous attention to everything of fiscal significance, Thérèse regarded the manifold opportunities to love that daily life presents as 'gold piece[s] that could be used to buy the fine jewelery of… holiness.'[109] Of course, this self-sufficient attitude was at the heart of her era's mother missiology: as has been seen, she 'employed every means imaginable'[110] to redeem Pranzini and others like him.

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[105] De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, p. 58.
[106] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume I*, p. 500.
[107] De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, p. 38.
[108] Ibid., p. x.
[109] Ibid., p. 43.
[110] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 99. See above, page 24.

As Thérèse matured in the spiritual life, a radical disparity began to crystallise: she became increasingly aware of an inequality of loves – divine and human.[111] The program of holiness which Thérèse had set herself upon entering Carmel was to love God passionately in response to his love. However, through her prayerful meditation, particularly upon the works of St John of the Cross and the Gospels, Thérèse gained 'an acute sense of the infinite worth of the All-Holy, of the Absolute Being who is gratuitous Love.'[112] With God's love towering before her in ever greater splendour, Thérèse perceived that her desires were impossible to realise; how could a finite being, who was also striving to love God on behalf of other finite beings, possibly respond to the infinitude of divine love? This realisation pulses through her declaration to Céline that

> We shall never be able to carry out the follies He carried out for us, and our actions will never merit this name, for they are only very rational acts and much below what our love would like to accomplish.[113]

Her conviction of the ontological chasm between God's love and the possibilities of human loving was confirmed experientially. Thérèse's delicate conscience registered her persistent, if minor, failings[114] and the reality of the psychological traumas of her

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[111] De Meester speculates that 'the law of inequality between the two loves… manifested itself in all its happy cruelty in 1894.' De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, p. 247. The unsystematic nature of Thérèse's writings, however, makes it difficult to specify such dates with accuracy.
[112] De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, p. 49.
[113] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume II,* p. 882.
[114] It is worth discussing an apparent paradox in this matter of Thérèse's 'failings.' In the processes leading up to her canonisation, Thérèse's religious sisters, and to a slightly lesser extent, her confessors consistently maintained that she never committed a fully deliberate fault. See, for example, *Procès de l'Ordinaire, 1910-1911*, pp. 150, 280, 293, 452, 464 and *Procès Apostolique de Thérèse de L'Enfant-Jesus et de la Sainte Face, 1915-1917* (Rome: Teresianum, 1976), pp. 149, 163, 231, 261, 348, 395, 560. Thérèse herself, however, repeatedly referred to her condition of weakness and imperfection. It would be injudicious to disregard her protestations as false humility, given that Thérèse had an aversion to insincerity. More profitable is de Meester's approach. He notes that 'the witnesses speak from their own knowledge: what they had either *seen* or *heard*. However it is clear that in large part an entire area escapes their observation and it is the sole decisive one: namely, the motives, the feelings, the interior docility. Moreover, there is a large gap between what is involuntary and what is fully deliberate… It is not at all certain that [Thérèse] had the privilege of… not having committed any faults that were semi-deliberate or slightly culpable.' De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, p. 234. Emphasis original.

childhood meant that she would 'forever be aware of her own fragility.'[115] Thérèse's dream of achieving sanctity for herself and others through her own efforts, then, was clearly shattered; from the ruins however, the 'little way' would gradually emerge.

Thérèse made her revolutionary discovery sometime towards the end of 1894.[116] At this juncture she was faced with a dilemma: her plan for reaching the summit of love, for holiness, appeared humanly impossible to realise, yet her desire to become a saint was ever-deepening. Thérèse drew encouragement from St John of the Cross's teaching that 'God cannot inspire unrealizable desires'[117] and was thus disposed to a resolution to her conundrum. The awaited breakthrough occurred while she was meditating upon passages from the Old Testament that were recorded in a notebook which Céline had brought with her when she entered the Lisieux Carmel in September 1894. The first Scripture that captured Thérèse's attention was *Proverbs* 9:4. She read: '*whoever is a LITTLE ONE, let him come to me*.'[118] Thérèse felt challenged, though drawn, by this invitation; her littleness was the very problem she was trying to surmount so that she could sanctify herself and others, yet the text identified littleness as the criterion for approaching God. Eager to learn 'what [God] would do to *the very little one* who answered [His] call,'[119] Thérèse continued her survey of the anthology. Her eyes fell upon *Isaiah* 66:12-13. Speaking in the voice of Yahweh, the verses read: '*As one whom a mother caresses, so will I comfort you; you shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall*

[115] De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, p. 241. See also Vilma Seelaus, 'Thérèse: Spirituality of Imperfection' in *Spiritual Life* (Winter 1998), pp. 199-212.
[116] De Meester records his scholarship into the date of Thérèse's discovery of the 'little way' in *The Power of Confidence*, pp. 31-35. For Thérèse's account of her discovery see *Story of a Soul*, pp. 207-208.
[117] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 207.
[118] Ibid., p. 208. Referring to the translation of this text, de Meester notes that 'God often comes to us in chance encounters; his workings are indeed mysterious to behold. If she had consulted a different version, Thérèse might not have made her discovery, or she might have found it elsewhere, or even discovered at a later date what she had now come to understand.' De Meester, *With Open Hands*, p. 61.
[119] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 208.

caress you.'[120] With this text, the revelation was complete, a resolution was reached. Thérèse realised that if she approached God in her littleness he would embrace her with parental-like tenderness and so grant her everything necessary for her sanctification. In other words, Thérèse grasped the glorious paradox that her inescapable limitations were not a 'dead-end' but the very pathway to holiness. Littleness was a cause for rejoicing and trusting because 'what is empty can be filled.'[121]

De Meester's description of the essence of Thérèse's discovery, the 'little way,' demands to be cited here. 'At last,' he explicates,

> Thérèse has understood the one needful thing. She has finally arrived at the idea that her fundamental task is one of being receptive, and completely, widely open to the saving, caring and nurturing love of God's maternal heart. Thérèse must no longer try to save herself. Instead she must accept being saved and sanctified, and for that she must surrender herself with absolute trust in the God who offers her his gratuitous, overflowing love.[122]

Thérèse realised, then, that God himself would raise her and those whom her heart embraced to the summit of love as he bridged the ontological chasm between her limited human resources and the infinitude of divinity. Or, to put it a different way, as Thérèse confidently abandoned her littleness to God's providence, the mutuality of loving she so ardently desired became possible; Thérèse would 'borrow'[123] God's love in order to make God loved as he loved her. The revolution Thérèse underwent is perhaps best captured by a comparison of two of her own statements. In 1890, with reference to her own loving actions, the novice Thérèse asserted to her cousin that there was 'no other means of reaching perfection but [love.]'[124] By 1896, however, Thérèse was so completely

[120] Ibid.
[121] Görres, *The Hidden Face*, p. 278.
[122] De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, p. 61.
[123] See Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 135.
[124] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume I*, p. 641.

reoriented in her spiritual perspective that she exclaimed 'it is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to Love.'[125]

Some six months after its discovery, Thérèse appropriated the 'little way' with increased depth when she made her 'Act of Oblation to Merciful Love.' On the ninth of June 1895 during the Mass for the feast of the Holy Trinity, Thérèse understood 'more than ever before how much Jesus desires to be loved.'[126] By this stage of her spiritual pilgrimage, it must be noted, Thérèse understood that 'Jesus is loved when he is free to love us fully and when we allow ourselves to be fully loved by him.'[127] The young Carmelite decided to respond to her insight by reworking a prayer formula that was common to her milieu. While many of her contemporaries had chosen to offer themselves 'as victims to God's Justice in order to turn away the punishments reserved to sinners, drawing them upon themselves,'[128] Thérèse instead opted to offer herself as a 'victim' to God's merciful love.

As Thérèse systematised her oblation into written form, it adopted the dynamic of the 'little way.' Indeed, this is not surprising; what else was Thérèse yielding to through this prayer other than that which is at the heart of the 'little way' – the utterly free gift of God's infinite love for all limited humanity? The prayer begins with Thérèse's familiar aspirations, 'I desire to *Love* You and make you *Loved*, to work for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls on earth and liberating those suffering in purgatory… I desire, in a word, to be a saint.'[129] The focus quickly shifts to Thérèse's recognition of her

[125] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume II*, p. 1000.
[126] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 180.
[127] De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, p. 71.
[128] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 180.
[129] Ibid., p. 276.

littleness, and she expresses her confidence that God can fulfil the yearnings of her heart. The climax and essence of the prayer are reached when Thérèse concludes,

> In order to live in one single act of perfect Love, I OFFER MYSELF AS A VICTIM OF HOLOCAUST TO YOUR MERCIFUL LOVE, asking You to consume me incessantly, allowing the waves of *infinite tenderness* shut up within You to overflow into my soul.[130]

From the ninth of June 1895 onwards 'an intimate bond would pervade Thérèse's life and everything would gravitate around the same axis with the "offering" completely integrated into the guidelines of the "little way."'[131] Clearly, then, the 'little way' effected a revolution in Thérèse's faith whereby she no longer imagined holiness in the clear nineteenth century categories of calculation and achievement but rather as a matter of confidently abandoning herself to God's love from the depth of that essential littleness which she shared with all humanity.

Thérèse's intensifying union with the kenotic Christ.

To conceptualise the emergence of the 'little way' as distinct from Thérèse's intensifying identification with the crucified Christ is to attempt to divide a seamless garment into sections. These two graced developmental movements in Thérèse's faith are discussed separately here, then, only in the interest of expository clarity.

'Authentic love,' Camillo Gennaro observes, 'demands a total likeness and fusion with the loved one so as to become one thing only with the object of its love.'[132] Given that

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[130] Ibid., p. 277.
[131] De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, p. 72.
[132] Camillo Gennaro, 'Apostle and Missionary' in Conrad de Meester (Gen. Ed.), *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Life, Times, and Teaching* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1997), p. 204. The application of this comment to Thérèse's desire for union with Jesus (and indeed all love-relationships) requires the qualification which Six provides. He notes that Thérèse knows 'that the union will never be total identification. [Jesus] will always be He and she will remain herself.' Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 137.

Jesus was the one captivating love of Thérèse's life, it follows that the desire for an ever-deepening union with him, more particularly, union with him in his ultimate act of love for the world, the Cross, was a prevailing trajectory of her journey of faith. For Thérèse, that image of the Holy Face which was popular in the Church of her day[133] was the prime (though not exclusive) signifier of Jesus crucified. Thérèse perceived the reflection of the Holy Face in the manifold painful situations of her life. Accordingly, her efforts to accept and find meaning in these situations were filtered through the lens of the Holy Face and so facilitated her growing immersion into the crucified Christ. As Frohlich puts it, 'Thérèse's devotion to the Holy Face [was] a psychospiritual node where personal history, sociocultural milieu, and mystical transformation creatively reacted with one another in the making of a saint,'[134] and, to extend Frohlich's assertion, in the making of a distinct theology of mission.

While devotion to the Holy Face was a component of the spiritual climate of Thérèse's childhood,[135] Thérèse explains in *Story of a Soul* that 'until my coming to Carmel, I had not fathomed the depths of the treasures hidden in the Holy Face.'[136] The impetus for this intensified devotion was the illness which beset her beloved father, Louis Martin.[137] Thérèse had not been in Carmel three months when her father began to manifest signs of a condition which most contemporary commentators identify as arteriosclerosis of the

[133] Frohlich explains that this 'image of the Holy Face… usually showed Jesus' weeping, bleeding face imprinted on the veil of Veronica. The model for this image was the one installed at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.' Mary Frohlich, '"Your Face is My Only Homeland": A Psychological Perspective on Thérèse of Lisieux and Devotion to the Holy Face' in David Hammond (Ed.), *Theology and Lived Christianity* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 2000), pp. 180-181.
[134] Ibid., p. 178.
[135] See ibid, pp. 178-181.
[136] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 152.
[137] See Görres, *The Hidden Face*, p. 260.

brain.[138] A man once distinguishable by his venerable and dignified bearing (indeed, Thérèse called him her 'King') was now shadowed by 'dizziness, loss of memory, sudden mood changes and… the urge to run away'[139] and was even hospitalised in a mental institution for several years. Compounding this agony was the fact that 'in those days mental illness was regarded as shameful, indeed quite possibly a manifestation of hidden sin.'[140] To Thérèse, her noble father's suffering and humiliation bore the imprint of the Holy Face of Jesus. She reasons that

> Just as the adorable Face of Jesus was veiled during His Passion, so the face of His faithful servant had to be veiled in the days of his sufferings in order that it might shine in the heavenly Fatherland.[141]

Moved with true compassion for her debilitated and disgraced father, and seeking to make sense of her overwhelming grief, Thérèse also discerned the pattern of the Holy Face carved upon her own life.[142] Indeed, she requested to have the title 'of the Holy Face' added to her religious name when she received the Carmelite habit in 1889, and so claimed association with her suffering Lord to be a central component of her identity and vocation on behalf of the world. In her early years in Carmel, then, Thérèse contemplated intensely the humiliated, rejected and wounded countenance of the condemned Jesus and pondered what conformity to him implied. In a letter she wrote to Céline in 1889, Thérèse asserted that

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[138] See, for example, Gaucher, *The Story of a Life*, p. 94. Here Gaucher also refers to additional ailments which were troubling Louis Martin: a large epithelial tumour which had spread from an unhealed insect sting and uraemia.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Frohlich, '"Your Face is My Only Homeland,"' p. 194.
[141] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 47.
[142] De Meester offers an interesting, if over-generalised, reflection here. He notes that before Louis Martin's illness, Thérèse experienced her 'Papa [as] an icon of God himself.' With her father's demise, Thérèse's 'former concept of God had been shattered, [and] she discerned the true reflection of God, that of Jesus as the Father's Envoy, much more intensely and explicitly than in the past.' De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, pp. 32-33.

> To be the spouse of Jesus, we must *resemble* Jesus, and Jesus is all bloody, He is crowned with thorns!... Look at His eyes lifeless and lowered! Look at His wounds!… Look at Jesus in His face.[143]

The indiscreet whispers regarding Louis Martin's demise which echoed within the cloisters of the Lisieux Carmel provided an entrée into such resemblance. Identifying with the crucified Christ, Thérèse 'could find ultimate meaning in her own experience of being unknown, misunderstood, and even scorned by those around her.'[144] Moreover, Thérèse interpreted the aridity in prayer that she had endured since her entry to Carmel – a reality which was particularly painful as she lived through her father's turmoil – in the light of her integration into the pattern of the Holy Face. She recognised that the image of Jesus disfigured by his passion bespoke a God for whom hiddenness is a component of presence and thus accepted that union with Jesus would imply living with his 'disconcerting non-availability.'[145]

Thérèse's assimilation into the redemptive brokenness of Jesus was taken to new depths when she 'discovered'[146] the 'suffering servant song' of *Isaiah* 52:13 – 53:12 in the Lent of 1890. These lyrics about the one who 'had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him… [yet who] was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities,'[147] so impacted Thérèse that she reportedly claimed from her death-bed that they constituted 'the whole foundation of my devotion to the Holy Face, or, to express it better, the foundation of all my piety.'[148] To be sure, references to this text abounded in Thérèse's letters, plays and poems from 1890 until her

[143] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume I*, p. 553.
[144] Frohlich, '"Your Face is My Only Homeland,"' p. 195.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Thérèse, of course, would have heard this Scripture before 1890, however because of her heightened sensitivity to the suffering Jesus at this juncture she heard it *as if* for the first time.
[147] *Is* 53:2, 5 (New Revised Standard Version)
[148] *Last Conversations*, p. 135.

death.[149] Exemplifying the manner in which she fed upon this Scripture in order to be more closely identified in and through her suffering with the crucified Christ, Thérèse commented on the eve of her Profession: 'tomorrow [I] will be the bride of Jesus "whose face was hidden and whom no man knew" – what an alliance and what a future!'[150]

If Thérèse, predominantly using the image of the Holy Face popular in her day and its amplification in *Isaiah,* grew into a progressively deeper conformity to the Christ who was crucified for the world's salvation throughout the majority of her years in Carmel, she reached a certain consummation in the last eighteen months of her life.[151] From April 1896 until her death in September 1897, Thérèse endured a twofold disintegration: physically when, with her haemoptyses during the nights of both the Holy Thursday and Good Friday of 1896, she entered into the final, agonising and fatal stage of the tuberculosis which had long lingered in her body, and spiritually, when on Easter Sunday, 1896, she was suddenly besieged by a trial of her faith which persisted until her death.

The various analyses of the precise nature of Thérèse's trial of faith[152] are well summarised by Larkin's comment that it was not a 'textbook example'[153] of any particular category of spiritual darkness. Whatever the case, theoretically, Thérèse describes something of her existential reality. Jesus 'permitted my soul,' she relates,

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[149] See Guy Gaucher, *The Passion of Thérèse of Lisieux* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), p. 225 for a list of Thérèse's references to this text.
[150] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume I*, pp. 671-672.
[151] Edman highlights the essential unity between the emergence of the 'little way' and Thérèse's intensifying union with the kenotic Christ when she speaks of the trial of Thérèse's last eighteen months as 'no contradiction of or addition to her "little way" but the totality of it.' Edman goes on to point out that 'the "little way" is not a sweet easy way out but the uncompromised Gospel: "Unless you become like little children…" We can be no smaller than being reduced to utter nothingness.' Edman, 'St. Thérèse and the Dark Night,' p. 176.
[152] Frohlich presents a synthesis of several of these analyses in 'Desolation and Doctrine,' pp. 265-270.
[153] Ernest Larkin, 'Thérèse's Prayer (2): Presence in Absence' in *Spirituality* 4:19 (1998), p. 233.

> to be invaded by the thickest darkness, and that the thought of heaven, up until then so sweet to me, be no longer anything but the cause of struggle and torment… [A fog] penetrates my soul and envelops it in such a way that it is impossible to discover within it the sweet image of my Fatherland; everything has disappeared! When I want to rest my heart fatigued by the darkness that surrounds it by the memory of the luminous country after which I aspire, my torment redoubles; it seems to me that the darkness, borrowing the voice of sinners, says mockingly to me: 'You are dreaming about the light, about a fatherland embalmed in the sweetest perfumes; you are dreaming about the *eternal* possession of the Creator of all these marvels; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog that surrounds you! Advance, advance; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for but a night still more profound, the night of nothingness.'[154]

Reflecting upon this testimony, Six captures what was ultimately at stake for Thérèse in this night of faith when he comments that 'if Heaven does not exist, Christ in Heaven does not exist and God does not exist.'[155] Stripped of the clear and sure vision of faith that her contemporaries possessed, Thérèse was left to trust amidst the darkness of unknowing and, in her words, to 'sing simply what I WANT TO BELIEVE.'[156]

Thus approaching death in physical torment and experientially alienated from God, the Saviour's cry of 'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'[157] resonated within Thérèse's own heart. 'In that paralysing agony of darkness where Christ was left to face the night alone,' Miriam Vaughan expands, 'Thérèse too learned something of what it was to have to confront the spectre of the dark abyss of total annihilation.'[158] Clearly, then, Thérèse's life culminated in a 'heroic exemplification of the kenosis of Jesus Christ.'[159] This complete immersion into the dark depths of Christ's redemptive self-offering is discernible in the intensity of Thérèse's attentiveness to the image of the Holy

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[154] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, pp. 211-213.
[155] Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 53.
[156] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul,* p. 214.
[157] *Mk* 15:34 (New Revised Standard Version)
[158] Miriam Vaughan, 'Solidarity With Unbelievers' in *The Way Supplement* (1997), p. 110.
[159] Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine,' p. 279.

Face in her final months; she discloses, for instance, that throughout one night during which she thought she would die she 'never ceased looking at the [picture of the] Holy Face'[160] which hung in her infirmary cubicle. Moreover, as her death approached, Thérèse conceived of the realisation of that long-held desire to die of love which the writings of St John of the Cross had inspired within her[161] not in terms of ecstasy but in terms of the death of Jesus. Penetrating to the essence of the sanjuanist category, Thérèse commented in July 1897 that:

> Our Lord died on the Cross in agony, and yet this is the most beautiful death of love… To die of love is not to die in transports. I tell you frankly, it seems to me that this is what I am experiencing.[162]

Indeed, at around three o'clock in the afternoon of the day of her death, Thérèse extended her arms in a cruciform manner and thus offered an exterior symbol of her complete interior participation in the salvific passion of her Beloved.

The development of a 'sister' theology of mission within Thérèse.

So what was happening to Thérèse's approach to unbelief while grace wrought a transformation of her faith? As the crystallisation of the 'little way' and a deepening union with the kenotic Christ shifted Thérèse's faith out from the bastion of nineteenth century certitudes and into a trustful abandonment to love in the midst of darkness, a similar paradigm shift was consequently at work in her theology of mission. Thérèse's historically determined mother missiology became the sister missiology of the Gospels.

Under the influence of grace, those black and white moral categories which formed the bedrock of Thérèse's maternal approach to unbelievers began to grey. The Saint's

[160] *Last Conversations*, p. 135.
[161] Further details about this desire are cited in *Last Conversations*, pp. 245-246.
[162] Ibid., p. 73.

realisation of her inherent inability to triumph over her limitations and to love as God loves led her to a deep awareness of her essential moral equality with all limited humanity. Görres captures the dramatic interior shift that occurred within Thérèse when she observes that

> Before His Face… there… vanished, gently and imperceptibly, the apparently so stout and absolute barrier between the 'sinners' out in the world – who are sinners because they do all possible wicked and forbidden things – and the devout souls who characterize themselves as sinners only 'out of humility,' when such a term is required by common decency or by the liturgy ('pray for us poor sinners!'), but who nevertheless are in all modesty conscious of being perfect or on the way to perfection, of being pleasing to God and of doing more than is commanded by the Law. Before His Face Thérèse found again the old, so often buried truth that man *is* a sinner and can never be more than a pardoned sinner, no matter what he does or does not do.[163]

Thérèse, it must be noted, did not discontinue believing the consoling assurance which Father Pichon had given her in 1888 '*THAT [SHE HAD] NEVER COMMITTED A MORTAL SIN*.'[164] However, shedding the bulwark of her conventionally assumed position of spiritual superiority, she became penetrated by an increasing conviction that it was not through her own heroic virtue but by God's prevenient action that she had not, for instance, 'fallen as low as St. Mary Magdalene.'[165] Indeed, Thérèse envisaged herself as a child from whose path a loving father had removed *all* dangerous obstacles and so she intuited that the forgiveness which she had received actually exceeded that meted out to the Magdalene. To express this pivotal insight in Thérèse's own words:

> I am… the object of the *forseeing love of a Father* who has not sent His Word to save the *just*, but *sinners*. He wants me *to love* Him because He *has forgiven* me not much but ALL. He has not expected me to *love Him much* like Mary Magdalene, but He has willed that I KNOW how He has loved me with a love of *unspeakable foresight* in order that now I may love Him unto *folly!*[166]

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[163] Görres, *The Hidden Face*, pp. 276-277. Emphasis original.
[164] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 149.
[165] Ibid., p. 83.
[166] Ibid., p. 84.

Manifestly, grace was leading Thérèse down from the presumed pedestal of perfection of her mother missiology and into her essential unity with all her brothers and sisters in the world.

Thérèse's graced deconstruction of the distinction between the 'good' and 'evil' of humankind underwent a radical intensification during the last eighteen months of her life; if her sisterhood with limited, fragile humanity was merely understood theoretically before, it was an existential reality now. Thérèse claims that before the onset of the trial of faith 'I was unable to believe there were really impious people who had no faith. I believed they were actually speaking against their own inner convictions when they denied the existence of heaven.'[167] Yet as she plunged into the ultimate depths of Christ's kenosis she knew herself thus to be 'carrying the very dereliction of this world which is ours [that is found] at the heart of [Jesus'] holy agony.'[168] Alternatively expressed, in her last months, Thérèse's heart was completely broken open and the full drama of the woundedness of fallen human nature – which includes, most drastically, the possibility of unbelief – absorbed into the very core of her being. Thérèse's ready sympathy with those who commit suicide – an act commonly interpreted in her times as one of utter despair, and thus the ultimate sign of unbelief – demonstrates the radical extent of her absorption of human woundedness. 'If I had not had any faith,' she reportedly declares almost one week before her death, 'I would have committed suicide without an instant's

[167] Ibid., p. 211.
[168] Paul Poupard, 'Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus, docteur de l'amour et le monde de l'incroyance' in *Vie Thérésienne* 122 (1991), p. 83.

hesitation.'[169] So Thérèse now knew definitively that any attempt to differentiate between the 'good' and the 'evil,' or the 'us' and the 'them,' was 'complete absurdity.'[170]

Thérèse's solidarity with unbelievers is an essential dynamic of her sister missiology.[171] Far from being safely separated from 'impious,' dishonest unbelievers, 'unbelief entered into her faith. Her faith became a bare faith, reduced to trust… [a] dance of faith and non-faith linked together.'[172] In the Saint's own concise expression: 'Jesus made me *feel* that there were really souls who have no faith.'[173] Thérèse uses the sociologically and theologically rich image of table fellowship to illustrate further this revolutionary movement into kinship with unbelief. She writes that she experiences herself to be sitting at a 'table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating'[174] and considers her dining companions to be 'her brothers.'[175] As James Chukwuma Okoye expounds, 'eating together is a means of expressing and strengthening group solidarity and affirming beliefs shared in common.'[176] Thérèse's sister missiology, then, implies that she is 'unquestionably on the side of sinners'[177] and even identifiable with them; her 'spiritual genome,' so to speak, is indistinguishable from that of an unbeliever. Moreover,

[169] *Last Conversations*, p. 196
[170] Vaughan, 'Solidarity With Unbelievers,' p. 112.
[171] It is worth noting that the argument developed here runs directly counter to the Thérèsian theology of Von Balthasar. He contends that Fr Pichon's declaration that Thérèse has never committed a mortal sin – and Von Balthasar speculates that Fr Pichon actually may have referred to *all* sin – destroyed Thérèse's sense of sin. Hence Thérèse was 'withdrawn from the community of sinners, divided off from them and banished into a lifelong exile of sanctity.' Von Balthasar goes on to maintain that because of her separation from the sphere of sin, 'certain of the central mysteries remain unacknowledged in [Thérèse's] theology: the mystery of bearing sins and of solidarity in sin, [and] the mystery of how love may be coupled with an awareness of sin.' Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, pp. 104-108. As De Meester notes, Von Balthasar used an 'old unauthentic text of [*Story of a Soul*]' and this encouraged his 'poor perspective.' De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, p. 238.
[172] Dominique Fontain, 'Thérèse de Lisieux: Un nouveau chemin vers Dieu...' in *Vie Thérèsienne* 113 (1989), p. 26.
[173] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 211. Emphasis added.
[174] Ibid., p. 212. Vaughan points out that when Thérèse refers to 'sinners' here, 'she mainly has unbelievers in mind.' Vaughan, 'Solidarity With Unbelievers,' p. 108.
[175] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 212.
[176] James Chukwuma Okoye, 'The New Mission of Saint Thérèse' in *Spirituality* 8:42 (2002), p. 170.
[177] Vaughan, 'Solidarity With Unbelievers,' p. 112.

the symbol of meal-sharing locates Thérèse's new approach to unbelief at the heart of the Gospel. Jesus himself stood not aloof from unbelievers but sat in 'solidarity at table with those he had particularly come to call.'[178] Indeed, in the drama of human redemption, God made the sinless Jesus, 'to be sin… so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'[179] A concluding observation summarises Thérèse's descent from the privilege of mothering divine life in unbelievers to the equality of sitting at table as a sister in suffering solidarity with and for unbelievers. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, a picture of the crucified Christ was instrumental in fuelling the young Thérèse's desire 'to snatch [sinners] from the eternal flames.'[180] In her last days, however, Thérèse took this same picture and inscribed upon it the words: 'Lord, you know that I love you, but have pity on me, for I am a sinner.'[181]

Solidarity with unbelievers tends toward futility without the second essential dynamic of sister missiology – receptivity to divine love. Within her maternal theology of mission, Thérèse envisioned herself as something of a co-generator of divine life and love in the hearts of unbelievers; she was 'Christ's useful assistant'[182] in the conquest of love. The graced trajectories which shaped Thérèse's faith, however, led her to grasp with increasing depth that radical openness was the only realistic stance she could take to God's love. She gradually intuited the mystery that in the economy of divine love God *alone* is Mother (she cried, for example, when she saw a mother hen's care for her little chicks, recalling that 'God used this image in order to teach His tenderness towards

[178] Ibid., p. 106.
[179] 2 *Cor* 5:21 (New Revised Standard Version)
[180] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 99.
[181] St Thérèse of Lisieux, cited in De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, p. 96.
[182] Gennaro, 'Apostle and Missionary,' p. 197.

us'[183]) and the human person can do naught but be as receptive as a child to this font of infinite love.

How did Thérèse's re-evaluation of her relationship to God's love coalesce with her sense of solidarity with unbelievers? Michael Paul Gallagher comments that in the trial of her last eighteen months,

> Thérèse seems to have understood in her subterranean way that the deepest unbelief involved a bitter refusal of any infinite love… [S]he confronted this abyss in a spirit of companionship with those in the darkness and with a vehement trust that love could survive this eclipse of faith.[184]

Seated with her brothers and sisters at the table of absolute human poverty, then, Thérèse would be a presence resolutely disposed to divine love. In September 1896, during what would be her last retreat, Thérèse declared in a letter to her sister Marie that 'in order that Love be fully satisfied, it is necessary that It lower Itself, and that It lower Itself to nothingness and transform this nothingness into *fire*.'[185] Integrating this truth with her immersion into the abyss of human-nothingness, Thérèse discovered that 'when love "lowers Itself to nothingness" it abandons all distinctions between "sinner" and "saint" in favor of transforming *all* by the fire of love.'[186] The realisation dawned, then, that God, who 'is more tender than a mother,'[187] wanted to love God's unbelieving sons and daughters *through* their sister – Thérèse.[188] So Thérèse came to understand that a humble soul's pure receptivity to love, not the efforts of the righteous, is at the heart of the meaning of mission; as her spiritual father, St John of the Cross had written, 'a little of this pure love is more precious to God and the soul and more beneficial to the Church,

[183] *Last Conversations*, p. 60.
[184] Gallagher, *St Thérèse and Today's Crisis of Faith*, p. 4.
[185] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 195.
[186] Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine,' pp. 278-279. Emphasis original.
[187] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 174.
[188] See Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 145.

even though it seems that one is doing nothing, than all these other works put together.'[189]

It is important to acknowledge that Thérèse's receptivity to universal, salvific love had the character of a permanent habit; indeed, it was at the core of her every interior and exterior move. The origin of this option for openness can be traced to the 'Act of Oblation to Merciful Love' made on the ninth of June 1895 in which Thérèse definitively offered herself to be consumed by the 'unknown, rejected'[190] excesses of divine love. This basic orientation expanded within her as she took her seat alongside her brothers and sisters at the table of human nothingness and enabled her to make the death-bed confession 'everything that I do, my actions, my looks, everything, since my Offering, is done through love'[191] with the confident knowledge that her acceptance of love went beyond the 'shores' of her own spirit. The full extent of Thérèse's fundamental option for redemptive love is exemplified powerfully by the following series of utterances she made just hours before her death: 'I am not sorry for delivering myself up to Love;' 'Oh! No, I'm not sorry; on the contrary!' and finally; 'Never would I have believed it was possible to suffer so much! Never! Never! I cannot explain this except by the ardent desires I have had to save souls.'[192]

Surveying the completed picture of sister missiology, it is evident that with this discovery Therese penetrated 'to the broken-open core of the paschal mystery.'[193] Just as Jesus 'was

[189] St John of the Cross, 'The Spiritual Canticle' in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991), p. 587.
[190] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 180.
[191] *Last Conversations*, p. 141.
[192] Ibid., p. 205.
[193] Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine,' p. 279.

made lower than the angels'[194] on the Cross and 'crowned with glory,'[195] in the resurrection, the fallen human condition, which reveals itself most profoundly in unbelief, can *become* love as the faithful assent to being loved on behalf of their unbelieving siblings. Thus the transformation of mother missiology into sister missiology is a journey from the limitations of an era into the perennial relevance of the Gospel. The nature of the significance of sister missiology to the twenty-first century remains to be discussed.

[194] *Heb* 2:9 (New Revised Standard Version)
[195] Ibid.

- CHAPTER THREE -

SISTER MISSIOLOGY IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Pope John Paul II's Declaration of St Thérèse as a Doctor of the Church on a World Mission Sunday at the threshold of the third millennium[196] would suggest that the sister missiology formed within the particularity of Thérèse's life-experience has a contribution to make to the Church as it contemplates its missionary role in the twenty-first century. To summarise, sister missiology essentially implies personal solidarity with the other[197] with the desire not personally to conquer otherness but to draw[198] that other into the transformative flames of divine love.[199] Representing the Church's overture towards the other, the Church's twenty-first century missionary agenda may be considered as twofold: firstly, the ongoing integration of the missionary insights of the Second Vatican Council, particularly those regarding the agents of mission and world religions, and secondly, engagement with postmodernity. The exploration of sister missiology's significance to this dual missiological agenda of today's Church is the concern of this chapter.

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[196] This Declaration was made on Sunday October 19th, 1997.

[197] Here, the prime significance of the phrase 'the other' is otherness in relation to the Christian experience of faith; such otherness may take the form of non-belief or non-Christian belief.

[198] The image of 'drawing souls' is Thérèse's. In *Story of a Soul* she writes: 'This simple statement: "Draw me" suffices; I understand, Lord, that when a soul allows herself to be captivated by *the odor of your ointments*, she cannot run alone, all the souls whom she loves follow in her train; this is done without constraint, without effort, it is a natural consequence of her attraction for You. Just as a torrent, throwing itself with impetuosity into the ocean, drags after it everything it encounters in its passage, in the same way, O Jesus, the soul who plunges into the shoreless ocean of Your Love, draws with her all the treasures she possesses. Lord, You know it, I have no other treasures than the souls it has pleased You to unite to mine.' St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 254.

[199] This is reminiscent of Edith Wyschogrod's insight that the 'primary trait [of the saint] is compassion for "the Other" whatever the cost to the saint.' Discussed in David Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 217.

The ongoing integration of the Second Vatican Council.

Reinforcing Pope John Paul II's description of the Second Vatican Council as 'a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning,'[200] Pope Benedict XVI in the first message of his pontificate declared the continuing implementation of the Council to be a priority of his pontificate.[201] Although she was not formally cited in any of its documents, the connection between Thérèse and the Second Vatican Council has not infrequently been noted: William Thompson, for example, labelled Thérèse 'a Vatican II in miniature,'[202] and Pope John Paul II commented that 'many times during the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, the Fathers recalled [Thérèse's] example and doctrine.'[203] Here, after identifying the chief missiological objectives of the Council, it will be discussed how sister missiology can assist in their ongoing realisation in the third millennium.

(i) The agents of mission.

With the Second Vatican Council, the horizon of the Church's understanding of the meaning of mission was radically expanded. No longer did 'mission' exclusively denote church-planting in 'unchristianized' lands, an enterprise typically inspired by a literalist

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[200] Pope John Paul II, 'Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000' (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2003), paragraph 57.

[201] See Pope Benedict XVI, 'First Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI at the End of the Eucharistic Concelebration with the Members of the College of Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel' located online at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20050420_missa-pro-ecclesia_en.html, paragraph 3.

[202] William M. Thompson, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: A Challenge for Doctrine and Theology – Forerunner of Vatican III' in Sullivan (Ed.), *Experiencing Thérèse Today*, p. 189.

[203] Pope John Paul II, 'Apostolic Letter *Divini Amoris Scientia*, Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is Proclaimed a Doctor of the Universal Church' located online at: www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_...-ii_apl_19101997_divini-amoris_en.shtml, paragraph 10. See also Christopher O'Donnell, *Love in the Heart of the Church* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1997), p. 213; Patrick Ahern, 'The Case for St Thérèse as a Doctor of the Church' in *America* 169:5 (1993), pp. 13, 24; and T. Lombard, 'Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et l'Église de Vatican II' in *Vie Thérésienne* 10 (1970), pp. 135-151.

interpretation of the adage '*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.'[204] More than a partial, if special, outreach of the Church's pastoral concern, 'mission' assumed a comprehensive significance through the proclamation in the Council's 'Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church' that

> the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.[205]

Within this all-encompassing perspective, missionary activity is then seen as 'nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of God's decree, and its fulfilment in the world and in world history.'[206] The Council thus conceptualised the activity of mission 'more in its Scriptural context as a continuation of the mission of building God's Kingdom'[207] throughout the world. In aligning the Church more thoroughly with Jesus of Nazareth's preoccupation with establishing the reign of God, the Council also focussed the Church more squarely upon the person of Jesus himself. As

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[204] 'Outside the Church there is no salvation.' This ecclesiological principle was enunciated by Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, in his impassioned treatise *On the Unity of the Church*. Confronting the problem of division in the Church, particularly that evoked by disagreement about the treatment of those who had apostatised in the face of persecution, Cyprian 'held that baptism given outside the sphere of the Spirit-filled community was no baptism, and that the schismatics could not be recognized at all.' Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Revised Edition; London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 119. Contrary to Cyprian, however, Pope Stephen 'held that by tradition baptism in water in the name of the Trinity was valid wherever given, and that those baptized outside the Church should not be rebaptized.' Ibid., pp. 119-120. Broadly speaking, these two basic approaches to the question of salvation outside the Church – one denying the possibility and the other admitting the possibility – point to two strands of thought on the issue within the history of the Church. On the one hand, as Luis Bermejo expounds, Cyprian's principle 'survived unscathed from the middle of the third to nearly the middle of the nineteenth century: sixteen long centuries in which the axiom was received, interiorized and deeply assimilated into Catholic consciousness.' With Pope Pius IX, a qualifying 'clause of invincible ignorance' was introduced to the maxim to allow the possibility of salvation to those who had never heard the Christian message. Luis M. Bermejo, *Infallibility on Trial: Church, Conciliarity and Communion* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics Inc., 1992), pp. 252-264. On the other hand, the concept of salvation outside the Church was developed, for instance, by Ambrose and Augustine's theology of baptism of desire and Aquinas' insistence on the primacy of the conscience, even when excommunication is implied. At the official level, the two strands of thought reached something of a conjunction at the Second Vatican Council. The Council, making no reference to Cyprian's adage, asserted that while the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, those outside the Church could be saved.

[205] Second Vatican Council, 'Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*' in Austin Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II – The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New Revised Edition; Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1992), paragraph 2.

[206] Ibid., paragraph 9.

[207] Anthony Scerri, 'Formation for Mission' located online at: www.ocarm.org/eng/articles/as01-eng.htm

Pope John Paul II would later state, 'the Kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program… but is before all else *a person* with the face and name of Jesus… the image of the invisible God.'[208]

As the Second Vatican Council widened the vistas of mission, conceptions of the identity of the missionary were similarly enlarged. Moving away from the narrow perspective that missionaries were solely 'special agents such as priests, members of religious orders… and some *élite* laity'[209] who were sent to distant shores, it was emphasised that, above all, the Holy Spirit '*is the principal agent of mission*'[210] and that, 'bringing about the Kingdom of God is ultimately *God's work* and so mission and ministry are rooted in the realm of grace and mystery.'[211] Accordingly, the Council Fathers emphasised that the entire People of God is ordained to participate in the divine work of mission. Sharing in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly office through baptism,[212] each Christian shares in his mission of establishing the reign of God 'according to his [or her] state'[213] and with prayerful attentiveness to the 'signs of the times.'[214] Indeed, in the mind of the Council this universal commission to realise the Kingdom is principally the responsibility of the laity. The 'Dogmatic Constitution of the Church,' for instance, declares that

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[208] Pope John Paul II, 'Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate' (Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 1991), paragraph 18. Emphasis original. Written twenty-five years after the publication of the Second Vatican Council's '*Ad Gentes*,' this encyclical sought to reinforce and promulgate the Council's key missiological tenets.

[209] Phan, 'Proclamation of the Reign of God as Mission of the Church.' This is not to say that the Council's universal call to mission was a denigration of the importance of the work of foreign missionaries; see, for example, Second Vatican Council, '*Ad Gentes*' in Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II*, paragraphs 6, 23. Rather, mission work in foreign lands was seen as one means among many (albeit a particularly obvious and generous means) of participating in the mission of Jesus.

[210] Pope John Paul II, '*Redemptoris Missio*,' paragraph 30. Emphasis original.

[211] John F. Russell, 'St Thérèse of Lisieux: A Contemporary Perspective' in *Spirituality* 2:9 (1996), p. 344. Emphasis added.

[212] See Second Vatican Council, 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*' in Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II*, paragraphs 10, 31.

[213] Ibid., paragraph 17.

[214] Second Vatican Council, 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*' in Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II*, paragraph 4.

> The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God… They are called [into the fabric of daily life] by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.[215]

Clearly, then, the Council lifted the missionary mantle from the shoulders of an exclusive, chosen few and restored it to its rightful place over *all* who profess to be Christian.

Thérèsian sister missiology is a potential catalyst for the ongoing fulfilment of the Second Vatican Council's assertion that all are called to participate in the mission of establishing the Kingdom of God. John Russell comments that

> Thérèse saw that God could take her life and make it part of a larger story whereby the Kingdom of God comes upon the earth. Thérèse's life given in love in a small convent in Normandy could become part of redemptive history through her union with Jesus Christ.[216]

In this, Thérèse personally enacted the Council's vision of the faithful being missionary within their particular life-situation. More to the point, 'her little way' – or, to think the unthought in Thompson's position – her sister missiology 'is a kind of Catholic form of the priesthood of the people in the Church.'[217] Therefore, it might be said that there is something paradigmatic for all Christians in Thérèse's personal witness of sharing in the mission of Jesus.

So what precisely does this mean? In the first place, it is important to appreciate that sister missiology's structure of radical solidarity with the other together with complete

[215] Second Vatican Council, '*Lumen Gentium*' in Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II*, paragraph 31. Furthermore, the centrality of the laity's role in realising the Kingdom of God is reinforced in Second Vatican Council, 'Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*' in Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II*. See also Neil Ormerod, 'Mission and Ministry in the Wake of Vatican II' located online at: http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aet_1/Ormerod.htm
[216] Russell, 'A Contemporary Perspective,' p. 344.
[217] Thompson, 'A Challenge for Doctrine and Theology,' p. 184.

receptivity to divine love is directly and inherently missionary, or Kingdom-building; as Pope John Paul II notes 'the Kingdom's nature… is one of communion among all human beings – with one another and with God.'[218] Thérèse herself indicates her awareness of her immediate participation in the mission of the Church with her well-known declaration, 'in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be *Love*.'[219] Thus it is fitting to speak of the darkness of unbelief which she experienced in the last eighteen months of her life as 'a new *mission field* of fellowship solidarity for Thérèse,'[220] and for Thérèse to claim that she herself is a missionary 'through love and penance'[221] due to her inner union with the causes of her brothers in the foreign missions. Secondly, the pattern of being missionary which Thérèse embodies is inherently universally accessible; in the words of the Saint's cousin Marie, 'people in the world can imitate her.'[222] Grounded as it is on 'letting go of all special claims in order simply to be with the people of the earth,'[223] sister missiology is essentially open to incarnation within the life-situation of any of the baptised. Evidently, Thérèse demonstrates how 'we can all be apostles and missionaries in our God-given vocation, wherever we find ourselves,'[224] and thus realise the Second Vatican Council's universal call to mission.

(ii) Mission and world religions.

[218] Pope John Paul II, '*Redemptoris Missio*,' paragraph 15.
[219] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 195.
[220] Gallagher, *St Thérèse and Today's Crisis of Faith*, p. 1. Emphasis added.
[221] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume II,* p. 956.
[222] *Last Conversations*, p. 281.
[223] Frohlich, 'Thérèse and the Sacred Heart,' p. 18.
[224] De Meester, *With Empty Hands*, p. 9.

According to Wayne Teasdale, the Council's 'Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions' 'may well be considered the most significant document of Vatican II because it has altered forever the church's attitude toward and relationship with the other religions.'[225] This document presented 'an openness to and sensitivity towards diversity or pluralism'[226] unprecedented in the Magisterium. It stated, for example, that

> The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in [non-Christian] religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which… often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.[227]

The Declaration went on to exhort Christians to 'recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these [followers of other religions].'[228] This favorable reappraisal of non-Christian religions was reinforced by the references in the Council's 'Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church' to the presence of elements of 'truth and grace'[229] and 'seeds of the Word'[230] in other religious traditions.

The Council's recognition of the positive value of non-Christian religions involves a substantive rethinking as to what precise significance the Church's missionary activity might be said to possess. To express the core of this reassessment most dramatically: 'if people can be saved within their own religious traditions, why should the church engage

[225] Wayne Teasdale, 'Interreligious Dialogue Since Vatican II – The Monastic Contemplative Dimension' in *Spirituality Today* 43:2 (Summer 1991), p. 122.
[226] Ibid., p. 122.
[227] Second Vatican Council, 'Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*' in Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II*, paragraph 2.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Second Vatican Council, '*Ad Gentes*' in Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II*, paragraph 9.
[230] Ibid., paragraph 11.

in missionary activity?'[231] Does not the recognition of the salvific significance of the other world religions rob the Church of its previous missionary dynamic and motivation? Teasdale highlights that while the Council was indeed open to other religions, 'its identity and focus were firmly Christian.'[232] In fact, in the vision of the Council Fathers it is only because of their hidden participation in the Christian economy of salvation that non-Christian religions have any redemptive value. This Christocentric approach is well captured by the 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World' when it asserts that

> Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.[233]

Within such an interreligious outlook, mission remains crucial and implies building the Kingdom of God through a process of both dialogue and proclamation. 'Dialogue is a path towards the Kingdom'[234] as it stimulates the Church

> both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit [outside of her borders], as well as to examine more deeply her own identity.[235]

While sincerely encouraging interreligious dialogue, the Church acknowledges that it also 'ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.'[236]

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[231] Michael Fitzgerald, 'Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue' located online at: http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/articles/fitzgerald_Oct03.htm
[232] Teasdale, 'Interreligious Dialogue Since Vatican II,' p. 122.
[233] Second Vatican Council, '*Gaudium et Spes*' in Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II*, paragraph 22.
[234] Pope John Paul II, '*Redemptoris Missio*,' paragraph 57.
[235] Ibid., paragraph 56.
[236] Second Vatican Council, '*Nostra Aetate*' in Flannery (Gen. Ed.), *Vatican Council II*, paragraph 2.

The process of integrating and implementing the Second Vatican Council's understanding of mission in a religiously pluralistic world in the contemporary milieu faces unique challenges. Carl Starkloff asks 'what more dramatic and tragic example of disruption of everything – dialogue *and* proclamation – can there be than the setback dealt to conversation among the religions by the terrorist action of September 11?'[237] The Church of the twenty-first century thus requires a missiology both steadfastly courageous enough to embrace religious diversity and faithful enough to proclaim the Gospel. It is demonstrable that Thérèsian sister missiology fulfils these criteria.

Although Thérèse herself did not intentionally engage with the question of mission and world religions, the principal dynamics of her sister missiology are well-suited to the task; the interplay of solidarity and receptivity to divine love provides an effective framework for embodying the dual ideals of interreligious dialogue and proclamation and so realising the Kingdom of God ever more deeply in the world. Walter Kasper comments that interreligious 'dialogue lives from mutual respect for the otherness of the other. Dialogue takes differences seriously and withstands their difficulties.'[238] How is sister missiology able to accommodate the ambiguity which dialogue clearly entails? It has been said of Thérèse that 'her quality of sisterhood… enables her to be received with joy in every culture.'[239] To take this insight further, the primacy given to brotherhood and sisterhood by sister missiology's radical commitment to solidarity necessarily implies that the otherness of religious diversity is welcomed. Sister missiology, then, offers a space in which the differing voices of interreligious dialogue partners, and the challenges

[237] Carl Starkloff, 'After September 11, 2001: Whither Mission?' in *In All Things: A Jesuit Journal of the Social Apostolate* (Fall/Winter 2001), p. 5. Emphasis original.
[238] Walter Kasper, 'Some Reflections on *Nostra Aetate*' located online at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20011123_kasper-nostra-aetate_en.html
[239] Frohlich, *Essential Writings*, p. 30.

contained therein, are able to be expressed. The solidarity, and thus openness to diversity, of sister missiology is grounded in a steadfast orientation to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. It is thus that the Thérèsian model of mission also intrinsically entails proclamation. Following St Paul,[240] Michael Fitzgerald emphasises that the love of Christ is such a compelling reality that 'because we have come to know and value the Lord Jesus, and because we appreciate all that God has done for us in him… we wish to share this good news with others.'[241] Manifestly, sister missiology has a potentially vital contribution to make to the Church as it seeks to integrate the Second Vatican Council's insights on mission and world religions in the third millennium. With its key structures so essentially disposed to enabling dialogue and proclamation, sister missiology is well able to withstand the challenges facing interfaith relations in the contemporary milieu.

A story told by Mark Raper, former head of the Jesuit Refugee Service, illustrates sister missiology's capacity for realising the Kingdom of God in an interreligious setting. He tells of a refugee camp for Muslims located in the Bihac pocket of northern Bosnia that was established in 1995 during the bloody conflict in the Balkans. From the camp's commencement, an international team of volunteers from the Jesuit Refugee Service lived in this dangerous environment and assisted the refugees by establishing a primary school and numerous other activities. Raper narrates:

> When I visited the camp about 18 months later, in early 1997, the number of refugees had diminished to a couple of thousand, since those who could had slipped home, and the most acceptable refugees had been selected for resettlement in third countries. The agencies assisting them were also reduced to just the Red Crescent Society and ourselves, the Jesuit Refugee Service. The teachers at the little school prepared a lunch, at the end of which, the principal of the school, whom I shall call Vildana, a blue-eyed and fair-haired Muslim woman, said to me: 'When all those people and agencies came to help

[240] See 2 *Cor* 5:14
[241] Fitzgerald, 'Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue.'

> us in the beginning, the last group that I expected to stay with us Muslims was the Jesus Refugee Service. Now I see that not only did you stay with us, but you love us.' Somewhat foolishly I replied: 'But is it not true that we are brothers and sisters, and do we not have the same Father, the same God?' Vildana looked at me, or rather through me, for what seemed like five minutes, as she digested this. Finally, and with immense surprise, she concluded: 'Yes!' It was a radiant moment of warmth in an environment created by years of betrayal, terror and distrust.[242]

Clearly, the Christians' radical solidarity, or dialogue of life, with their Muslim companions, originating as it did from a commitment to divine love, led to a deeper in-breaking of the reign of God, to a fuller manifestation of the wonders of God, in the fragility of the refugee camp. As Raper continues,

> What gave Vildana, after all the violence, terror and betrayal that she had lived through, much of it at the hands of Christians, whether they be Orthodox Serbians or Catholic Croatians, the ability to recognise that our Christian God could be any match for her great God, her Allah Akbar? Only the lived faith, which means faith in practice, the constant love of those young volunteers who stayed with her people, could give this experience of solidarity.[243]

The Church's engagement with postmodernity.[244]

Highlighting a central ecclesial concern of the twenty-first century, Michael Amaladoss questions how equipped the Church is 'to be on mission witnessing to the Reign of God in the post-modern world;'[245] of course, such a concern flows from the wellspring of the Second Vatican Council's expansive vision of mission. In order to address this matter it is necessary first to establish what is meant by the designation 'postmodern.' As one author explains, '"postmodern" has become the umbrella term for the rejection of [the]

[242] Mark Raper, 'The Church as agent of hope: What can religious faith contribute to life in contemporary Australia?' in *Compass* 39:2 (Winter 2005), p. 30.
[243] Ibid., p. 31.
[244] The focus in this section is primarily upon Western society.
[245] Michael Amaladoss, 'Mission in a Post-Modern World: A Call to be Counter-cultural' located online at: http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/resources/sedos_amal.htm

ideas and tendencies'[246] of modernity. An understanding of postmodernity, therefore, may be attained through first considering the nature of modernity and then examining what remains as modernity is rejected or deconstructed. In the analysis that follows, it is important to note that modernity and postmodernity are not two distinctly separate historical epochs, one following the other. Modernity and postmodernity refer more accurately to two different sensibilities or mindsets which, while undeniably associated with the unfolding of history, coexist in today's world with their various possibilities and limitations.[247] Nevertheless, many scholars have recognised that the current of postmodernity so holds sway that it is justifiable generally to classify the contemporary milieu 'postmodern;'[248] this general classification will be employed here.

The roots of modernity can be traced to the philosophers René Descartes and Francis Bacon.[249] Searching for the criteria of absolute truth, Descartes wrought an exaltation of human rational consciousness, reducing human intelligence to only one of its functions, to the detriment of poetic, intuitive and participative knowledge. As Donald Buggert

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[246] M. J. Kerlin, reviewing F. Centore's, *Being and Becoming: A Critique of Postmodernism*, in *Theological Studies* 53:1 (1992), p. 165.

[247] Amaladoss claims that 'we are… living a moment of crisis and tension between the radical modernity of the scientific-technological world and the post-modernity of the cultural perspectives.' Amaladoss, 'Mission in a Post-Modern World.' Thus to neatly carve the contemporary world into categories of 'modernity' and 'postmodernity,' however, is to introduce false distinctions; surely, for example, quantum theory has introduced postmodernist tendencies into science and the rise of various forms of fundamentalism has introduced modernist tendencies into contemporary culture. A certain fluidity of approach is therefore needed when speaking of the coexistence of modernity and postmodernity in today's world.

[248] The list of scholars who could be cited here is extensive. See, for example, J. D. Caputo and M. J. Scanlon (Eds.), *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999); Graham Ward (Ed.), *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997); Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996); and Donald W. Buggert, 'New Wine: Jesus, Carmelite Prayer, and Postmodernity' in K. J. Egan (Ed.), *Carmelite Prayer. A Tradition for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), pp. 63-81.

[249] In fact, Catherine Pickstock argues that seeds of modernity can even be found in the Middle Ages in the person and philosophy of Duns Scotus. Catherine Pickstock, 'Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance' in *Modern Theology* 21:4 (October 2005), pp. 543-574.

explains, 'the individual self and its consciousness became the autonomous, rational subject, that is, the centre of reality and the foundation for all truth and certitude.'[250] This triumph of the rational was heightened by Bacon's assertion that 'knowledge is power.'[251] Modernity's portrayal of the human person as an autonomous, powerful self guided by reason to objective, and thus universal, truth promoted a distinct vision of the world. It envisions that 'everything that exists has its own intrinsic, stable meaning or intelligibility, which can be grasped by the transcendental, knowing subject.'[252] Characteristic of modernity, therefore, is an unbounded optimism in humanity's ability to make progress through fathoming the world's apparent mysteries and harnessing their potential. Not surprisingly, then, the culture of modernity extols science, and sometimes even tends towards the extremity of scientism.

The certainties and self-assurance of modernity were explicitly and seriously confronted in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche;[253] it is thus no surprise that Nietzsche is often regarded as the first postmodernist.[254] He held the modern person's claim to possess rationally attained universal truth to be essentially subjective, self-serving and ultimately meaningless – in short, the 'will to power – and nothing besides.'[255] With his nihilist suspicion of human reason, Nietzsche announced the death of the god of modernity – that is 'a way of doing philosophy in which a highest principle is sought that grounds the

[250] Buggert, 'New Wine: Jesus, Carmelite Prayer, and Postmodernity,' p. 65.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid., p. 66.
[253] Robert Misrahl notes that Arthur Schopenhauer – for whom 'the last word of wisdom will henceforth consist in plunging ourselves in nothingness' – 'is the source… of the philosophy of Nietzsche.' Robert Misrahl, cited in Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 204.
[254] See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1987), cited in Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine,' p. 262.
[255] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 550.

possibility of all things.'[256] What remains after such a reaction to and critique of modernity? Postmodernity firstly rejects the notion of the human self understood as an autonomous, rational centre of objective truth existing 'above and outside the flux of history and culture.'[257] Left in the wake of the rational subject is 'a self that is constituted by language, traditions, narratives and relationships.'[258] Accompanying the postmodern anthropology is a world devoid of inherently knowable absolute truths. In this worldview of postmodernity, 'truth consists in the ground rules that facilitate the well-being of the community in which we participate,'[259] so that, as Gallagher notes, 'meaning, if it exists at all, is created by us and is always in flux.'[260] Furthermore, the shifting sands of postmodernity clearly offer no foothold for metanarratives. Silencing voices that profess to capture the whole story of reality, postmodernity 'lives with many narratives, many traditions, many versions of the truth, and with cultural diversity.'[261]

Postmodernity's disavowal of anything (or anyone) that claims to be '*the* way,' '*the* truth' or '*the* life'[262] presents an obvious challenge to the communication of the Christian story.[263] It is possible to trace a development in the nature of the tension between the proclamation of the Christian message and postmodern sensibilities. With Nietzsche and his adherents in the late nineteenth century, God was angrily 'being rejected… as the dangerous enemy of human freedom, as an illusion that humanity must outgrow in order

[256] Graham Ward, 'Introduction, or, A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace' in Ward (Ed.), *The Postmodern God*, p. xxviii.
[257] Buggert, 'New Wine: Jesus, Carmelite Prayer and Postmodernity,' p. 67.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 7.
[260] Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, p. 88.
[261] Buggert, 'New Wine: Jesus, Carmelite Prayer, and Postmodernity,' p. 68.
[262] See *Jn* 14:6
[263] With Frohlich, it is worth noting here that 'some commentators do find positive religious potential in the postmodern breakdown of traditional forms.' However, 'it is evident that this phenomenon also is presenting the human spirit with a new challenge of immense proportions.' Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine,' p. 264.

to reach its true dignity.'[264] Throughout the twentieth century and into the third millennium, however, this anger has atrophied into what Gallagher calls a 'spiritual numbness.'[265] Decades of floating adrift upon the surfaces of fragmentary experiences have rendered God 'culturally unreal'[266] for many people, leaving them with a felt 'distance… from the inherited forms of church religion and from the ordinary expressions of the Christ-story.'[267] Indeed, 'for millions today, questions of belief, truth, or goodness are not even on the horizon.'[268] In a word, in the present postmodern era 'God is missing but is not missed.'[269] The pervasive spiritual apathy of postmodernity is not without its repercussions. Frohlich summarises these well when she asserts that

> [Postmodern] culture offers no language for the articulation of depth or genuine longing, leaving many people in terrible desolation when suffering, serious loss, or the approach of death cannot be allayed by the available consumeristic means.[270]

Against the background of this brief survey of postmodernity, more of its mood than its system of thought, if indeed one can ever speak of a 'system' in relation to postmodernism, the question of the Church's potential to carry out its evangelising mission in a postmodern cultural climate presents itself with particular acuity. Amaladoss laments that presently, 'though there is much talk of mission, a convincing new vision that one could propose, relevant to the postmodern world, seems lacking.'[271] Yet a strong case can be argued for sister missiology as precisely the 'new vision' of mission of which the Church of the third millennium stands in need. Firstly, it is significant that sister

[264] Gallagher, *St Thérèse and Today's Crisis of Faith*, p. 3.
[265] Ibid., p. 4.
[266] Ibid., p. 6.
[267] Ibid., p. 4.
[268] Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine,' p. 264.
[269] Josep Vives, 'Dios en el crepusculo del siglo XX' in *Razón y Fe* (May 1991), p. 468.
[270] Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine,' p. 264.
[271] Amaladoss, 'Mission in a Post-Modern World.'

missiology emerged at the genesis of postmodernity. Gallagher observes that although 'St Thérèse of Lisieux and Friedrich Nietzsche never heard of one another… they were contemporaries, and in a strange sense companion spirits.'[272] This companionship was forged in the dark night of the last eighteen months of Thérèse's life, for although Thérèse would have been unaware of the first stage of postmodern atheism that was germinating in her midst, 'her own extraordinary inner conflict seems to have put her into imaginative contact with this night battle of her culture.'[273] Six elaborates this coincidence when he notes that 'at the very moment when Thérèse is going through the night of her life, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud are emphasizing this nocturnal situation of the human condition.'[274] It was the nihilists, then, who were Thérèse's brothers at the table of unbelief and with whom she abided in redemptive solidarity through her choice to cling ferociously to faith through love. Thérèse's lived response to nascent postmodernity is obviously alternatively identifiable as her embodied expression of sister missiology. From its origin, then, sister missiology has spanned the chasm between postmodern unbelief and Christianity.[275]

A further nexus between sister missiology and postmodernity is noteworthy here. As Thérèse approached her death, she became increasingly aware that her way of being missionary through solidarity with others and radical receptivity to God's love – that is to

[272] Michael Paul Gallagher, *Dive Deeper: The Human Poetry of Faith* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001), p. 65.
[273] Gallagher, *St Thérèse and Today's Crisis of Faith*, p. 3.
[274] Six, *Light of the Night*, p. 34.
[275] Thérèse's sympathy with those who commit suicide (see *Last Conversations*, pp. 196, 258 and *Procès de l'Ordinaire, 1910-1911*, p. 472) may be an antecedent echo of her kinship with the unbelief of contemporary postmodernity. In this present age, marked as it is by a cultural unreality of God that leaves many in terrible spiritual desolation, suicide rates have reached epidemic proportions in many parts of the developed world. To the complex question of suicide, Thérèse offers her witness of 'a small and naked person standing in the abyss, trusting in God and absolutely committed to loving.' Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: "Doctor for the Third Millennium?"' p. 37.

say, her sister missiology – would be ever more efficacious after she had died. For example, referring to her life after death, Thérèse explained to her missionary correspondent Maurice Bellière that 'when my dear little Brother leaves for Africa, I shall follow him no longer by thought, by prayer; my soul will be always with him.'[276] Frohlich observes that this understanding contains a profound doctrine on heaven. 'Thérèse begins to teach,' Frohlich writes, 'that heaven is not a far-away happy land of ethereal beings, but rather is love – love in this small time and place, and love unbounded by time or space.'[277] In this way the Saint of Lisieux provides 'an insight into the mutual coinherence of eternity and each moment of time, so that this small moment already opens out onto eternity, and entrance into eternity does not remove one from presence in time.'[278] In other words, Thérèse demonstrated that from within a circumscribed time, place and personhood – the only reality available to her, and to all human persons – and 'intimately linked to God, it is possible to love without boundaries.'[279] Sister missiology, then, offers a path through one of postmodernity's most confounding dilemmas: how is it possible to affirm a multiplicity of worldviews and cultures without totally jettisoning the concept of 'truth?' Thérèse's sister theology of mission 'witnesses to a kind of truth that is known only through complete immersion in particularity, yet which blossoms into a communion accessible to all, without exception.'[280]

So how can the Church of the twenty-first century embody sister missiology in order to bridge the distance between the unbelief of contemporary postmodernity and the Christ-story? Thérèse's immersion into her era's dark night of atheism while trusting in God and

[276] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence – Volume II*, p. 1140.
[277] Frohlich, 'Thérèse of Lisieux: "Doctor for the Third Millennium?"' p. 35.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid., p. 36.

remaining utterly receptive to his love exemplifies that today's Church must enter into a transformative solidarity of love with the present day manifestation of postmodern unbelief. The Church, then, must somehow redemptively participate in the 'undramatic limbo of indifference'[281] that marks this cultural moment. To put it a different way, the Church needs to facilitate a 'retrieval of hunger and depth in people,'[282] to awaken people's desire for the 'freshness of Jesus.'[283] As to how this might be done, it was Pope Paul VI who declared that the contemporary 'man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.'[284] Highlighting that Thérèse herself was a forerunner in this regard, and endorsing the priority of personal witness in realising her sister missiology today, Pope John Paul II remarked that 'Thérèse is a Teacher for our time, which thirsts for living and essential words, for heroic and credible acts of witness.'[285] This point is further elaborated by Anthony Thiselton who notes that in a culture wary of totalising narratives it is 'a love in which a self genuinely *gives* itself to the Other *in the interests of the Other* [that] dissolves the acids of suspicion.'[286] Hence the key to entering into the postmodern spiritual slumber and awakening it to the transcendent message of the Gospel is not primarily catechetical formulae or dogmatic pronouncements but the witness of a life transformed by the Christian story, a life entirely penetrated by divine love. As Gallagher expounds, 'only love lived in simple constancy, in transparent authenticity, in undramatic ordinariness, can mirror the presence of Jesus and thus be the crucial foundation of any

[281] Michael Paul Gallagher, *What Are They Saying About Unbelief?* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1995), p. 6.
[282] Gallagher, *St Thérèse and Today's Crisis of Faith*, p. 4.
[283] Chukwuma Okoye, 'The New Mission of Saint Thérèse,' p. 171.
[284] Pope Paul VI, 'Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* On Evangelization in the Modern World' (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1976), paragraph 41.
[285] Pope John Paul II, '*Divini Amoris Scientia*,' paragraph 11.
[286] Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, p. 160. Emphasis original.

new evangelization for unbelievers now.'[287] This is the vision of mission in a milieu of postmodernity that sister missiology offers the Church of the twenty-first century.

There are at least three implications for the Church if it is to incarnate Thérèsian sister missiology as its model for establishing the Kingdom of God in the postmodern culture of today. Firstly, with the emphasis that it places on the transformative power of witness, sister missiology will

> attune us to the originating sources of personal experience as the ground for God's fresh beginnings in history and the Church; [it will] attune us to the never-fully-conceptualizable unique person's experience as the ground for ongoing renewal and critique in the Church.[288]

Without denying the role of Scripture or Tradition, sister missiology demands that ordinary lived Christian experience be acknowledged as a source of revelation of the Gospel message. Secondly, and this is related to the former point, sister missiology necessitates that the language used by the Church be resonant with the personal. Gallagher observes that 'today's unbelievers seem to listen to witness that speaks a language of depth, that does justice to the contemplative dimension of experience rather than the doctrinal level of interpretation of faith.'[289]

Finally, sister missiology challenges the Church to an ever deeper surrender to the person of Jesus in order that the Christian witness it presents truly has the ability to penetrate, and enter into solidarity with, the indifferent 'fogginess' of postmodernity. Neil Brown captures this call to conversion well and offers an insight into the expression a radiant Christian witness could take in present day Australian society when he writes that

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[287] Gallagher, *St Thérèse and Today's Crisis of Faith*, pp. 5-6.
[288] Thompson, 'A Challenge for Doctrine and Theology,' p. 184.
[289] Gallagher, *St Thérèse and Today's Crisis of Faith*, p. 5.

> An authentic Church praxis should have an alternative way to living to offer the roller-coaster ride to increasing violence, inequality and despair that presently seems to be civilisation's course… Its compassion, for example, to asylum seekers might be more vocal, it might be able to offer its expertise in reconciliation to indigenous people seeking justice for their cause, and it might include more sustainable living in its own spirituality and lifestyle as a sign of hope for the environment. In general it should be ready to give a voice to the voiceless, express indignation at oppression of all kinds, resist jingoism, not be taken in by political spin, and above all to find in its own life and practice a source of inspiration and insight which is truly a 'hope' to offer the modern world.[290]

A corollary of this summons to an increasingly authentic Christian witness is a call to prayer as a primary locus of personal transformation. If the Church of the third millennium sincerely desires to engage with its postmodern contemporaries then Thérèsian sister missiology clearly provides a road-map for such engagement. The question which remains is whether or not the Church is prepared to face the consequences of embodying this model of mission.

[290] Neil Brown, 'The Church in the Post-Postmodern World' in *Compass* 37:2 (Winter 2003), p. 22.

- CONCLUSION -

'I think that God was at his wits' end when he gave us Thérèse,'[291] writes Ruth Burrows. Faced with generation after generation of Christians placing saints, and thus sanctity, on an inaccessible pedestal, God resolved, Burrows reflects, to give humanity one so little that neither she nor her message of holiness could possibly be exalted beyond reach. Unfortunately, the plan was not immediately successful. Many, including her own sisters, have drowned Thérèse in a molasses of sentimentality; others have rejected her as self-occupied, immature and provincial; still 'others see her as heroic, a genius, a seraph.'[292] In recent times, however, the 'real' Thérèse and her revelation of the meaning of holiness have broken into spiritual discourse with new luminosity. This is in a large part due to a contemporary upsurge of study on the dark night of faith that consumed Thérèse's last eighteen months[293] – a topic little treated, and perhaps regarded as scandalous, in earlier times, yet defining for Thérèse's spirituality. And what vision of holiness does Thérèse diffuse? She cries out 'that Jesus was her holiness, that all that pleased him in her was to see her love her nothingness, see the utter trust she had in him.'[294]

With such a vision of holiness in mind, Pope John Paul II's concluding words in his encyclical letter 'On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate' resound with fresh significance. He declares that 'the call to mission derives, of its nature, from the call to holiness.'[295] With holiness and mission so interwoven, Thérèse's message

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[291] Burrows, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*, p. 131.
[292] Ibid.
[293] See Edman, 'St. Thérèse and the Dark Night,' p. 170.
[294] Burrows, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*, p. 130.
[295] Pope John Paul II, '*Redemptoris Missio*,' paragraph 90.

about the essence of sanctity is inescapably a message about the essence of mission. Thérèse's incisive contribution to missiology and the ongoing relevance of this contribution has been the focus of this dissertation.

Thérèse's enduring contribution to missiology emerged within the particularities of her life-experience. As a girl, and then as a young Carmelite, Thérèse's approach to unbelievers revealed her participation in the vision of faith that informed her ecclesial context. With its psyche scarred by the atrocities of the French Revolution, the Church in France in the late nineteenth century was shuddering at the predominance that republicanism was asserting in society. The Church responded to this rise of republicanism by withdrawal; the Church, good, redemptive and holy would stand for everything contrary to the evil, corruptive and secular republican project. Faithful Catholics of the day, such as the Martin family, embodied this dualistic mentality in their daily spirituality. Retreating from the 'corruption' of the world around them, the faithful created an alternative, purified reality and from within this haven sought to conquer what they saw as the darkness of those on the 'outside' with the weapons of reparative acts.

It was thus that a mother missiology was formed within Thérèse of Lisieux. Perceiving herself as securely embedded in the 'camp' of the righteous, Thérèse regarded unbelievers with motherly condescension and sought to 'birth' divine life in them through her prayers and sacrifices. Indeed, Thérèse refers to the conversion of the first unbeliever for whom she deliberately and relentlessly interceded as the birth of her '*first child*.'[296]

[296] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 100.

As Thérèse gradually grew into the life of a Carmelite nun, her faith, and with it her approach to unbelief, began to break out of the nineteenth century mould. Increasingly aware of the discrepancy between her human frailty and the splendour of God's love, yet ever desirous of sanctity, Thérèse discovered the 'little way.' The way to holiness, to loving as God loves, Thérèse was amazed to realise, was not primarily through her own efforts but through abandoning herself to God's love from the depth of her poverty. Thus Jesus himself would become her 'wisdom and [her] righteousness and sanctification and redemption.'[297] Furthermore, Thérèse's struggle to cope with her beloved father's physical and psychological demise initiated her deliberate immersion into the passion of Jesus. This assimilation into the kenosis of Christ deepened through Thérèse's contemplation of the 'suffering servant song' of *Isaiah* 52:13 – 53:12 and reached a consummation in the dark night of Thérèse's last eighteen months; approaching death in physical agony and engulfed with doubts about the existence of heaven, Thérèse could echo Christ's cry of abandonment from the Cross while trusting from within the darkness of unknowing in the utter fidelity of God's love.

These two transformative trajectories in Thérèse's faith together transformed her relationship with unbelievers from mother to sister. Thérèse's confident acceptance of her fundamental human limitedness, even to the extent of bearing in trust that stripping of her very faith during her last eighteen months, led her down from a position of motherly superiority to unbelievers to one of sisterly solidarity with them. She was no longer 'unable to believe there were really impious people who had no faith'[298] but rather sat

[297] 1 *Cor* 1:30 (Revised Standard Version)
[298] St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, p. 210.

alongside her unbelieving brothers at the table of unbelief and shared their daily bread.[299] Infused into this solidarity was Thérèse's childlike receptivity to the extravagance of God's love. By remaining steadfastly open to the divine outpouring of love while enmeshed in a matrix of unbelief, Thérèse 'abandons herself to letting God love through her all those who are "nothing."'[300] With its dual dynamic of solidarity with unbelievers and receptivity to divine love, Thérèse's sister missiology clearly penetrates to the core of the paschal mystery. Jesus' transformative, redemptive participation in the wounded human condition, then, makes him the archetypal embodiment of sister missiology.

Sister missiology pulsates with dynamic applicability to the Church of the twenty-first century. It provides a means of enacting the twofold missionary agenda of today's Church – the ongoing realisation of the missionary insights of the Second Vatican Council and engagement with postmodernity. Thérèse's way of being missionary is inherently open to incarnation within the life of any member of the faithful; accordingly, sister missiology offers a way towards the realisation of the Council's universal call to mission. The Council's further call to Christians to enter into a process of dialogue and proclamation with members of other world religions with the aim of further establishing the Kingdom of God on earth can also be facilitated by the essential dynamics of sister missiology. Moreover, connected with postmodern unbelief from its germination, sister missiology offers the Church a vision for engaging with the postmodern unbelief of the contemporary era; through living lives that are authentically permeated by the Gospel message of God's extravagant, salvific love, Christians have the potential to enter into the

[299] See ibid., p. 212.
[300] Frohlich, 'Desolation and Doctrine,' p. 270.

spiritual indifference of their unbelieving brothers and sisters and to awaken them to the freshness of Jesus.

Perhaps God was at his wits' end when he gave humanity Thérèse as an accessible model of authentic missiology. Perhaps the nineteenth century model of mission, which lingered into the twentieth century, and even into the twenty-first, was so far from God's heart that a radical corrective was needed. Will his plan be successful? In the end, the full realisation of Thérèse's sister missiology, like her message of holiness, depends on this one question: will each of the baptised, will each human person, joyfully accept that fundamental poverty that is the shared glory of humanity and, from the depth of that poverty, accept being divinely loved and thus allow the Kingdom of God to penetrate to the very heart of the world?

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