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Filial Relationship, Mercy and limitation in Thérèse of Lisieux: Towards a Thérésian Theological Anthropology and its Implications

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CHAPTER THREE

Leading Out From Childhood

In this chapter, we continue to seek evidence for an early childhood experience of mercy in Thérèse: in terms of what Sroufe observes about the toddler and the young child, and what McDargh observes about progressing self-formation and assimilation of the idea of God. The discussion will take us to Thérèse's painful experiences of an absence of mercy, and how this serves to bring into relief the vivifying and empowering effect of mercy. From eighteen months onward, we find morally sensitive behaviour emerging in Therese, marking the awareness of independent agency and beginning of a separate self. We note the influence of the Martin's religious lens (winning eternal life in God's presence as a saint) and a particular family dynamic on her self-formation. We encounter what McDargh describes as a complex interaction between the theological ideas offered by a community's tradition, and the God and self-representations which the child brings along to confront these ideas.¹ To explore this, the research will examine the Martin family dynamic, using, in addition to McDargh and Sroufe, Thomas R. Nevin's *Thérèse of Lisieux: God's Gentle Warrior*,² and Thérèse's aim "to be a saint," and her goal to be a nun (from the "dawn" of her reason).³ We turn to the notion of 'self-becoming' and developmental nature.

1. Self-formation and early interactions with the idea of God

a. Self becoming as Developmental and the Place for God

In the previous chapter, we concluded that where dependency in the infant is sensitively (mercifully) responded to by the caregiver – and not treated as the basis for rejection –

¹ John McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion: On Faith and the imaging of God* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 129.

² Thomas R. Nevin, *Thérèse of Lisieux, God's Gentle Warrior* (Oxford; New York: University Press, 2006), 71-112. It will use the chapter entitled, "On Her Mother: The Travails of Zélie Martin."

³ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul. The Autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, translated by John Clarke (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996), 207. Thérèse declares her life-long quest to be a saint, in Man C. "I have always wanted to be a saint." At 116, In *Man A*, she asserts to Bishop Hugonin that she took up her aim to be a Carmelite at "the dawn of my reason." At two Thérèse decided to become a nun. See also *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: General Correspondence Volume II 1890-1897*, translated by John Clarke OCD (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1988), 1298.

competent self-regulation, and a confident self results.⁴ “Self-becoming,” McDargh states, is an ongoing process with no end point, and the “self” is no one thing.⁵ It is not a completion, such as “a set of traits” that one has, but a progressive inner organization of attitudes, beliefs, and values.”⁶ The human infant is utterly dependent on the ministrations of caregivers, not only for the provision of physical needs but, McDargh notes, also, and equally crucially, for the organization of the psychic structure.⁷

Dependence becomes the place for God. The child is first “absolutely,” and, later, permanently “relatively” dependent on the mother.⁸ In adults, McDargh states, dependence is not only on actual persons available, but on the total experience of significant past relationships which provide an internal sustaining foundation.⁹ This inner sustainment reminds us of our perpetual indebtedness to help that must come beyond ourselves, and, as that help is an on-going relationship kept alive psychically, beyond any present person available to us.¹⁰ Religious faith “is essentially related to this inner sustainment” and “makes possible a mature dependency.”¹¹ Attachment, a “continuum of condition and age appropriate dependence” entails maintaining a sense of “well-being and relatedness even in the absence of the parent” via a process of internalization.¹² A sense of trust in the reliability and availability of love and care, and the processes of faith that renew and sustain that sense, form an interior presence (the

⁴ L. Alan Sroufe, *Emotional Development: The Organization of Emotional Life in the Early Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 150.

⁵ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 75.

⁶ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 218.

⁷ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 84. Bowlby and Ainsworth’s studies resulted in the acknowledgment of the “fact of normative dependence.”

⁸ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 84.

⁹ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 84.

¹⁰ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 84.

¹¹ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 84.

¹² McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 86.

“transitional object”), while lack of it, and the subsequent lack of renewability, cause a person to continuously approach other persons for validation.¹³

b. The Complex Interrelatedness of Self-becoming

Sroufe noted that the caregiver’s handling, responses, and initiatives, in arousing and guiding the child’s emotion, raising and meeting its expectations, produced a shared language of trust, and therein “attachment.” With the child’s growth, new capacities provide the means to evolve, both in degree of response and sophistication of repeating the quality of the care-giving received.¹⁴ In the second and third year, the child appraises and responds to events in context (including the context of feelings) and evaluates his behaviour in relation to external standards, then, in the following years to internal standards.¹⁵ As infants literally “move out” from the caregiver, and now have a new capacity for representing experiences and have their own place at the centre of this experience.¹⁶ The child is able to express, control and modulate affect, and has positive expectations in their ability to stay organized in the face of high arousal (they expect to recover after expressing strong emotion).¹⁷ A “self” determines motivation for action, and the child is aware of “the self as an actor”.¹⁸ With these capacities, the child develops a new understanding of the self: the self felt as good (in a suffusion of pleasure with oneself – the cockiness of the toddler), and the self felt as bad (a sense of shame, of the self exposed and vulnerable).¹⁹ With a “fragile and rather undifferentiated self ... the toddler is vulnerable to a global feeling of dissolution when

¹³ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 86-87.

¹⁴ “Because of motoric and cognitive advances, affective states arise more as a result of the child’s own actions leading to a sense of agent. As a result, certain new affects arise, such as shame and “positive self-evaluation,” which exercise a powerful influence on the child’s social behaviour and inner experience. Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 193.

¹⁵ The child’s advancing linguistic skills make this possible. Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 193.

¹⁶ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 195.

¹⁷ For example, they expect to be able to be fully angry and recoup. Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 195.

¹⁸ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 195.

¹⁹ Quoting Tomkins, Sroufe describes shame as: “felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul... the humiliated one... naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth.” Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 199.

being punished for a specific behaviour, especially if done in a harsh and degrading way.”²⁰

c. Mercy in the Toddler Age

Given the type and degree of helplessness infants are born to, caregiver mercy, in restraint and exertion, could be described as normative. Defining mercy with respect to the toddler (one to three years old) requires greater attention to context. Universal features, though, are still to be found. Aware of itself as an agent the child tries to live up to the standards of persons present to them (who also mediate the standards of others – the government, or God).²¹ Any claim that there is a direct correspondence between an ethical value and the child’s response at this point must be a tentative one because the child responds to the adult’s emotion accompanying the rule or standard, rather than the value itself.²² Mercy here, thus, involves the caregiver accommodating the child’s conflicting aims ‘to please’ and ‘to become a self’.

Finally before we turn to “theological ideas offered by a tradition,” we consider the influence of the inborn difference in the child upon the caregiver. Was Thérèse simply born with an appealing character? For Sroufe, variation in character belongs to the developmental history of the child: the responsive care offered to both “universal” and particular inborn characteristics.²³ Temperamental differences observed in toddlerhood are “complex constructions, with inborn variation transformed in the context of care-giving relationships, rather than as freestanding, relatively immutable characteristics of

²⁰ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 199.

²¹ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 197. This is indicated by “positive self evaluation” and by being “ashamed when scolded for a wrongdoing,”

²² Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 197-198. “By the middle of the second year, toddlers show a sensitivity to social demands, understanding that certain behaviours are forbidden.” There is a generalized response to disapproval. They express uncertainty, or distress toward a flawed object, or “when an external standard is violated or cannot be met.” By the end of the second year, distress or deviation anxiety is shown “when they are about to commit a forbidden behaviour,” and “a variety of negative emotions are displayed with verbalized concern and even attempts at reparation.” Toddlers show also show spontaneous self corrections, often mediated by language such as “No, can’t.” At this age “standards are externally based, and the adherence to standards almost always requires an adult presence.”

²³ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 194.

the child.”²⁴ Much is established during infancy, and from the second year the child is a strong force in his or her own development: “toddlers influence the actions of others and, in part, create their own environments.”²⁵ The challenges presented to the caregiver in infancy gradually expand, but caregivers draw from the strength of the dialogue they have nurtured. The Martins profit from Rose’s style of caring when a well-nourished, responsive, active Thérèse returns (added to their relief and joy that in Thérèse life came to flourish). Zélie faces a strong otherness in Thérèse (a confident self trying to secure a new attachment). Noting that the ability to respect the child’s otherness prepares the caregiver for its ever-growing reality, we observe Zélie responds with acceptance, perhaps learned through the difficulty she had with daughter Leonie.

1. Theological ideas offered by a Community’s Tradition

Thérèse’s family interacts with her on the basis of religious assumptions: God is the origin and goal of one’s existence and to whom all is directed. The liturgical and sacramental life of the Catholic Church is a manifestation of God’s presence in the world for all cultures. Wholehearted agreement to this, through participating in the Church’s liturgical and sacramental life leads to sainthood. Zélie and Louis make God ‘real’ by themselves relating to God as real, encouraging their children to interact with God on the basis of how they perceive God to be moved (by prayer before such as the statues of “Our Lady of Victories” and “Our Lady of the Smile,”²⁶ processions and pilgrimages, partaking in the Mass, charity, and self- sacrifice). ‘God’s ways’, where they are felt as distasteful, such as in self-renunciation and death, are defended. The child is held aloft by the parent’s faith activity. In this environment, a self still merged with the parent is encouraged and prolonged. Such unity, however, might ignore the child’s normative moral development, frustrating necessary individuation – as this form

²⁴ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 194.

²⁵ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 194.

²⁶ C. Kevin Gillespie, SJ, “Narcissism and Conversion: The Cases of Thérèse of Lisieux and Henri Nouwen” *Spiritual Life* (Summer 2007) 53, 2, pp108-118, 133. This was an unnamed family statue, but thus named after Thérèse’s experience of the statue’s healing smile.

of unity tends to maintain a one-to-one correspondence between the ‘goodness’ sought from the child and the values/standards the parents are held to.²⁷

Zélie also communicated a view of the human person. Jansenism, where it held correction as a “sign of God’s mercy” (like Calvinism), required the parent to counteract sin as soon as it was first felt to be in evidence: in behaviour taken as ‘self-will’ or acting for self-profit.²⁸ This represented another possible hindrance to moral-development. Identifying the child’s defence of self (as other) as a rejection of God’s ways (punishing/correcting the child in terms of this), interprets a child’s self-assertions through adult moral-standards.²⁹ It assumes an adult capacity for choosing renunciation (based on caregiver-esteem as unequivocally felt and successfully transposed to the transcendent Other).

a. Theology in Thérèse’s home Environment

As a toddler, Thérèse’s theological environment is the home – the place of her parent’s married relating, and interaction with her sisters as companions and caregivers. Here Louis, in part, lives out his ardent feeling for God and Zélie continues to practice

²⁷ Zélie’s sadness over the felt-pain of her mother’s moralizing and unequal treatment itself presented as a value. Zélie’s judgment that her mother’s moralizing made her life sad led to her resolving to make a different life for her family. Zélie wrote to Isidore, “My childhood and youth were as dismal as a winding sheet; although my mother spoiled you, she was very severe with me as you know. Even though she was very good she did not know how to take me, and I suffered very much interiorly.” (Nov 7, 1865). Therese of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, 2.

²⁸ Following Augustine, Calvin viewed children as affected by original sin, who need diligent “substantive and energetic guidance.” Calvin developed Augustine’s view that “children’s ‘whole nature is a seed of sin.’” toward the idea that “children’s inborn ‘seeds of sin’ naturally develops over time into increasing capacities for becoming actual ‘fruits’ of sin.” These capacities he saw as increasing with the onset of reason and puberty. Infant baptism was to prepare parents at the earliest point for this task. The child could “look back” to see “baptism as a “sign” or “assurance of God’s mercy against sin, becoming one way of helping prevent sin from dominating...” “The more ‘holy discipline’ a child receives from adults, the more likely that child will live in God’s grace and the more secure will become the social order for God’s reign.” John Wall, “Fallen Angels: A Contemporary Christian Ethical Ontology of Childhood.” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 8 (2004), 160-184, 170-172.

²⁹ As the toddler’s action rests largely on the imitation of gestures, one of its means for pushing for independence is to turn the “no’s” used to restrain him against restraint. The typical negativistic behaviour of this period reflects (i) the limited means available to them, (ii) the extent they feel vulnerable to their need for independence as thwarted ---there is “a tendency for toddlers to overcompensate in pulling away from the dependency of infancy in accord with a dialectic principle of development.” Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 195.

abandonment to God's incomprehensible ways.³⁰ Neither had relinquished their aspirations to be a religious, performing hidden works of charity. Refusal by the religious orders they approached did not change their fundamental desire. Zélie by her own admission, suffered as the unfavoured middle child; she could do nothing to please her mother and endured an austere childhood under her mother's moralizing.³¹ Though her aim was not to repeat those circumstances for her own daughters, to an extent she helplessly did. We turn to Zélie and Louis' marriage.³²

b. Zélie and Louis' Marriage

Affecting Zélie and Louis' marriage were the practical realities that: women and men were educated separately and lived in separate spheres, Louis was by nature and choice a confirmed celibate,³³ Zélie was faced with a life choice of spinsterhood, the lowest of Catholic society,³⁴ middle class women were poorly informed about sex, and Zélie and Louis began married life living with Louis' family.³⁵ In her correspondence, Zélie expresses expectations relating to her social class,³⁶ and refers to Louis as "my

³⁰ Nevin writes, for Zélie "adversity is desirable as a sign of divine testing and thus of divine favour." Following the loss of her children Zélie reflects: "When afflictions come, I resign myself quite well, but fear is a torment for me." "I prepare myself "in advance to bear my cross as bravely as possible." With her cancer, Zélie came to feel that that "suffering in this life would advance the soul's purification and thus reduce the time that it would have to spend in purgatory." Summing this up Zélie believes that "God does well what he does," and "I am calm, I find myself almost happy, and I wouldn't change my lot for any other." Thomas R. Nevin, *Thérèse of Lisieux, God's Gentle Warrior* (Oxford; New York: University Press, 2006), 90, 98, 105-106.

³¹ See footnote 27.

³² We use Nevin's review of *Correspondence Familiale 1863-1877* which contains 217 letters written by Zélie over 15 years. Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 78, 84.

³³ Louis perhaps held no less fear and apprehension about sex than Zélie. His only experience of sex may have been the vision from prostitutes in Parisian clubs he had earlier encountered and "emerged victorious from." Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 76-77.

³⁴ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 79-84. 100-101. Zélie felt the highest place in Catholic life was to be a religious. Pauline recalled that she was told that virgins alone follow Jesus, and that Zélie added, these virgins "would be crowned with of white roses and sing what no-one else could," and that married women "would only have red roses in their crowns."

³⁵ Later, they also take in Zélie's father. Maureen O' Riordan, "Blessed Zélie Guerin and Louis Martin: Companions on our Journey," 4, 6. <http://www.thereseoflisieux.org/their-pastoral-significance/> Accessed December 29, 2010.

³⁶ "...they [our daughters] really need to have their father and me working together to provide them with a dowry; otherwise when they are grown they won't be happy with us!" Zélie reflects upon the cost of this

husband” rather than by name.³⁷

Zélie and Louis were beatified for their care for the poor, commitment to prayer, and abandonment to God’s will,³⁸ a recognition of their merits while (not because of) occupying spousal roles.³⁹ A preference for the virginal life remained as a background to their mutual affection. Stephane Piat expresses this preference in the feeling of his time,

A temporary sojourn on the peaks of continence [the resolve of the Martin couple] was a providential preparation for an exceptionally holy progeny. God, who willed for His Son a virgin birth, willed to entrust Thérèse of the child of Jesus only to parents who were capable of understanding the grandeur of virginal life because they practiced it.⁴⁰

A card was found in Louis’ belongings with underlined text expressing that “a marriage with the desire for sexual activity without the desire for children is invalid; whereas it is a valid marriage when the two spouses agree to ‘to cultivate the intimacy of the heart

work, “How much toil and hard work for this cursed place of Alençon, which is filling up my suffering to the brim! I earn a little bit of money, true, but my God, at what cost! ... It is costing my life, because it is shortening my days; and if the Lord doesn’t protect me in some special way, I don’t think I’ll be around long.” In hindsight she comments “ if I were alone and had to go back and put up with everything I have suffered for the last 24 years up to today, I would prefer to die of hunger, because just thinking about it all I feel a shuddering coming over me.” Antonio M. Sicari OCD, “Zélie (1831-1877), and Louis (1823-1894) Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus of the Holy Face,” translated by Thomas Koller OCD, accessed on 29/12/2010 at <http://www.thereseoflisieux.org/their-pastoral-significance/>, 10, 14, 15.

³⁷Zélie’s writing consistently uses the singular for the shared things of marriage; for example, ‘My daughter was born...’ “I would have preferred to keep the wet nurse at my home and so would my husband” rather than “We preferred to have the wet nurse in *our* home.” *Letters of Thérèse: Volume II*, 1199, 1205. Considering that Zélie and Louis have been married for fourteen years, and Zélie has been writing to Mme Guérin for seven years, we today find this awkwardly distant. Zélie writes this way in spiritual terms: “my suffering,” and in business, using “I” in relation to her business as a *fabricante* (does not give the impression of teamwork with Louis). Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 81, 87, 89-90.

³⁸ Maureen O’Riordan, “Blessed Zélie Guerin and Louis Martin: Companions on our Journey,” 6. Their Beatification was on 19 October 2008 by Pope Benedict XVI.

³⁹ Sicari, “Zélie and Louis Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus of the Holy Face,” 25.

⁴⁰ Piat indicates Louis and Zélie embody an ideal: “Free from other cares, the husband and wife can fully realize the moral union between them. Marriage has a social objective...this is the essential end which dominates and precedes all the others—the bestowal of life, the rearing of the child, the training of the man. What more effective noviciate in this order than that period of recollection, prayer and sacrifice wherein the mind restrains the instinct and suspends its activity.” Stephane-Joseph Piat OFM, *The Story of a Family: The Home of the Little Flower* (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1947), 46.

and of the spirit, while renouncing the physical union allowed them'.⁴¹ Near the end of her life, Zélie writes to Pauline about her feelings shortly after her wedding

I shed so many tears, more than I had ever shed in my whole life... I was comparing my life with hers [Marie-Dosithée's]. I felt so unhappy seeing myself living in the midst of the world; I wanted to live a hidden life, to hide my life alongside hers. You who love your father so much, my Pauline will think that I was unhappy with him, and that I regretted the day of my marriage with him. But no, he consoled me wonderfully, because his tastes were so similar to mine; in fact I believe that our mutual affection grew precisely because of this inclination [for religious life]. Our feelings have always been of one accord, and he has always been my consolation and support.⁴²

Antonio Sicari supports the idea of an “original vocation to virginity:”

the human heart is made for the Absolute, and that nothing will satisfy that heart except God; in the end there is always a solitude in the human soul that can never be filled or healed by creatures, not even the most loved creature, another human being.⁴³

Thus, a monastery is always worthy of every Christian's “tears of desire” even when his or her vocation leads the person away from the sacred space. Spouses should not flee this original desire for virginity.⁴⁴ Does Sicari's ideal of an individual union with God as primary undermine the hope of, and original good of human consummation? Perhaps the Catholic symbols for marriage in their time, in such as parents working to swell the Church, or as fellow penitents (self-effacement), against the values of the ‘world’, arise from this thought.⁴⁵ Here is little sense of a *circumincessio* of union by

⁴¹ Sicari, “Zélie and Louis Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse,” 4-5.

⁴² Sicari, “Zélie and Louis Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse,” 5.

⁴³ Sicari, “Zélie and Louis Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse,” 6.

⁴⁴ Sicari, “Zélie and Louis Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse,” 6. This is a far cry from Jephthah's daughter lamenting her death as a virgin in Judges 11: 36-39.

⁴⁵ In Patristic times, marriage was threatened by Gnostic Christians who “taught that sexual relations were evil.” Origen wrote that people could achieve salvation through marriage, but that “married people temporarily lost the Holy Spirit during intercourse, for “the matter does not require the presence of the Holy Spirit and nor would it be fitting.”” Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Ligouri, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1981, 1982, 1991), 351, 378-379. In present Catholic writings on Zélie, for example, see Joan Gormley, “Earth is not our true home: The mother of St. Thérèse of Lisieux,” *New Oxford Review* 68.9 (Oct 2001): 15, Zélie's marriage is reduced to child-bearing, housework, and, significantly, to it being her second choice.

beings capable of consummation;⁴⁶ the goal of marriage meant “raising up” children for heaven, serving “God really well... one day to be among the company of the saints.”⁴⁷ Fidelity to God as one’s foremost satisfaction possibly encouraged spouses, such as Zélie and Louis, to seek individual moral exemplariness over depth of relation – something that would influence their daughters. Marriage, a sort of twin service to God, was not the place for the most ardent pursuit of God

Nevertheless, Zélie and Louis did express loving feelings. Five years into their marriage, Louis writes

My dearest, I cannot get back to Alençon before Monday: the time seems long to me, for I want so much to be with you...I embrace you with my whole heart, while awaiting the joy of being with you again.... Your husband and friend who loves you forever.⁴⁸

Zélie writes, “Louis makes my life sweet. He is truly my holy husband; I would wish a husband like him for every woman,” and “You would not find one in a hundred as good as a husband is to a father-in-law.”⁴⁹ After the birth of her first son, she reflects (Nevin writes), “if only she could attain heaven with her ‘dear Louis’ and see her children as saints there... then she would not ask more.”⁵⁰

When Zélie accepts the possibility of her death, she writes to Louis: “I am not here freely except to be with you, my dear Louis;” then, close to death, she writes: “Poor Louis, every now and then he held me in his arms like a little child.”⁵¹ Louis (reclusive

⁴⁶ The expression ‘*circumincessio*’ suggests an interpenetrating dance, used by John of Damascus, and later Bonaventure, to describe the Trinity’s way of being.

⁴⁷ Sicari, “Zélie and Louis Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse,” 9, 11. Celine reports (in her deposition) that her parents spoke chiefly in pious platitudes about this world and the next. They spoke of this world as precarious, full of miseries – and the wretchedness of France. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 92 and 347 footnote 34.

⁴⁸ 3 October, 1863. O’Riordan, “Blessed Zélie Guerin and Louis Martin,” 3.

⁴⁹ O’Riordan, “Blessed Zélie Guerin and Louis Martin,” 4.

⁵⁰ Nevin notes that this is a rare occasion of Zélie using Louis’ name. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 87. In 1873 Zélie writes, “I am with you all day in spirit, and say to myself: ‘now he is doing such and such a thing.’ I long to be with you Louis dear. I love you with all my heart, and I feel my affection doubled by being deprived of your company. I could not live apart from you.” O’Riordan, “Blessed Zélie Guerin and Louis Martin,” 3.

⁵¹ Sicari, “Zélie and Louis Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse,” 17, 19.

and emotional) and Zélie (overshadowed by her more perfect sister, and doting on her younger favoured brother) reflect their background and personalities. Restrained in her affection, Zélie tends to sermonize Louis, let down by his worry and his absences.⁵² Louis is affective (cries), but is retreating, often away, in Père Pichon's words, like "a monk astray in the world."⁵³

c. *Zélie and her Children: Thérèse's place in the Family*

Zélie's daughters differ due to inborn characteristics, but also in reply to Zélie's developing responsiveness. Marie, the eldest and the "sweet" hearted favourite of Louis (in Zélie's opinion, "at once too wild and too shy to marry"), is 'spoilt' by the harsh reality of work.⁵⁴ She leaves the convent school at Le Mans where their aunt Sr Marie-Dosithée resides (Marie, Pauline, and Leonie admitted through their aunt's influence) resolving to be an "old maid."⁵⁵ Zélie's desire for the cloister is lived through the next daughter, Pauline, who shares Zélie's physical appearance, is composed, obedient, successful at school, and shares Zélie's spiritual disposition.⁵⁶ Named "petit Paulin" by Louis, over her 'masculine' independence, Pauline's presence in the *Visitandines* convent represents a vicarious 'arrival' for Zélie.⁵⁷ The temptation, Nevin writes, is for Zélie to co-opt Pauline with respect to her own aspirations; writing to her as a confidante (at fourteen and fifteen) and drawing support from her, Zélie pressures Pauline to become who Zélie wants to be.⁵⁸ Léonie, the third

⁵² Zélie remonstrates with Louis' fear about political outcomes: "I've told him, 'Don't be afraid God is with us'." In 1870, she writes, with frustration, that Isidore "is like my husband, very lazy about writing." Nevin notes that she then delimits her writing to women. Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 96, 92.

⁵³ Zélie comments during the Prussian invasion, "everyone is crying but me.." *Story of a Soul*, 42. Louis is in tears over the sermon. Marie recalls Louis in tears over her leaving. Sicari, "Zélie and Louis Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse," 26, 28, Louis writes about Thérèse entering Carmel, "in the midst of tears my heart is overflowing with joy." Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 94, 86, 75.

⁵⁴ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1212.

⁵⁵ Pupils at the *Visitandines* of Le Mans "came from *la haute société*." Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 91, 100.

⁵⁶ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 100-101.

⁵⁷ Louis named "little Paul", perhaps over declaring her refusal of the three options (nun, wife or spinster) open to a Catholic girl. Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 100-101.

daughter, not young enough to be excused as a child, suffers from being sickly, awkward, and slow to learn (“foolish conduct beyond compare” Zélie writes), and has the difficulty of defining herself against her older sisters.⁵⁹ Susceptible to exploitation, Leonie is taken advantage of by their maid, and, later, by two women masquerading as nuns.⁶⁰ As Zélie transfers her own (punished) failures to Léonie, they spiral “downward in a closed circle of resentment and failure, each helpless toward the other.”⁶¹

Before the arrival of Celine and Thérèse, Zélie gives birth to Hélène who charms her with her personality, Joseph-Louis, who brings profound joy but dies five months later, then, Joseph-Jean-Baptiste.⁶² After one week, unable to nurse him, he goes to Rose Taillé, who expresses doubt over her ability to save him.⁶³ When he develops bronchitis Zélie walks eight kilometres twice daily to visit him at Rose’s home.⁶⁴ Rose, taking on the care of her mother, returns him in July and he gradually dies of enteritis, at eight months of age.⁶⁵ Zélie is torn by grief, a second time, over her helplessness and awaits his death as a relief.⁶⁶ During her fear of losing her following baby, Celine (1869), she expresses her state: “When afflictions come, I resign myself quite well, but fear is a torment for me;” she tells herself “to prepare ... in advance to bear...[her] cross

⁵⁸ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 100, 102-103. Zélie writes to Pauline: “My feelings for you grow daily, you are my joy and happiness. Well, I have to be reasonable and not push my love too far. If the good Lord were take you with him what would become of me?” and “My dear Pauline, you, you’re my dear friend. You give me the courage to sustain my life with patience.” To Mm Guerin she writes, “Pauline is my favourite; I love her only too much, but I just can’t help it, she is so exquisite.” Later, she confides: “I dream only of the cloister and solitude. I really don’t know how with my views, it wasn’t in my vocation to remain an old maid, or to close myself up in a convent. I would like to now live to old age and withdraw into solitude once all my children are grown.”

⁵⁹ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 101-102.

⁶⁰ Léonie had been withdrawn from the *Visitandines*. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 102.

⁶¹ Quote from Nevin. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 102.

⁶² Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 91, 87.

⁶³ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 88.

⁶⁴ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 88.

⁶⁵ Zélie is burdened by “increased commissions for her lace,” and her father’s decline. He dies in August. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 88-89.

⁶⁶ Marie sadly recalls arousing “pearly” laughter, when she danced for him. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 88-89.

as bravely as possible.”⁶⁷ But, after the unexpected death of five-year-old Hélène in Feb 1870 from a fever and congested lung,⁶⁸ Zélie is reduced to bitter suffering, accepting life only on behalf of her children’s needs. When her next daughter Melanie-Thérèse, who Zélie is also unable to nurse, dies from starvation also in 1870 (October), Zélie is beyond “consolatory beliefs.”⁶⁹

Celine, the next child, is counted as one of the babies. Four years older than Thérèse (delicate, reserved, well-meaning, and pious), she will come to be dominated by Thérèse’s ‘large’ personality⁷⁰ – producing some rivalrous feeling. Zélie unwittingly contributes to this by playing favourites with her children, evident not only in open acknowledgment of it (“Pauline is my favourite”), but also in her daughter’s efforts to earn her attention. Just before her death, observing her mother as pleased by health *and* obedience, Hélène (to stem Zélie’s tears over her wilting appearance), asks plaintively

If I eat [the broth], will you love me better? ...yes, right, now, I’m going to get well, yes, at once.⁷¹

Leonie, sensing the frustration she causes her mother, asks

Do you love me Maman? I won’t disobey you anymore.⁷²

Celine, threatened by Thérèse’s ‘easy winnings’ and aware of the place that Pauline holds, approaches the matter of Thérèse’s place

Tell me, Mamma, if you love me the most [seeing that Zélie is giving much to Thérèse].

Zélie replies that she loves both equally, to which Celine responds:

⁶⁷ Zélie adds, “It’s best to leave all things in the good Lord’s hands and await in calm and abandon to his will. That’s what I’m going to force myself to do.” Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 90.

⁶⁸ Isidore blames improper medical care on Zélie. Her sister, Marie-Dosithée suggests perhaps she will be “the great saint you have so much wanted for his glory.” Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 91.

⁶⁹ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 93.

⁷⁰ Celine shows a preference for her father. Her arrival follows a difficult and grief-filled time for Zélie. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 91.

⁷¹ Hélène refers to swallowing the bouillon the doctor prescribed for her. She dies and Zélie is left feeling wretched. This time she blames herself for not preventing it. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 91.

⁷² Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 104.

Love me like you love Pauline; you know that you love her more than a little more than Marie⁷³

Though the above belong to different contexts and need to be treated so, there is a theme – what must be done to secure Zélie’s favour?

Toward the end of her life, amid a new challenge to accept God’s (and the Virgin’s) will⁷⁴ in her deteriorating health and the diagnosis of her cancer, whether it be a miracle or further suffering, even to death, Zélie struggles with Léonie’s ‘faults’. Having discovered Léonie’s predicament, Zélie recognizes that Léonie’s trait of stubbornness, which has a positive aspect, originates in herself. We return to the opening thought in this section about Zélie’s maturing responsiveness to her children. Zélie over-zealously steers her first children, seeking herself in them. Suffering wrenching loss in the deaths of babies she treasured, and troubled by resistance in her children’s, at times, poignant opposition, she becomes more aware of her self. Thérèse is to reap this maturing in Zélie.⁷⁵

d. Zélie’s Hope for Sainthood for her Family

Sainthood is Zélie’s hope for her children:

I really hope Marie will be a good girl, but I would like her to become a saint, and I would like you, my Pauline, to be a saint too. I want to become a saint, but I don’t know where to start; there is so much to do, and I will just hold on to the desire. Often during the day I say, ‘My God, I would like to be a saint!’ But then I don’t do the works! But now is the time to get going...⁷⁶

⁷³ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1227-1228.

⁷⁴ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 106, 108, 109. Zélie felt that “suffering in this life would advance the soul’s purification and thus reduce the time that it would have to spend in purgatory;” summing this up Zélie believes that “God does well what he does.” “I am calm, I find myself almost happy, and I wouldn’t change my lot for any other. Disillusioned by doctors, she prefers the Virgin’s cure. When after a painful trip to Lourdes and four dips in the water, which does not result in a cure, Zélie takes courage by repeating what the Virgin told Bernadette: “Alas! The Blessed Virgin has told us as she told Bernadette, ‘I shall make you happy, not in this world, but in the other’.”⁷⁴ She advised Pauline, “If I didn’t hope for heavenly [joys], I would be quite wretched.”

⁷⁵ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 87.

⁷⁶ Sicari, “Zélie and Louis Martin, Mother and Father of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus of the Holy Face,” 12.

After giving birth to a son she reflects,

if only she could attain heaven with her “dear Louis” and see her children as saints then she would not ask more.⁷⁷

Zélie aspires for her little son to be a priest, but after Melanie Therese’s death, Zélie is shattered and confides to Mme Guerin

I don’t want a little boy, just a Thérèse who will look like this one.⁷⁸

Thérèse is doted on – but Zélie watches for sanctity (which, she feels, is marked by premonitory signs), interpreting Thérèse’s behaviour through her desire to see evidence of dispositions the elect possess. For example, when they go for a walk, Thérèse wants it to culminate in visiting the church (Thérèse likes the Mass).⁷⁹ When her parents attend early Mass, Thérèse does not want to be left behind (further interest in mass attendance).⁸⁰ When she is scolded for not yet being asleep – her bed being cold – she asks to say her prayers lengthily with Zélie or Louis (she’s insistently prayerful).⁸¹ Prayer draws more approval from Zélie than mischief (reciting holy things is Thérèse’s joy).⁸² Though Zélie recounts these wryly, she also has them as true. Thus, Thérèse’s religious inclination, on the one hand is reinforced, but on the other hand, it is also not taken entirely seriously – bemused suspicion as to her motives, especially from her sisters, wounds her.⁸³

Zélie praises Thérèse (at two and a half to three and a half years), by ambiguously placing “impish,” “rascal,” “ferret,” and “stubborn,” next to “intelligent,” “affectionate,” and “bringing joy;” ingenuity and defiance indicate incorrigible,

⁷⁷ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 87.

⁷⁸ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 92.

⁷⁹ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1213.

⁸⁰ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1214.

⁸¹ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1218. When Zélie is tired, obedience becomes the virtue most desired from Thérèse. Marie is quick to correct Thérèse.

⁸² *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1233.

⁸³ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1217, 1220, 1222, 1231.

tenacious life.⁸⁴ By her writing, Zélie indicates that she understands little Thérèse to mean well even while being self-serving.⁸⁵ While finding Thérèse ‘difficult’, Zélie adores her, follows her actions with interest, and notes her potential with satisfaction and humour.⁸⁶ Zélie delights in Thérèse’s small-child audacity.

e. Becoming a Saint from Thérèse’s Perspective

Thérèse absorbs a sense of ‘sanctity’ through the inter-affirmation of language and its context. When the word “angel” (*ange*) connoting innocence⁸⁷ is applied to Thérèse, the Martins mirror back to her the innocence, beauty, or heavenliness they feel she resembles/evokes.⁸⁸ ‘Angelic-ness’ (*angélique*) belongs to expressing and receiving love, and is consonant with such actions as saying prayers, singing, attending mass, and speaking about God. Involving a place called “heaven,” a person called “God,” and being “elected” (their precise character overseen by Zélie), “angel” names something about herself.⁸⁹ It means to delight the ones she wants to delight, and earning a loving gaze from those who value her. Zélie exclaims, “How happy I am to have [Thérèse]! I believe I love her more than all the others; no doubt because she is the youngest,” “we are enraptured by [Thérèse’s recitation about God] it;” and “...my husband adores

⁸⁴ Therese of Lisieux, *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1222, 1223.

⁸⁵ Perceiving her presence was of immense value, little Thérèse was testing how difficult she might be and remain adored, through events such as insistence to say her prayers, calling out numerous “mama’s,” “why” questions, and unwillingness to yield. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1215, 1218, 1223.

⁸⁶ Marie tells of Thérèse’s stealthily acquiring/appropriating things which do not belong to her, and ‘killing’ her much loved doll, only for necessitating a later emotional burial *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1220, 1222, 1223, 1219, 1219.

⁸⁷ O’ Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew her*, 84. Marie blends the word “angel” with the idea of ‘saint’ in her testimony for her canonization, “I desire very much to see [Thérèse] beatified...I looked on her as an angel.”

⁸⁸ Zélie writes that Thérèse told her “that she wanted to go to heaven and that, for this, she was going to be nice like a little angel.” *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1222.

⁸⁹ “Mother told us:”Thérèse always has a smile on her lips; she has the face of one of the elect.” Christopher O’ Mahoney OCD, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew her: Testimonies from the Process of Beatification* (Dublin: Veritas Publication, 1975), 86,

her!”⁹⁰ If Thérèse felt valued in proportion to these declarations, preserving Zélie and Louis’ maintenance of her value would involve high stakes.

2. Thérèse’s Developing Independent Agency and Intention

At first Thérèse experiences Zélie’s ‘God’ as joined to Zélie. By pleasing Zélie she also pleases Zélie’s God. Zélie’s pleasure with Thérèse (connected with God) forms a self in her that tells her she is good, beautiful, and able. Zélie’s displeasure or disappointment suggests her self as naughty, unattractive, weak, unable, or foolish. As indicated by Sroufe, the child approaching a sense of separate agency-awareness responds to sensed demands.⁹¹ We see from eighteen months onward, Thérèse absorbs others’ values by sensing their emotion. Though it distresses her, she tries to be quiet and obedient at Le Mans (Sr Marie-Dosithée’s value which Zélie maintains?).⁹² When the *sous* are upon the floor they must be quickly gathered in for Louis (Louis’ value).⁹³ In “transports of love” she demonstrates her affection by wishing death on Zélie so that they might be able to more speedily go to heaven, the place they seem to yearn for (to preserve their happiness and permanence).⁹⁴ If she resembles an angel, she will go to heaven (her mother’s wish).⁹⁵ There is family worry over Thérèse’s life; her mother and her sisters state that they cannot bear losing her (through sickness).⁹⁶ Thérèse absorbs their emotion over the injustice of losing, a sense underneath their simple joys,⁹⁷ however the persons she ‘loses’ do not leave through sickness and death, but to the train or the convent. Amplifying Zélie’s interest, she expresses concern and impatience for these

⁹⁰ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1223, 1233, 1227.

⁹¹ “In the third year children ... often refuse to violate parental prohibitions and show signs of affective distress, even in the absence of a parent, and they may confess to parents upon their return when violations did occur.” Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 217.

⁹² *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1214. In a way Zélie shares her sister’s feeling and feels more intensely over the convent as it is a pathway not privy to her.

⁹³ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1214.

⁹⁴ This occurs just before three years of age. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1218-1219.

⁹⁵ Thérèse insists the roses are not to be cut by Zélie as they are Marie’s (Maries’ value). *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1222, 1224.

⁹⁶ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1216, 1223, 1227.

⁹⁷ Visits, feast days, and new toys at Christmas. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1220.

persons' return.⁹⁸ Pauline, whose return Thérèse often asks for,⁹⁹ and holds Zélie's admiration, perhaps reminds Thérèse of a leaving/returning Zélie in Semallé.¹⁰⁰

Thérèse absorbs the tenor of Jansenist sanctity through Zélie's approving and disapproving tones in conversation with Marie, Pauline, Mme Guérin, and Sr Marie-Dosithée.¹⁰¹ Sanctity's degree and quality is ground for disagreement. Sr Marie-Dosithée wants Marie to be separated from fashion and play, but Zélie responds, "In the world we cannot live in seclusion! There is something to take and leave in everything."¹⁰² Against others, Zélie feels the Sabbath is to be kept (to be sure one's profit is sent by God), that France deserves the punishment it is experiencing, prosperity should be treated with suspicion and adversity welcomed as God's means for purgation.¹⁰³ Zélie chides Louis for his lack of trust in the good outcome God offers in health, business and politics.¹⁰⁴ Loving God, Thérèse learns, often means not doing as one pleases. Indeed, sanctity may be measured by the comfort forgone to make God happy.¹⁰⁵ For Zélie, adversity is desirable as a sign of divine testing and thus of divine favour.¹⁰⁶ Renunciation is more virtuous if it is hidden so that it cannot supply the

⁹⁸ *General Correspondence Volume I, 1877-1890*, translated by John Clarke OCD (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1982), 113.

⁹⁹ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1213,1218.

¹⁰⁰ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1221, 1223.

¹⁰¹ "...father always respected the punishment we [Marie] meted out for her little faults." As Marie was only in her teens herself, she might not have been aware of the path of a child's moral development. Thérèse replied to Victoire's teasing to amuse with "you know well that that offends the good God." O'Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew her*, 85, 86.

¹⁰² Zélie also argues against judgment of infants as sinners, viewing them to be innocent. *Story of a Soul*, 5, Burton, *Holy Blood, Holy Tears*, 24.

¹⁰³ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 84, 96, 97, 105.

¹⁰⁴ Zélie remonstrates with Louis' fear about political outcomes: "I've told him, 'Don't be afraid God is with us'." Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 96.

¹⁰⁵ Hagiography of this time presented external evidences of goodness. Marie, in her deposition recalls her mother as exclaiming, in relation to Blessed Marie of the Incarnation "How blest she was to have given three daughters to God!" O'Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew her*, 84.

¹⁰⁶ Zélie comments: "It's a bad sign when all is going well. God in his wisdom has willed it thus, to make us remember that our earth is not our true country." Also: "it's certain that continual prosperity alienates us from God. He has never led his elect along that road; they have previously passed through the crucible of suffering in order to purify themselves." Zélie admits to her tendency toward pessimism, "I who see black in everything," when awaiting the outcome of her illness. Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 84, 97.

satisfaction of sympathy, or triumph of earthly vindication.¹⁰⁷ Thérèse incorporates these into her appetite for ‘mostness’ and ‘bestness’ as a kind of ledger – a motivation to do with self-development. It is possible that Marie and Pauline, practicing at being adult, and Celine from rivalry, accuse Thérèse of *not* being a saint, when being a saint is essential to her becoming a self.¹⁰⁸ Zélie documents a concern in little Thérèse about her goodness.

Thus, at three, going to heaven had something to do with God’s judgment (Zélie’s deliberation), with being an angel (being “nice”), and not going to hell (bypassing her disfavour). While Zélie is alive, Thérèse is indulgently loved for being the amusing and affectionate baby of the family. Görres observes that being “good” meant

doing the will of her father and giving her mother joy. Naughtiness was but one thing: making her parents sad. Contrition and forgiveness wiped out all faults entirely, instantly, without reservation. That was her basic ethical experience and it remained with her all her life. From the very start all formalism in fulfilment of the law was excluded.¹⁰⁹

However, Thérèse is affected by her sisters who were raised by a more stringent Zélie, attend a convent school, are influenced by their aunt, and who *do* express formalism in the fulfilment of the law.

a. Frustrated Intentions

Zélie refers to Thérèse’s frustrations. Her comments show a limited understanding of what is transpiring in Thérèse. Close to three years of age, Thérèse is trying to achieve with blocks what Celine does.

...from time to time they argue. Celine gives in, in order to have a pearl in her

¹⁰⁷ “at four she began to count her little acts of virtue and her sacrifices on a string of beads made especially for the purpose.” O’Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew her*, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Marie writes, Thérèse “is so accustomed to caresses that she hardly pays any attention to them; and so when Céline sees how indifferent she is, she tells her in a tone of reproach: ‘One would say all these caresses are *Mademoiselle’s* due.’ You should see Thérèse’s face!” *General Correspondence Volume I*, 113.

¹⁰⁹ Ida Görres, *The Hidden Face: A Study of St Thérèse of Lisieux* (New York, Pantheon, 1959), 52. “The will of her parents took absolute precedence in her life, she always obeyed it...she obeyed it at all costs. Nothing else was possible for her.”

crown. I am obliged to correct the dear baby who gets into frightful tempers; when things do not go according to her way, she rolls on the floor like one in despair, believing that all is lost. There are moments when it is too much for her and she chokes up.¹¹⁰

Rather than guiding Thérèse's hands to do what she envisages but cannot achieve physically, to calm her frustration, Zélie takes this moment as the one for teaching self-restraint.¹¹¹ For Zélie, restraint, leading to passive acceptance (she views a moral good), must begin early; Thérèse must begin to become what Celine has become – surrendering. Thérèse, however, is struggling to execute her 'great' intentions. When she becomes distressed on the way home from Le Mans because she has lost her gift for Celine,¹¹² it is over failure to execute her good intention. She becomes upset by her limitedness (then by her inability to communicate the importance of her aim). The inability to realize her own intention, which contrasts with the infant illusion of unlimited agency, is crushing because it represents the boundaries of who she can be at this moment.¹¹³ (The power to demonstrate her affection in 'good acts' will ensure Celine's gaze of approval).¹¹⁴

b. Self and Values

From two and a half to four and a half years of age, the self continues to develop, with roles, values, flexible self-control, play, and peer relations as new concerns. The caregiver's role is to guide the child in relation to these, and on their behalf. In Chapter Two, Fitzgerald was quoted as stating that individuation, for the girl-child, involves maintaining the other's benevolent "gaze." At three years, Thérèse resolves the problem of her self being threatened (by admonition) by declaring her offences early,

¹¹⁰ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1219.

¹¹¹ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 213. Within certain boundaries the toddler is much more able than the infant to regulate affect – for example, fighting down tears or meting out angry feelings in subtle and indirect ways. But as stronger feelings, impulses, or desires arise, in this case frustration over her own proficiency, the toddler's emerging capacities for self-regulation are easily overwhelmed."

¹¹² *Story of a Soul*, 23. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1214.

¹¹³ Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 196-197.

¹¹⁴ Though Celine accepts she must be passive, it does not resolve her feelings of jealousy when she remains unrewarded. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1227.

before they are reflected back to her with the face of displeasure.¹¹⁵ While maintaining the benevolent gaze, Thérèse still engages in “purposeful struggle” for a separate self,¹¹⁶ emphatically asserting that her will is other than Zélie’s, even in the face of strong opposition.¹¹⁷ With this self she expresses independent enjoyment at gifts of sweets, and anticipates desired events, opening the possibility of disappointment.¹¹⁸ Zélie is amused by Thérèse’s developing logic – persons are better off with (available) sweets than wealth (a mere quality), one ought not “get sassy” to get one’s own way; (here Thérèse practices values she has encountered in Zélie and Louis); confronted by her mother’s power, “God” cannot block Thérèse’s way to heaven.¹¹⁹ In the last, Thérèse has Zélie (who approves of Thérèse, and knows her good intentions) overcoming God where justice is concerned – triumphing over the God of Marie or Celine (who perhaps have recently ‘condemned’ her), or over God’s insurmountable arbitrariness.

“Charming, ..sharp... vivacious, but....a sensitive heart,” Thérèse struggles between enjoying favour, and earning companionship (sickness draws attention from Zélie, but that attention draws jealousy from Céline).¹²⁰ Sickness appears to be profitable where their mother’s attention is concerned, but Thérèse regrets wishing sickness for attention, upon seeing that it is not a good trade: “I [only] wanted to be sick as a pinhead” for the pleasure.¹²¹ Celine strategically airs her envy of Thérèse’s easy rewards by projecting upon Thérèse’s dolls: they “are badly reared and ... she lets them carry out their whims!”¹²² Amid her failing health, Zélie observes Celine is pious, but Thérèse is “a

¹¹⁵ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1223, 1224, 1224-1225.

¹¹⁶ Recognizing the self as the origin of action, the toddler can experience both shame and positive self-evaluation and can engage in a purposeful, even angry, struggle with caregivers that persist beyond some specific cause.” Sroufe, *Emotional Development*, 213.

¹¹⁷ Zélie comments that one could put her all day in the cellar, but her ‘no’ will remain a ‘no’. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1223.

¹¹⁸ When Pauline does not arrive at the station (to come home) after a walk that neared the station “she cried all the way home.” On another occasion, she “struggled to ‘...get Pauline’” from the station. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1224, 1223, 1226.

¹¹⁹ Thérèse copies tones and sentiments used with her. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1224, 1226.

¹²⁰ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1227, 1228.

¹²¹ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1228.

real little angel.”¹²³ She recalls Thérèse feigning sleep (“I don’t want anyone to see me” meaning Marie who had stated “Mamma, she is pretending to sleep, I am sure”), which results in a tearful display of repentance.¹²⁴ Thérèse’s request for pardon met with pardon, and forgiveness is taken up as a celebration (of what more mercy might be had).

I took my cherub into my arms, pressing her to my heart and covering her with kisses. When she saw she was so well received, she said: “Mamma, if you swaddled me up as when I was little! I will eat my chocolate here at the table.” I went to the trouble of going for her blanket and I wrapped her up as when she was little.¹²⁵

Thérèse, in effect, describes her familiar role – which has thus far defined her self: she is the baby; babies are forgiven, and indulged. In keeping with this, when Léonie offers a basket of toys she no longer wishes to keep (after Celine taking a little ball of wool), enthusiastically Thérèse takes charge of all.¹²⁶ We see Thérèse defend herself in a normative way, in her “little practices:” a form of piety, where beads are moved along a chaplet to count self-denials. When Zélie tries to correct Thérèse who has been moving the beads the wrong way, Thérèse deflects it by stating that her chaplet is lost.¹²⁷ It is likely that Thérèse felt her mistake in comprehension as a moral/value failing, not differentiating between these two.¹²⁸

With death imminent, Zélie’s final letters relate Thérèse’s interest in God and her sweetness in pleasing; talk about God increases, and sober evaluations of her children

¹²² *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1229. Thérèse writes of this later. Celine reprimands Thérèse’s dolls for “bad behaviour” in *Story of a Soul*, 55-56.

¹²³ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1229.

¹²⁴ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1231. It is unclear why feigning sleep indicates “spoiled” behaviour, unless we know what is unjustly gained by it. On another occasion, Zélie writes that Thérèse forthrightly (freely) states that she is “bored” with the “beautiful,” long sermon on a feast day, which draws understanding, and not disapproval from Zélie.

¹²⁵ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1232.

¹²⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 27.

¹²⁷ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1232.

¹²⁸ She flees the possibility of shame, wary of transgressing a standard which results in fastidious correction, threatening her ‘good’ self.

increase.¹²⁹ As her pain increases, she becomes less available to the little ones. Thérèse no longer simply relishes the luxury of favour, but tries to restore its source – perhaps being good will make her mother well again. There is talk about being “good” (and of Marie to take Zélie’s place) which for Thérèse is no small task: she fixes on Celine as a companion, but Celine attends Marie’s class which involves enduring Marie’s firm requirements (not disturbing the lesson even when confronted by an unthreaded needle), for Celine’s company.¹³⁰

c. Self and Early Theology; Thérèse’s Aim to become a Nun

Thérèse’s antics are relayed to a bedridden Zélie, who writes to Pauline that Thérèse’s ideas are rare for one her age. To “How can God be in a host so small?” Thérèse replies “This is not surprising since God is all powerful!” To “What does all-powerful mean?” “It means to do whatever he wills!”¹³¹ Thérèse constructs a God who is not so much arbitrarily self-serving, but is defined by meeting all questions that might be asked of God. Pauline writes that Thérèse confesses (“and it was enough to make me die laughing”):

I will be a religious in a cloister because Celine wants to go there, and, then, also, Pauline, I must learn how to read to children, don’t you see? But I will not conduct class for them, because this would bore me too much. Celine will do it. I will be mother; I’ll walk all in the cloister, and then I’ll go with Celine; we’ll play in the sand with our dolls...¹³²

In the above, Thérèse shows intentional agency within what she has been assigned. Becoming a “religious” is necessary to be in Céline’s game, one which Celine (seven years of age) steers, and which involves their dolls. Celine will have explained what there was to be done, and volunteered for the task of teaching as it interested her. As the younger, Thérèse creatively invents a space for herself to fit into the confines of the

¹²⁹ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1233.

¹³⁰ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1233.

¹³¹ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1234.

¹³² *General Correspondence Volume I*, 108. This letter, written in April 1877, shows the effect Zélie’s desire to be a religious has on the dynamic between her daughters.

rules, which she stretches to allow her to do exactly as she pleases (be Mother). Accepting her place as youngest, Thérèse nevertheless asserts a strong self within this confine, from the perspective of gaining Celine's company (which she values above "dessert"),¹³³ and confident rationalizing from her own judgment. Pauline breaks down Thérèse's "castles in the air:" "You think dear Thérèse that you'll talk all day long: do you know you'll have to keep silent?" Thérèse replies

True.... Ah! what a pity! I will say nothing...

"What will you do then?"

That's no problem; I'll pray to good Jesus. But what can I do to pray to him without saying anything? I don't know and who will show me since I'll be Mother? Tell me?

"She was gazing at me thoughtfully...she fixed her big blue eyes on me, and smiling mischievously, she gesticulated with her little arms like a grown person, saying"

After all, my petit Paulin, its not worth tormenting myself already, I'm too little don't you see, and when I'll be big like you and Marie, I will be told what to do before entering the cloister...¹³⁴

Showing confidence in her power to rationalize, employing sentiments, values, and rules she has heard, Thérèse interacts with Pauline from an independent self. A positive interactive history allows her to be confidently open to the unknown future.

Pauline, in suggesting that life with God is not as 'good' or 'easy' as Thérèse thinks, puts 'religious practice' in the place of "good God," who for Thérèse is still the One who is pleased with companionship and contented play. God and play are not yet incompatible, and silent conversation will not do. Pauline places an obstruction before Thérèse – and Thérèse takes up the problem without becoming affectively

¹³³ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 107. *Story of a Soul*, 26.

¹³⁴ "That's it dear baby" Pauline answers "covering her with kisses.... Spend a few good nights before calling yourself Sister Marie Aolyisia... [the name Thérèse chooses for herself – Aloyisia mispronounced] you still have time to think it over." *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 108-9.

“disorganized.” She remains affectively positive, and preserves her good sense of self, confidently incorporating offered values.¹³⁵

Zélie lists Thérèse’s virtues as honesty and a good mind.¹³⁶ However, miserable with sickness (writing she is happy to be alone), these will not win Thérèse Zélie’s companionship.¹³⁷ Thérèse becomes fragile. Marie reports Thérèse as sharp, with a talent for dramatizing and mimicking adult mannerisms, but fails to be aware of her insensitivity in her expressed amusement (“I told this to Mamma in front of Thérèse”) over repeating Thérèse’s words: “Mamma has a bruise here” (meaning the tumour on her breast), “and Papa has a bruise on his ear,” which trigger in Thérèse “pardons which never end” and inconsolable distress for not having got the thing correct.¹³⁸ Reducing her efforts to amusing incorrectness, especially amid her gradual loss of Zélie, undermines Thérèse’s sense of self.

d. Zélie’s Example of Abandonment

As her cancer progresses, God is the only physician Zélie trusts (“God does well what he does”).¹³⁹ Zélie travels to Lourdes, abandoning herself to a miraculous cure.¹⁴⁰ She returns without a cure: “Obviously, the Virgin does not want to cure me.” Zélie declares, “Alas! The Blessed Virgin has told us as she told Bernadette, ‘I shall make

¹³⁵ Pauline then soothes Thérèse and puts her to bed. She continues, “How I would like this little angel not to grow up. A little soul who has never offended God is so beautiful....So I love having Thérèse close to me; it seems to me that with her no misfortune can befall me...” In a way Pauline is noticing the connection that a good sense of self, unspoil by shaming (harsh correcting) has with God. *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 108-109.

¹³⁶ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1233.

¹³⁷ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1234. *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 113. Marie now writes to Pauline about Thérèse: Thérèse bounds upstairs in joy to make her prayer at a lavish May altar, is indulged with kisses by all (which Celine observes Thérèse takes for granted), and during Marie’s lesson, outdoes Celine in comprehension and imagination.

¹³⁸ Marie states, pre-figuratively - “How innocent is a little child, how darling, how good! I’m not surprised that God loves them more than adults; they’re much more lovable!” *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 114.

¹³⁹ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 105. Marie-Dosithée’s tuberculosis (she died earlier that year, in Feb 1877) and her “suffering in this life would advance the soul’s purification and thus reduce the time that it would have to spend in purgatory.”

¹⁴⁰ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 117.

you happy, not in this world, but in the other’.”¹⁴¹ She becomes sicker, weeping as she looks over her children; four weeks before her death she attends an award night Marie has prepared for her pupils.¹⁴² Leonie wishes to suffer in Zélie’s place, but Zélie refuses this, stating “I’ll derive a two-fold profit: I’ll suffer less by resigning myself and I’ll spend part of my purgatory on earth.”¹⁴³ Accepting neither cure nor relief, with “I’ve suffered in the last 24 hours more than I’ve suffered in all my life,” Zélie dies.¹⁴⁴ The face which was enchanted by all that was Thérèse and adored her brightness, health and joy, vanishes. Thérèse now clings to the faces of Marie, Pauline and Celine, each suffering their own loss. Thérèse loses Zélie, the source and guide to her role and values, to a death to which Zélie assigned symbolic value: she had made terminal illness integral to spirituality, making it the final word on her *abandon*.¹⁴⁵

3. Summary of Thérèse’s Developing Self in Toddlerhood

After her return from Rose Taillé’s care, Thérèse reworks her attachment to Zélie, making her a new secure base. Through expressions of attention and favour, Zélie consolidates Thérèse’s sense of ‘I am good, I delight my mother’ gained from Rose. Thérèse takes up her place in an established family culture which has goals that will affect her developing self.¹⁴⁶ Impacted by the culture/goals of those who assure her security, she forms a unique construction from their standards, values, and ideas about God, to contend with moment to moment concerns.

Thérèse competes with her sisters for Zélie’s attention, and works to earn her sisters’ approval. As an emerging independent self, in relation to others, she becomes aware of her physical, cognitive, affective, and moral limitations, and that these are not met by

¹⁴¹ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 109.

¹⁴² *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1235-1236.

¹⁴³ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 109-110.

¹⁴⁴ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 110.

¹⁴⁵“For both mother and daughter, terminal illness became integral to spirituality and determined the character of their abandon.” Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 111.

¹⁴⁶ Thérèse is not entirely cut off from Rose. We read of a visit in a letter by Celine dated around April 1877. *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 111.

unending compensation. A self forms that senses ‘I am incapable of always winning your delight, in my otherness I am limited, my otherness and limitation are at times unloved’. Often Zélie, Louis, and her sisters allow her to feel she is delightful even in her limitation, even when her good efforts fail. But when her action/motive is suspected as being self-serving (through sisterly rivalry), her ‘good’ self is felt to be under threat. Thérèse wants to be wholly good, without compromise (this aspiration is simultaneously her strength and weakness), and presses for its reaffirmation. Seeking ‘forgiveness’ (but, really, rapprochement) for feigning sleep, Thérèse asks to *feel* its reality in holding and swaddling.

Thérèse’s strong-will is not seriously thwarted in her early years, as Léonie’s is, nor is Thérèse’s ability and obedience co-opted by Zélie’s ambition, as occurred with Pauline. Thérèse’s trusting disposition is appreciated by Pauline and Marie, but they do not grasp that her “innocence,” which they feel uplifted by, is vulnerable to the correction they mete out.¹⁴⁷ Thérèse is felt by her family as bringing new hope and delight following the hope-crushing deaths of her siblings. On the one hand, she is feted and adored. She enjoys a sense of freedom; Zélie no longer asks for a boy or a religious, which, considering her demands on the others, whether intended or not, might provoke envy.¹⁴⁸ Untouched by serious refusal or coercion in her early years, when Zélie dies, however, Thérèse will receive stern correction from Marie, as if to even the balance. Thérèse typifies the youngest and favoured by God in Hebrew Scriptures, whose ‘heart’ is preferred to that of the ‘first born’.

With Zélie, ‘religious rules’ and ‘being loved/good’ do not strictly coincide. At the time of Zélie’s death, who God is – is still plastic. The dialogue between ‘self’ and ‘God’ continues after her death. In Zélie’s absence, Pauline and Marie will implement rules from the religious writings and institutions which guided them. Thérèse gives these rules slavish attention, to build a sense of good-self by their standards.

¹⁴⁷ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 104.

¹⁴⁸ This is a motif in the Hebrew Scriptures, the most notable example is Joseph, who suffers the resentment of his brothers due to his father’s favour, but which is later redressed by divine favour.

a. Mercy

In the toddler years, mercy consists of making space for a new intentioning self, and providing values together with a safe space (one free from condemnation) to practice them. Mercy involves the care-giver encouraging independent assertions from the emerging self (actions that might otherwise be felt as opposing or rejection their care) and alleviating any emotion that overwhelms the toddler when their envisioned goals cannot be realized. Mercy is shown when the child, inconvenient and difficult for a household (a liability), is unquestioningly treated as a member.

In following the devastation of loss in infant deaths, Thérèse represents God's mercy in once more giving the Martins the joy of new life. Where previous births included Zélie's desire to participate in the emergence of a saint, Thérèse is the recipient of Zélie's simple gratitude for, and delight in, life. Mercy is the ground of Thérèse's life. In spite of this, mercy is not always shown her. Even while affirming her smallness (simply to be darling), a youngest's inherent role, rules not appropriate to her age are addressed to her, leading Thérèse to challenge 'God's arbitrariness and 'unjustness', as for her, 'God' allows play, and as 'one who sees all, defends one who means well'.

Before narrating her suffering, we turn to the last part of Thérèse's childhood self-formation. The following material about Thérèse, from four and a half to eight and a half, only found in Thérèse's autobiography, represents an important experience of mercy.

4. With Louis at Buissonnets

At Buissonnets (the home moved into after Zélie's death), as a four year old, Thérèse is taught by Pauline, and Louis takes Thérèse with him when he goes about visiting churches, and into the garden.¹⁴⁹ In the garden, Louis accepts the play-roles Thérèse prescribes for him in her games, enacting his part with humoured reverence.¹⁵⁰ When she presents her father with a potion in the garden, Louis "stops his work" and

¹⁴⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 35-36.

¹⁵⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 37.

follows the rules of the game Thérèse is playing, which involves ‘tasting the soup’ she has concocted, and asking (“on the sly”) if he should throw away the contents or not.

In another game (one of “thousands”), Louis pretends to be overcome by admiration (“ecstasy”) for Thérèse botanical talent (her garden and May altar) to suggest that she had created a masterpiece.¹⁵¹ Putting his adult judgment criteria aside, Louis confirms Thérèse’s sense of accomplishment – from the work she put into it and from satisfying an eye unspoilt by criticism. Thérèse’s creative endeavour leads to a game of mutual admiration. She asks whether her creative effort is pleasing, and he replies with an effusion of delight, his exaggeration giving her the clue that it is not real criticism.¹⁵² He becomes heroic in his appraisal/defence of her talent. Louis’ co-operation dignifies her being a child, validates the value of play, and nourishes her imagination. Such experience supports later expressing freedom with God (sensing her ideas impact God; feeling God assesses her small efforts generously).

Taking Thérèse along with him, Louis sometimes takes her fishing. In the open space, in each other’s company, she begins to meditate. Feeling ‘right’ (happy) allows the ‘not right’ to penetrate (Zélie’s absence).¹⁵³ However, being secure and protected by Louis, allows Thérèse freedom to be excited by an oncoming storm.¹⁵⁴ On their walks, Louis supplies her with money to express charity on their behalf.¹⁵⁵

Feast days were associated with being indulged by her family.¹⁵⁶ Louis, Marie, and Pauline’s feeling of anticipation, purpose, and unity, on these days, translated into

¹⁵¹ “[Papa] did all as I asked him... He would open [his eyes] and then go into an ecstasy to please me, admiring what I really believed was a masterpiece! I would never come to an end if I really wanted to portray a thousand little actions like this which crowd into my memory.” *Story of a Soul*, 37.

¹⁵² *Story of a Soul*, 37.

¹⁵³ *Story of a Soul*, 37.

¹⁵⁴ The burden of protection being upon him, Louis was less enamoured by the storm. *Story of a Soul*, 38.

¹⁵⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 38.

¹⁵⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 41. “The feasts!” evoked happiness through Pauline communicating the “mysteries,” and through the expression of these mysteries: “What a joy it was for me to throw flowers beneath the feet of God! Before allowing them to fall to the ground, I threw them as high as I could and I was never so happy as when I saw my roses touch the sacred monstrance.”

favour toward Thérèse: staying in bed longer than on other days, being brought chocolate to drink while in bed, and then being dressed-up by her sisters.¹⁵⁷ Going to Mass involved the felt-honour of walking beside Louis, and felt-admiration from onlookers (by her association with an esteemed man).¹⁵⁸ Thérèse was also privy to a close view of Louis' tears during the sermon.¹⁵⁹ Though sad at the day's end (at the thought of her family being once again dispersed), she was carried home on Louis' shoulders, and they contemplated the stars.¹⁶⁰ In winter, after dinner, checkers would be played, then, Louis would teach 'eternal' things by his songs or poems while rocking her and Celine on his knees.¹⁶¹ Alone together for prayers, she was moved by his demeanour.¹⁶²

a. *Summary of Self-development, Mercy and Play*

The potion and garden games illustrate the value of play. In his allowing himself to be in her charge, and lending support to her imagining, Thérèse experiences Louis' grace. Before she can advise him of any rules, he first elevates her – a form of mercy. Louis' agreement to be fed by her tells her that he knows what it means to be young, small and tended to, and agrees that she knows how to be wifely (queen) and motherly, and, most importantly, that he sees value in giving himself to this activity. His cooperation with her play-acting allows her to practice roles, acknowledges her aspirations, overlooks her childly limitations, and finds her imaginary initiatives as worthy of his participation, all which form a positive and hopeful self.¹⁶³ The possibility of play requires the caregiver

¹⁵⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 41.

¹⁵⁸ Thérèse writes: "everyone seemed to think it so wonderful to see such a *handsome* old man with such a *little daughter* that they went out of their way to give them their places" (emphasis Thérèse's). *Story of a Soul*, 41-42.

¹⁵⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 42, "His eyes at times were filled with tears which he tried in vain to stop; he seemed no longer held by earth so much did his soul love to lose itself in the eternal truths."

¹⁶⁰ Visiting Uncle Isidore for dinner without Marie or Pauline was a fearful event. *Story of a Soul*, 42.

¹⁶¹ *Story of a Soul*, 42- 43.

¹⁶² *Story of a Soul*, 43.

¹⁶³ Richard D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970* (USA: Cornell University Press, 2004),43. Hugo Rahner in *Man at Play, or Did You Ever Practice Eutrapelia?* Translated by Brian Battershaw and Edward Quinn (Burns and Oates, 1965), 1-11, speaks of a God who is not confined to the concept of work, but according to Proverbs 8:31-32, is "at play," and that "creation has no 'point' beyond its existence as God's loving gift, and all that he requires is of his playmates is that they play along with him, like the David of 2 Samuel 6:21."

to momentarily put aside his height. Louis also takes Thérèse into his world, a world of God, of physical beauty and feeling. While on his knee, she experiences him cherishing his heritage, and, at Mass, his vulnerability (tears). Though not invited into all of his thought, Louis does not hide his feelings from Thérèse. She feels included in (and worthy of) their depth, so that affective depth becomes something she values in herself.

The feast day with her family represents for Thérèse the nourishment of a ‘good self’ as sacramental, signifying family as communion that originates in, and images God. Von Balthasar writes that Thérèse was “born into a family which immediately serves her as an image of heaven;” Thérèse looked “to her father, her father look[ed] to God, and so she learn[ed] to look to God.”¹⁶⁴ “Looking to” is part of Thérèse’s response to Louis’ love and esteem for her. Thérèse holds up her father’s God inasmuch as he names this being as the source and object of his love, patience, and vitality.¹⁶⁵ However, in his regular leaving (and not preventing her sisters, her carers, from leaving), Louis fails to stop the dissolution of her security. Her image of God, based on this, is of gentleness, warmth and depth, but concerned or unable to keep her loved ones together. God is weak in his defence of a physically present (this world) family environment for Thérèse. Thérèse does not feel secure. She welcomes Pauline’s mothering but fears Pauline withholding her favour.

5. The Years of Suffering

We now review Thérèse’s life from eight years of age to the writing of *Manuscript A* (in 1895, at twenty-two years of age), using Thérèse’s correspondence where it is available. In this period, concepts about God are pressed onto Thérèse, from pious devotions of the time and Jansenism, where moral rigorism, “refusal of the world” (temporal gain and happiness) and great personal piety, are believed to be a mark of the

¹⁶⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 72. Balthasar states that “the entire activity of the Martin household is for Thérèse the place and symbol of heavenly goods.” “Symbolic vision and grasp of wholeness precede the development of abstract thought and provide the surest guide for the awakening mind. The world is wholly sacramental, its appearance an effective symbol of the Spirit of God working through appearances and matter.”

¹⁶⁵ Without this, ‘God’ will not be properly sustained, as exemplified by Sartre with his grandparents. See Chapter Two, 81-82.

elect.¹⁶⁶ Moral rigorism involved self-examination for possible sin so to be in a ready state for the sacraments. This did not just involve examining one's behaviour for sins committed, but scrutinizing one's motives (so to divest oneself of possible self-satisfactions).¹⁶⁷ In this, Thérèse is confronted by the idea of God as such unapproachable perfection, and herself as so lacking in goodness, that their only point of interaction is acknowledgment of doubt over her every motive.¹⁶⁸ Yet, latent in her psyche is a God who affirms a Thérèse who is utter delight, who does not doubt the sincerity of her efforts, and who defends her intention – as all is not yet visible in the still developing child.

a. Impasse

Thérèse is cared for and taught by her sisters until they enter Carmel. As the youngest who sought by obedience to please God – inextricable from family harmony and her “circle of security” which threatens to evaporate – Thérèse is powerless in the face of her sisters' ordinary pain, jealousy and ambitions.¹⁶⁹ This kind of powerlessness, where control over one's actions is taken hostage by other persons' ambitions, spiritual though they be, is, arguably, congruent with Constance Fitzgerald's description of “impasse,” as it relates to St John of the Cross's “Dark Night,” where

there is no way out of, no way around, no rational escape from, what imprisons one, no possibilities in the situation.... Impasse is experienced not only in the problem but also in any solution rationally attempted. ... The whole life situation offers a depletion, has the word limits written upon it. ... intrinsic to the experience of impasse is the impression and feeling of rejection and lack of assurance from those on whom one counts...the support systems on which one has depended [have been] pulled out from under one and [one] asks if anything, if anyone, is trustworthy.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ “Jansenism,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Detroit: Thompson/Gale; Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 2002-2003), 719.

¹⁶⁷ “Not soiling” her “baptismal robe,” an expression we read in Thérèse's writing, suggests that this sacrament is not so much an ongoing salvific process of conversion, but maintenance of purity.

¹⁶⁸ This scrupulous self-examination is named as “scruples.”

¹⁶⁹ Thérèse's immaturity, depression and unhappiness stood in Pauline's way, and made it difficult for Marie to have peaceful control at home.

¹⁷⁰ Constance Fitzgerald OCD, “Impasse and the Dark Night,” *In Living with Apocalypse, Spiritual Resources for Social Compassion* (San Francisco: Harper & Rowe, 1984), 93- 116, 2. Accessed 04/10/2010 from <http://www.baltimorecarmel.org/saints/John%20of%20the%20Cross/impasse%20and%20dark%20night.htm>

When Pauline unexpectedly enters Carmel, forgetting her promised motherhood and sisterhood (as hermits into the desert), it is utter suffering for Thérèse because all freedom to go forward, or to do good is withdrawn. Thérèse may be understood as helplessly ‘impacted’ by an impasse, as described by Iain Matthew,¹⁷¹ “leading “to the admission that, ultimately, I am not the one who saves. I am not my saviour...God is.” We cannot “be our own liberators ... ultimate healing lies beyond our grasp,” as “the real wound is our need for God, and God himself must be the cure.” “God cannot be conquered or achieved.”¹⁷² The following events attest to this.

After her mother’s death,¹⁷³ through social contact outside the home, her sisters’ tutelage, schooling at the convent, and life with the Guérins, Thérèse encounters religion and society away from the warmth of family mercy.¹⁷⁴ There are rules and other realities, apart from this warmth, which press to be integrated into one’s ‘pleasing God’. From eight to fourteen years she will struggle, locked in an impasse.¹⁷⁵ During these years, Thérèse tries to please Pauline and Marie. At the Benedictine abbey she fails to enjoy school, feeling the weight of herself “too serious, shy, and withdrawn,”¹⁷⁶ which she does not wish to trouble her family with, as she experiences this as a failure in terms of fault rather than loss that impinges upon her. Her isolation from the mischief and competition of ordinary play however, too, marks the beginning of a sensed separateness, and the need for an ongoing interior life (with God her unseen friend and defender) – suffering - felt difference heralds her special mission that will define her saintliness.

¹⁷¹ Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God: Soundings from St John of the Cross* (United Kingdom: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 70.

¹⁷² Matthew, *The Impact of God*, 70.

¹⁷³ Thérèse’s early correspondence until 1887, surrounding ordinary bourgeois pastimes and concerns, is embroidered with the expressions of affection, such as “I am kissing you with all my heart.” Innocence is cherished and adored, and Thérèse is its present representation. Sisters, cousins, and aunt, exchange affection in writing. The adjective “petit,” used to express endearment by making its object diminutive, is applied prolifically to both persons and to things. *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 143, 211, 212.

¹⁷⁴ Prayers were to be recited at by Thérèse and Celine alone at Mme Leriche’s home as if a ritual independent of human relating. *Story of a Soul*, 33.

¹⁷⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 98.

¹⁷⁶ Vitz and Lynch describe this as “Symptom Four” of Separation Anxiety. Vitz and Lynch, “Thérèse of Lisieux From the Perspective of Attachment Theory and Separation Anxiety,” 67.

Pauline's unexpected departure for Carmel leaves Thérèse bereft. She felt Pauline agreed to be "a hermit" with her wish (felt as special intimacy), where Pauline "was waiting for me [Thérèse] to be big enough to leave."¹⁷⁷ Thérèse took this as big enough to be taken with her, not left behind. Pauline, without confiding her plan to Thérèse, leaves unexpectedly. The idea that Pauline would not wait for her brings "bitter tears."¹⁷⁸ When, in the Carmel speak-room, Pauline gives her a hurried last five minutes, after her cousins, Thérèse dissolves into tears.¹⁷⁹ The face Thérèse empowered to nourish her abandons her, leaving her alone with the part of her self that was drawn to the desert. Vitz and Lynch describe Thérèse as succumbing to depression associated with Separation Anxiety Disorder; a fragile state becomes even more brittle after her mother's death.¹⁸⁰ She develops headaches, and becomes 'difficult'.¹⁸¹ Pauline and Prioress Marie de Gonzague write to Thérèse, persuading her, in spiritual language (metaphors) to change her behaviour, so that she might be acceptable to God (and Carmel).¹⁸² Thérèse's letters searching for love are met by Pauline's exhortation to renounce herself for Jesus.¹⁸³

This morning...you were crying like a baby! But since I've preached to you and scolded you I must now act as an indulgent sister...I'm asking... that [my little Thérèse] seek each day the means of pleasing the child Jesus, and to do this, that that she offer him all the flowers [sufferings] on her path! Yes, gather always these little hidden flowers...to form your crown one day.¹⁸⁴

then

how naughty of you, Mademoiselle, to aim at being sick like this! Wait till I

¹⁷⁷ Italics Thérèse's. *Story of a Soul*, 56-57.

¹⁷⁸ "I understood what life was...it appeared to me in all its reality, and I saw it was nothing but a continual suffering and separation." *Story of a Soul*, 57-58.

¹⁷⁹ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 151.

¹⁸⁰ Vitz and Lynch support this through Thérèse's own declaration: declares this herself, "my happy disposition completely changed after mama's death." (*Story of a Soul*, 34-35). Vitz and Lynch, "Thérèse of Lisieux From the Perspective of Attachment Theory and Separation Anxiety," 65.

¹⁸¹ "...you will work to correct [the little fights with Celine]..." *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 158-159.

¹⁸² *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 183- 222

¹⁸³ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 150-160.

¹⁸⁴ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 150.

scold you... how eager I am to see... [you] open to the very gentle sun of the child Jesus' love...cure yourself quickly in order to come and see your Agnes.¹⁸⁵

During that December Mother Marie de Gonzague writes in reply to Thérèse's sleeplessness, crying, and not eating, stating "if my dear little daughter follows what I advise her to do, she will... see her Agnes of Jesus again, and like her...become a good and fervent spouse of Jesus."¹⁸⁶ Pauline's letters intensify, oblivious to Thérèse's real need

You are distressing me...you are causing me worries. And worry is such an ugly flower. What should I say to you my dear little child...we must love God more and more. Oh! Don't you see, in that is life's only joy, even for little children... I trust little Jesus will caress you very often... and, as a consequence, that you may merit those caresses by very many efforts and by love.¹⁸⁷

When her Uncle Isidore (who represented a threat to her security)¹⁸⁸ states that she is at present too "soft-hearted," Thérèse becomes unwell, appearing to retreat from her self, from her bodily senses.¹⁸⁹ Once Rose, Zélie, and Pauline mirrored the value of her soft-hearted and sincere self; now, defenceless and overwrought, Thérèse (we suggest) loses her 'self'.¹⁹⁰ During this state, she refuses to let Marie go any distance from her.¹⁹¹ Pauline continues 'scolding',¹⁹² but after a month she softens, promising long visits

¹⁸⁵ Pauline named Thérèse her "rosebud." *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 154.

¹⁸⁶ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 156. Marie de Gonzague takes up the role of spiritual mothering since Thérèse's request for entry into Carmel at nine.

¹⁸⁷ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 157. At 158-159, Pauline writes, further, "...be very good during this Lent. Each day you will have to offer to the child Jesus a pretty bouquet made up of acts of virtue. I desire above all, that your flowers [self-denials] be gathered in the very beautiful garden of gentleness, for I am thinking at this moment of the little fights with Celine. [This refers to Marie's difficulty with the Celine and Thérèse's arguments]. Oh, you will work to correct this my little child? ... you will draw profit from everything, just as the bee gathers honey from the tiniest flowers.

¹⁸⁸ See *Story of a Soul*, 35, 42. Uncle "frightened me, and I wasn't as much at ease in his home as I was at Les Buissonnets..."

¹⁸⁹ After Uncle's speech, Thérèse is too "fatigued" to go out, and then begins to "tremble," which warming cannot stop. She is then often "delirious, saying things that had no meaning," appearing to be in a faint, sometimes unable to open her eyes. *Story of a Soul*, 60-63.

¹⁹⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 65. This state sometimes prevents her from recognizing other faces (suggesting -I have to be me in order to recognize you).

¹⁹¹ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 165.

¹⁹² *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 163-164.

upon Thérèse's recovery.¹⁹³ When Thérèse fails to recognize Marie, who is beside her, Marie, Leonie, and Celine, in distress, throw themselves into prayer beside Thérèse's bed.¹⁹⁴ Thérèse suddenly recovers through a "ravishing smile" from "the Blessed Virgin" (*sourire de la Vierge*).¹⁹⁵

The sisters at Carmel question Thérèse over the vision, wanting to know objective details.¹⁹⁶ Thérèse becomes guarded over her it, as her reviving vision was a relational event, and not an objective scene. Earlier, a priest at a retreated she attended, described how lying about a vision was a grave sin that would endanger worthily taking communion.¹⁹⁷ This marks the beginning of Thérèse's "scruples" – doubt with regard to the genuineness of her sickness and healing,¹⁹⁸ then, to the intention behind each good work. Pauline and Marie's directing Thérèse to critically examine herself demolished her sense (developed under Zélie's care) of her intention as well-meant (simply doing what it has learned so far). Examining herself as to whether her intention/action was undividedly good becomes her persecutor.¹⁹⁹ Marie, recognizing that this is neurotic rather than pious (though Thérèse obeyed what was put upon her), works against it.²⁰⁰ "Scruples" involves returning to a possible mistake to correct it. It fears the mistake's consequences, and the inadequacy of the self (felt in the face of who it fails to please, or by the unexpected loss of an approving face). Pauline has asked Thérèse to improve herself, while her *face* remains hidden in Carmel. Thérèse later wrote, "Pauline was lost to me...as if she were dead;" "*Pauline* had become a saint who was no longer able

¹⁹³ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 166-168.

¹⁹⁴ O'Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew Her*, 173.

¹⁹⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 65-66.

¹⁹⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 67. "They [the sisters] asked me if the Blessed Virgin was carrying the child Jesus, or if there was much light, etc. All these questions... caused me much pain."

¹⁹⁷ At this time there was fear and suspicion among clergy about the authenticity of visions. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 32.

¹⁹⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 67.

¹⁹⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 84, 88.

²⁰⁰ Pauline wrote "me a nice letter each week...and aided me in the practice of virtue." *Story of a Soul*, 74, 88.

to understand the things of earth...the miseries of ...Thérèse;" if she were to know of them it would have prevented "her from loving her Thérèse as much."²⁰¹

Thérèse was once audacious in her self-confidence. As a little child, hearing from Marie that infants formerly received communion after their baptism, "she was amazed and asked 'Why then is this no longer the case now?'"²⁰² When she saw she was to be left alone for midnight mass at Christmas, she proposed, "If you will take me with you, I too will go to communion. I could slip in among the others and no-one would take any notice. Could I do that?"²⁰³ Now, at eleven, in preparation for her much delayed communion,²⁰⁴ Thérèse was

encouraged to practice a meticulous form of asceticism. Marie formed the ideas and Thérèse applied them literally...Pauline adorned them with ...symbols: roses, violets...²⁰⁵

b. Boarding School

The Martins' isolating themselves from society is cited as the cause of Thérèse's felt ineptness at boarding school,²⁰⁶ but it could be argued that depression exacerbated this.²⁰⁷ She is sad, and "...did not know how to enter into games of my age level." Upon her first communion, she began to look forward to "practicing virtues seriously," but "came in contact with students who were... distracted, and unwilling to observe

²⁰¹ *Story of a Soul*, 88.

²⁰² O'Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew Her*, 88.

²⁰³ O'Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew Her*, 88

²⁰⁴ Marie recalls the imposition of a year's delay on her first communion date (due to her January birthdate) caused her "a great deal of suffering." O'Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew Her*, 87.

²⁰⁵ "Thus the symbolism of the flower entered the vocabulary... [and] the spirituality of Thérèse." *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 182.

²⁰⁶ "Our parents reared all of us in a spirit of detachment from the good things of this world." O' Mahony, *St Thérèse of Lisieux By Those Who Knew Her*, 85.

²⁰⁷ Difficulty in learning is supported by Vitz and Lynch, as a distress (Criterion D) which manifests Separation Anxiety. Vitz and Lynch, "Thérèse of Lisieux From the Perspective of Attachment theory and Separation Anxiety," 69-70.

regulations...”²⁰⁸ She sought “permission to learn [the catechism] during my recreation periods...My efforts were crowned and I was always first.”²⁰⁹ Thérèse wants to compete spiritually – for a God who asks this – and have her spiritual mastery acknowledged, but no-one is interested in such competition. She admits to privately feeling that she was “born for *glory*” through becoming a “great *saint*,”²¹⁰ destined for more than small satisfactions.

While “affectionate,” she felt her fidelity “misunderstood,” and did “not beg for ...affection that was refused.”²¹¹ She learns how affection can be won (in Celine), but refuses to do what is required;²¹² she cannot bring herself to trade in flattery. Earlier, in her return to Alençon, she found that though she enjoyed being fêted, this seemed trivial next to the memory of death and its suffering.²¹³ Her mother’s absence, felt each day, draws a sober awareness suited to her circumstances. Grief impinges on her. At school, something greater than games is needed to lift her from inward thought – such as stories about transcendent realities.²¹⁴ With the faces that love her marked by work and tears, Thérèse senses affection bought by flattery and manipulation as shallow. Further, survival till now has cost *her* much.

With boarding school too much, due to headaches, Thérèse is given private lessons.²¹⁵ When she hears of Marie’s leaving for Carmel, further depleted, clingy tearfulness is added to scruples.²¹⁶ Thérèse disowns her attic room with shrines to her many interests,

²⁰⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 53, 81.

²⁰⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 81.

²¹⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 72.

²¹¹ *Story of a Soul*, 82.

²¹² *Story of a Soul*, 83.

²¹³ *Story of a Soul*, 78.

²¹⁴ Thérèse composes stories at recess, eventually forbidden this by the mistress. *Story of a Soul*, 81.

²¹⁵ This occurs at Mm Papinot’s home where she receives unsolicited compliments. *Story of a Soul*, 81, 85-86.

²¹⁶ In 1886. *Story of a Soul*, 90, 91.

and her pursuit of Pauline and Marie.²¹⁷ She forms a union with God and holds this between her human relationships.²¹⁸ Her remaining goal, to be a saint, is thwarted by inability to actualize her good intentions.²¹⁹ For help, she turns to her deceased siblings whose faces she has never seen, as if the dead are more present to her than the living.²²⁰ Her wish is to master herself, so that she can become a nun, a saint – familiar steps to prove that she *is* good.

Just as she was unable to make her goodness understood at school, at home she is unable to sacrifice without acknowledgment from those she aimed her good *at*, causing tears.²²¹ Accepting her sisters' idea of having to be 'perfect' before entry to the religious life, Thérèse is alienated from her childly self. She strives, but she has no power over her growing-up, which depends on external affirmation, and physical development. Still begging to be acknowledged, she is not yet in possession of a self whose riches might be renounced. Further, her ascetic practice, instead drawing her toward a loving face, turns her to look at herself.

c. *Grace*

Thérèse will write that her predicament is overcome by grace.²²² Louis, arriving home tired from Midnight Mass at Christmas (1886), remarks, "fortunately, this will be the last year" for filling Thérèse's shoes, the Martins' Christmas practice for small children.²²³ The remark "pierces" her, but Louis' testiness (anticipating her tears) perhaps 'cries' for Marie's help (Marie has left only two months earlier), which will evoke Thérèse mothering him in her place. She has mothered Louis before in play, now

²¹⁷ She recalls others stating that she had a "weak character," ruled by the desire to please others. *Story of a Soul*, 90-91. Here Thérèse expresses anger toward the things that represent who she was (hopes in relation to loved ones).

²¹⁸ She later denies Pauline and Marie her confidences in the name of detachment.

²¹⁹ "Thwarting" is the true self in mutiny over the cost of pleasing.

²²⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 93. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1211.

²²¹ *Story of a Soul*, 97.

²²² *Story of a Soul*, 98.

²²³ *Story of a Soul*, 98.

her moment has come in reality. Louis needs someone to be Zélie/Marie.²²⁴ An impasse ends. From Christmas onward, ‘infused with charity’,²²⁵ Thérèse can replicate Zélie’s role. From her new out-going disposition, Thérèse re-interprets her commitment to sanctity through a maternal symbol: “saving souls.” From her desire to please Jesus,²²⁶ she asks for what she believes Jesus previously wants (that the criminal Pranzini will repent before his execution).²²⁷ In this way her request will be fulfilled. Jesus fulfils her request by pleasing himself.²²⁸

d. Summary of Suffering an Impasse

While separated from familiar comfort, Thérèse encounters religion apart from relation. Pretty sentiments about flowers representing self-denials, to draw the child Jesus, however, do not dignify Thérèse’s powerlessness to recapture Pauline’s presence. She persists with this, the familiar symbol of her culture, nevertheless, as the path to the cloister, and to sainthood. In her scruples, Thérèse experiences herself as needing to be in control of her goodness to stay Pauline’s disappearing face.²²⁹ Pauline is lost to her because she has become unreal, “no longer able to understand the things of earth,” while Marie demands ascetic rigour.²³⁰ Both, in effect, ask her to give up needing a mother to reflect her value. She cannot divest herself of need; she can only suffer it or deny its presence. God releases her from scruples by replacing self-judgment with peace, and reminds her (subliminally) of the grace she once received, allowing her relieve Louis at Christmas. She becomes God’s conduit for God’s saving. God who unexpectedly and freely bestows favour to the helpless one constitutes a ‘return’ to reality. She enters into a conversation with this God.

²²⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 98. She “resumed her strength of soul” which she lost when her mother died.

²²⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 97-98.

²²⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 98-99.

²²⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 100. She does not purchase Pranzini’s forgiveness through her prayers, denials, and merits, but simply obtains a sign of his forgiveness. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 36-37.

²²⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 100-101.

²²⁹ Matthew, *Impact of God*, 70.

²³⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 88.

6. Toward Carmel: Realizing her Goal to be a Nun

The above leads to a spiritual conversation between Thérèse and Celine (around a shared book, *The End of the Present World*), which forms a prelude to Thérèse declaring that she has a vocation, and seeking early entry to Carmel.²³¹ Louis not only agrees to Thérèse's request, but joins himself to her cause which takes them to the bishop and then Rome.²³² Achieving her goal is unexpectedly difficult, fraught with refusals.²³³ Thérèse encounters rules in the name of religion aimed toward restraining women.²³⁴ Along the way, she uses a metaphor supplied by Pauline: she is the infant Jesus' toy ball, an object which must be content to amuse him while it takes his interest.²³⁵ Refusal into Carmel is imagined as Jesus' momentary abandonment of her, which she practices to welcome.²³⁶ Yet all is felt as bitter, and the waiting represents another impasse.²³⁷ Supported by Louis, and Pauline's correspondence, Thérèse joins herself to the suffering.²³⁸

Thérèse's encounter with bishops revealed them to be unlike God, who gives in a way that is consistent with what he wants. When Thérèse prays for the conversion that God desires, it eventuates. Bishops however, have their hands tied,²³⁹ citing prudence as the basis of their refusal for a child to enter Carmel to pray for them.²⁴⁰ They have to

²³¹ *Story of a Soul*, 103. *Correspondence: Volume I*, 273-76, 281-82.

²³² *Story of a Soul*, 108-109.

²³³ "I believed I'd be able to fly to Carmel." *Story of a Soul*, 109.

²³⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 140.

²³⁵ *Correspondence: Volume I*, 335, 353, 357-358. Thérèse takes this symbol from a poem Pauline sent her, which teaches surrender to a child. *Correspondence: Volume II*, 1279-1280.

²³⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 136.

²³⁷ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 357- 368.

²³⁸ Thérèse feels denial of self-will should begin now, and also practices separation from the world. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 800-802, 803-805. See also *Story of a Soul*, 130.

²³⁹ Monseigneur Révérony, delegate of the Bishop of Bayeux, did not further Thérèse's case during her audience with the Pope. *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 351-353.

²⁴⁰ Delatroëtte, the Lisieux Carmel's ecclesiastical Superior, disapproved of young Thérèse entering the rigour of the Carmelite life. *Story of a Soul*, 111.

respect the boundary of their jurisdiction, and be cautious about an extreme impulse to serve God. The girl who as a little child insisted to Marie that she go where ever God invites her faces intransigent refusal. Powerlessness becomes a theme. Human wills block her path. Decisions based on other than her own desire (which she aligns with God's will), translate into painful, inexorable realities. Comparing her ability to self-determine to an inanimate object, a ball, is apt.²⁴¹

In his grace at Christmas Thérèse felt Jesus as one who is entirely 'for' whoever chooses him. She gives her self to Jesus, not to remove all suffering, but to be on the path to knowing, loving, and interacting with the One who is *for* her (who answered her in her distress), so that she might please him. She would like to impress her love upon him, but how can she know, interact, influence, *sway*, the One she pursues, when he eludes her? The answer is to do with her will and God's will. Thérèse contends with an overwhelming urge, which is felt to be God-given. She has control over very little, but this – her interior life and her desire for God – she makes much of. We turn to another cause of suffering in Thérèse: Louis' losing his mental faculties.

a. Seven Years in Carmel

Thérèse's move to Carmel (approval gained in March 1888) brings peace insofar as it realizes her aim to be with God in the desert. But here she suffers misunderstanding, spiritual aridity, the absence of her director, lack of encouragement for spiritual progress, and it is brought to her attention that she has no adequate work skills. Though she is professed, as the third member of one family, she is not able to become a voting member, so she is unable to hold office. Marie de Gonzague concedes to Thérèse's spiritual value to others, but Thérèse is caught between her and Pauline's rivalry for office, in a "storm" of tension.²⁴² These pains are converted to willing humiliations, as we shall see in *Man C*, but when her father suffers his dementia, Thérèse experiences bitter helplessness, an impasse of a different kind. At Pauline's instruction, Thérèse

²⁴¹ This image is from a pamphlet received between her trips to Bayeux and Rome. Jesus punctures the ball (not in the original poem) and finds, Thérèse reflects in *Man A*, its inner substance (her disposition) pleasing. *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 335-336, 499.

²⁴² Jean-François Six, *Light of the Night: The Last Eighteen Months in the Life of Thérèse of Lisieux*, translated by John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1995), 54-58. See also Thérèse of Lisieux, *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 776.

fixes on the “Holy Face of Jesus,”²⁴³ which brings to mind Louis’ suffering. (Later, Louis will evoke in Thérèse affinity for Jesus’ merciful love.) Years of fearing she might hurt Jesus by her sin come to an end for Thérèse through the Franciscan Fr Prou.²⁴⁴ She welcomes this ‘news’ about Jesus’ resilience (reminiscent of the quality of her caregivers in infancy). Yet Thérèse continues to use reparative symbols, enduring suffering the humiliation of Louis and the distance between herself and Céline as a means to lower herself. When Louis is allowed to return to his family, and Pauline becomes prioress, Thérèse briefly experiences a reprieve from pain.²⁴⁵ Thérèse experiences darkness with regard to her faith, and the fact of Céline as still at home is a torment for Thérèse who fears the prospect of her remaining in “the world.” Thérèse persuasively reminds Celine that she belongs to God.²⁴⁶ Upon Louis’ death, Céline enters Carmel.²⁴⁷ This takes us to 1895 when Thérèse writes her autobiography.

7. Concluding Remarks

McDargh develops an argument on the human imaging of God around three points. He observes that the God who is called upon in time of need dwells in a person’s centre of value and meaning and does not consist of abstract concepts, no matter how beautifully plausible. He then explores what the human person’s centre of value and meaning is comprised of through “object relations” theory. From there he investigates how the idea of God and the concept of transcendence form, and concludes that the formation of the image of God is inseparable from self-formation, which is influenced by early affective experiences in relation to plenitude (or scarcity) and limitation. Through examples, McDargh shows that persons in ordinary life construct “cognitively-credible” God-images to fit their lives, but upon a time of need there is a return to a deep felt-sense about God.

²⁴³ She fixes herself on the Holy Face while she suffers aridity and weakness. Conrad De Meester, *The Power of Confidence: Genesis and Structure of the “Way of Spiritual Childhood” of St Therese of Lisieux* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1998), 107.

²⁴⁴ At the heart of Carmel’s reparative theology was the need for sacrifice and suffering to console Jesus for the pain that sin brings him. Six, *Light of The Night*, 7-8.

²⁴⁵ There is a brief “euphoria” which becomes a “storm” of rivalries in the convent. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 773, 774-776.

²⁴⁶ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 861-863.

²⁴⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 284.

This chapter investigated what was most real for Thérèse, what affirmed her self,²⁴⁸ especially in terms of felt-images of God, to identify a place to which she returns to after ‘leading out’ in life. It explored the matrix of her self-development, and the early out-going passage of her life. Contributing to her early self-sense, we saw Thérèse feel immersed in Rose and Zélie’s forgiving love, ‘raised’ by Louis as a companion, included in his moment of prayer, and carried on his shoulders. As a child, through her desire to be ‘holy’ (in amongst family), she questions rules that stop her from receiving God when she is willing (the reception of her first communion, entry into Carmel).

McDargh documents persons encountering crisis returning to a felt-sense in their early life. Thérèse suffered crises in the form of phases of helplessness, or “impasses:” she is unable to prevent Zélie’s death, to keep her family together, to grow up, to act like other school children, or spare Louis from humiliation. Ordinary growing pains are met by absence and correction; Marie and Pauline imply that her “faults” pain Jesus, and prevent her progress to a place in Carmel. Fear of loss, and desire to generate love is so great in Thérèse that paining the ones she loved by “faults, even if involuntary,” distresses her.²⁴⁹ These helplessnesses bring certain felt-knowing into relief – restoration (reorganization) after a smile, remembrance of gracious action – a return.

In Carmel, with childliness permanently imposed on her, Thérèse suffers an impasse in being unable to ‘outgrow’ her youngest sister-role. But, through her early self and God images, she will reassess what it means to be holy – finding this less to do with inhuman perfection, and more to do with loving God, which entails knowing what her capacities are and what she might receive.

Before exploring these images, we turn to a leading-out phase in Thérèse at fourteen, through reading Arminjon’s *The End of the Present World*.²⁵⁰ Where does this take her?

²⁴⁸ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and The Study of Religion*, 27.

²⁴⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 173-174.

²⁵⁰ Charles Arminjon, *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Future Life*, translated by Susan Conroy (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2008).