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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 FIVE

PART TWO: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Return: A Recovery of Thérèse's True Self Image of God

In the introduction, it was proposed that Thérèse's overall controlling metaphor was her filial relation to God. To show the origins and dimensions of that filial love, we examined in Chapters Two and Three Thérèse's early relationships within her natural (and surrogate) family, focussing on the experience of mercy. We then investigated whether Thérèse digressed from the felt-knowing of her early experience. We found in her accepting *The End of the World*, Thérèse allowed some unmerciful concepts next to her desire to love.¹ We will now show Thérèse's filial love toward God as taking up positive and negative dimensions, note whether these over-ride or play into Arminjon's theology, and finally, show how she re-engages with her original object-representations of God. For our tool of analysis we use Winnicott's True Self/False Self paradigm as McDargh interprets it and uses it. We let Thérèse speak for herself, in *Story of a Soul* (*Manuscripts A, B, C*), and in her later correspondence.

To distinguish between thoughts that flow from felt-knowing about mercy and thoughts which are mere religious allegiances, we will interpret Thérèse's expression through a sense of True Self or False Self, expecting Thérèse's True Self to echo felt-mercy and her False Self to support Arminjon's judgment oriented eschatology. Spanning two chapters, the material of *Story of a Soul* will be divided into three phases. In this chapter we will 'listen' to Thérèse as she recalls mercy toward herself as a little child (phase one), and as she recalls yearning for mercy when she finds herself bereft of it (phase two). In Chapter Six, we will look for Thérèse using her early experience of mercy to illustrate her spiritual 'way' (phase three).

¹ Boris Ford (ed), *The Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Blake to Byron* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1957), 221. The romantic poet John Keats saw the ability to tolerate uncertainties, to hold conflicting thoughts without resolution, as positive. He writes: "*Negative capability*... [is] when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason." Thérèse, as we will notice, seems unconcerned about the full consequences of some of the ideas she endorses, only taking up the part that illustrates her immediate feeling. (Nevin opines, by virtue of the passages she copies, that Thérèse was primarily attracted to Arminjon's declaration that God desires to outdo (by reward) human demonstrations of sacrifice for God. Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 177-178.)

a. *Aim*

The “True Self,” as coined by Winnicott,² operates from a position that is true to what a person has felt, while aiming to engage the world (what is really there) as constructively as possible. A “False Self,” alternatively, sets up a defence facade as real, leaving a person “aware only of a nagging and debilitating sense of personal unreality, a sense of the betrayal of an inner truth, or failure to realize a potentiality for living.”³ To return to the True Self is a return to the heart, a *Redire ad Cor*, to one’s place of dwelling, away from a False Self (which houses pain and emptiness).⁴ From where we dwell, or are present, we can meet another – and capacity for communion, John Macmurray proposed, is at the centre of theology.⁵ We agree, and expect that a theology which promotes loving communion with God and neighbour will arise from a True Self. Thérèse’s thoughts on self-understanding and God (leading to communion with God), based on felt-knowing about mercy, thus, are important to theology.

b. *Method*

We turn our attention to “object relations theory,” where a person constructs an inner world (from “objects” that represent their early relations) through which to operate in

² “True Self,” in the context of standing opposite to a “False Self” in psychoanalysis, is attributed to Winnicott. See D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (London, New York: Karnac, 1965, 1990), 140.

³ 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), 233.

⁴ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 240. McDargh notes (from Aelred Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx*, 1973), that the desert fathers spoke of “*Redire ad Cor*, to return to the place of the heart, the core or center of the self” as a homecoming. Ryan further notes that the Biblical notion of the “heart” should not be equated simply with the affective centre of the person; it is rather “the inside of a person” embracing “feelings, memories, ideas, plans, and decisions.” Citing Léon-Dufour, he points out that, “in the inclusive and concrete anthropology of the Bible, the heart is the principle of morality, the centre of one’s freedom, of decisive choices and the place where one enters to be in dialogue with oneself and where one opens oneself or closes oneself to God.” See Thomas Ryan SM, “Conscience As Primordial Awareness in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Veritatis Splendor*”, *Australian Ejournal of Theology* 18.1 (April 2011), 94, citing Léon-Dufour, X, “Heart” in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 228.

⁵ This is noted by McDargh. McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 206-207. McDargh states that John Macmurray’s “Gifford Lectures, *The Form of the Personal*, were a major effort to introduce the relational paradigm into fundamental theology.” He wrote “That capacity for communion, that capacity for entering into free and equal personal relations is the thing that makes us human... the personal life demands a relationship with one another in which we can be our whole selves and have complete freedom to express everything that makes us what we are.” From *Reason and Emotion* (London: Faber & Faber, Ltd, 1935), 63, 97.

the world of relations. Winnicott states that these objects are mobile (“transitional”); they can be re-engaged or dispersed, and throughout life they are invoked to integrate, and reintegrate the self.⁶ Here we are concerned with ‘self’, and the ‘God-object’ – for belief to be *in*, to preserve inner goodness,⁷ and as occupying a reality “testified to by a whole social environment”⁸

True Self/False Self emerges through the early phases in life. A total absorption in maintaining homeostasis in the infant makes way for a “unified situational experience,” which becomes a “holding environment” (Winnicott)⁹ where the mother provides an “auxiliary ego:” a safe anchorage in her maternal matrix that supplies an increasingly secure “ego feeling” or “continuity of being.”¹⁰ The True Self is an ego feeling (“feeling real, creative and spontaneous”) protected enough to allow interaction with the “real external world.”¹¹ A False Self is the result of a pressured adjustment to a sense of unreality, or futility – a concern with being (*that* I am) rather than identity (*who* I am). This may be caused by insensitive “schedules, wishes and whims” of the caregiver.¹² True Self/False Self formation affirms that the inner representational world functions as a kind of model which enables us “to identify not only danger but safety, not only enemies but potential friends and lovers.”¹³ On one level, thus, we are investigating Thérèse’s identification of “enemies,” “friends and lovers” in her filial metaphor.

⁶ Fairbairn argued for a static model whose temporary purpose was solely to help a self under threat to survive. McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 210.

⁷ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion*, 229. At 228, one client (who suffered painful absence) complained “People use God like an analyst – someone to be there while you are playing.”

⁸ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 227.

⁹ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 219.

¹⁰ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 219.

¹¹ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 219. This ego feeling (we learned through Sroufe in Chapter Two) corresponds to a sense of impacting one’s environment – which effectively means an ‘other’. Insensitive care-giving – experiences of not impacting one’s environment – result in weaker development, and replication of such ministrings.

¹² McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 219.

¹³ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 213.

We will look for evidence of constructive engagement with her inner world of object representation¹⁴ in Thérèse’s autobiographical reflections about herself and about God,¹⁵ to infer self-perceptions that disclose a True or False Self. A True Self is represented by positions directly conveying feelings from early in life with regard to painful experiences (feeling threatened, rejected, punished, devalued, ignored), happy experiences (feeling valued, forgiven, encouraged, noticed, supported), or ambiguous experiences (feeling seduced, manipulated, approval as conditional). A False Self denies the fact of certain experiences to maintain an inner representation that buttresses against disintegration, betrayal, or intolerable binds. Helpful to this project is McDargh’s analysis of the creation, elaboration and reconstruction of the object representations of God of two women in a longitudinal study.¹⁶ His analysis will guide our questions to Thérèse’s autobiographical text – reflections on a lived life. Chapters Seven and Eight will explore the theology arising from Thérèse’s affective-knowing (via interaction with her God-object representation), a response to felt-mercy toward felt-limitation.

c. Divisions

As mentioned, *Story of a Soul* will be divided into three phases; the first two will be investigated in this chapter, and the third in Chapter Six. These follow Thérèse’s own phases except for one difference. Rather than ‘phase one’ ending with Zélie’s death (as Thérèse has it), our phase one is concerned with mercy received. Thus, to “*Chapter I –*

¹⁴ Winnicott stresses that an inner world that can be returned to constructively to reconfigure one’s position depends on previous respect for “the integrity and the timing of an individual’s private creation of a God that provides an inner sense of goodness.” He states, “Religions have made much of original sin, but have not all come around to the idea of original goodness, that which by being gathered together in the idea of God is at the same time separate[d] off from, the individuals who collectively create and recreate this concept. The saying that man made God in his own image is usually treated as an amusing example of the perverse,” but its truth could be made more evident by stating, “man continues to create and recreate God as a place to put what is good in himself, and which he might spoil if he kept it in himself along with all the hate and destructiveness which is also to be found there.” “[Theology] has stolen the good from the developing individual child, and has then set up an artificial scheme for injecting this that has been stolen back into the child, and has called it moral education.” McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 229.

¹⁵ Thérèse’s autobiography is not chronologically straightforward. She moves from remembered affects to present ones, and mixes these, often declaring that she feels a thing today just like yesterday or that her feelings have remained unchanged. Theological concepts are held in tension, yet Thérèse reports herself as feeling integrated (at peace). In terms of chronology, we rely on Conrad de Meester’s study, *The Power of Confidence: Genesis and Structure of the “Way of Spiritual Childhood” of St Therese of Lisieux* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1998).

¹⁶ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 213.

Alençon” (up till the age of four and a half), we add “*Chapter II – Les Buissonnets*” (from four and a half to eight and a half). In “*Alençon*,” Thérèse, through her mother’s ‘eyes’, awakes an experience of Zélie meeting her actual physical limitation and vulnerability with mercy.¹⁷ In “*Les Buissonnets*,” she reinvests Louis with the tenderness he once showed toward her play initiatives, and ‘again’ enjoys Louis’ mercy.

Thérèse, however, includes “from the age of four and a half to...fourteen” in her “painful” years,¹⁸ based on the loss of her childhood character due to her mother’s death, singling out “*Chapter III—The Distressing Years*” as “the most painful of the three, especially since the entrance into Carmel of the one whom I chose as my second “Mama.”¹⁹ Thérèse states “at Buissonnets... my life was truly happy;” here “my life passed by tranquilly;” what marred her stay here was being sent away from it, especially to her Uncle and Aunt’s home.²⁰

As Thérèse reaches eight, she approaches older childhood (pre-pubescence), where limitation requires a different form of mercy²¹ - which appears to be lacking. Phase II, for our purposes, includes that period of time when Thérèse craves for what an eight year old to a thirteen year old aged child needs in normative, or “good enough,” terms. Thérèse recalls grasping at what childhood offers, to obtain the support and consolation she formerly experienced. Phase III takes in the remaining material of *Story of a Soul*: experiences of Phase I as imaging her present experience of God, symbolizing God’s merciful love toward her experience of existential vulnerability. We turn to the form of Thérèse’s writing.

¹⁷ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul. The Autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, translated by John Clarke (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996), 49.

¹⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 34-35. She names this as her painful time during which she was “timid and retiring, sensitive to an excessive degree.”

¹⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 34.

²⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 35, 49, 34-35. “I could not bear the company of strangers and found my joy only within the intimacy of the family;” “[Uncle] frightened me, and I wasn’t... at ease in his home.”

²¹ See L. Alan Sroufe, *Emotional Development: The Organization of Emotional Life in the Early Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 161. From three to five years of age, to master impulses, identity, and peer relations, the caregiver needs to provide clear roles, values, and show flexible self control; while from six to eleven years of age, for loyal friendships and peer group functioning, the caregiver needs to monitor, support activity, and co-regulate. These periods assume current American preschool and schooling. Thérèse was eight and a half years of age when she first attended school. *Story of a Soul*, 53.

d. *Preliminary Observations - Writings by a Carmelite under Religious Obedience*

In his research on Thérèse, Thomas R. Nevin observes the possible influence of a Carmelite literary convention, the *circulaire*, on Thérèse's writing.²² Thérèse heard many of these spiritual biographies²³ during meal times and at recreation:

The *circulaire* depicted the sister's calling into religious life, usually signalled by a visitation or miracle; then her conduct within Carmel, including offices held and particular devotions; finally, how through illness, she came to face death.²⁴

Some of the qualities that Thérèse would have heard repeated were smallness, hiddenness, love, and confidence; with "little way" indicating a nun's particular approach to life.²⁵ While the resemblance of Thérèse's thought to those contained in these biographies diminishes her originality, Nevin feels that this does not lessen the value of *Story of a Soul*, because Thérèse supplies a whole (inner) self to these ideas.²⁶ These ideas, further, relate to Carmelite aspirations and rule, and practices in one's own time.²⁷ For example, Nevin notes that the primary task of the prioress was "to help them [nuns] break their own will."²⁸ Small faults, indicative of greater ones, needed swift correction as their effects would be disastrous in a confined community.²⁹ "Coulpes," or

²² This summary of a nun's life, generally composed by her prioress, and sometimes incorporating a nun's own words, served as a death notice. Thomas R. Nevin, *Thérèse of Lisieux, God's Gentle Warrior* (Oxford; New York: University Press, 2006), 148.

²³ Nevin quotes from forty of the four hundred *circulaires* he read. These follow a formula, and incorporated symbolic language, such as "the perfume of a sister's life, flower imagery being drawn from the Song of Songs..." Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 154, 147-159.

²⁴ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 142-143. At 150. Sr Euphrasie du Saint-Sacrament is quoted "I love God with my whole heart and compel myself to please him, and then all is done and I go my little way," further, "I'm deeply aware of my wretchedness. I'm a poor creature, but since God's goodness puts up with me, why should I not put up with myself?" Novices, listening to her story while they ate their vegetables, could be encouraged that the Carmelite way to perfection could be realized.

²⁵ Marguerite de Beaune who furthered Carmelite devotion to the Infant Jesus in the seventeenth century used the expression, "la petite voie." Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 118.

²⁶ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 126, 161. Against this background, Nevin entitles his chapter on Thérèse's autobiography "Thérèse Writes Herself."

²⁷ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 138.

²⁸ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 138-139.

²⁹ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 131-131.

“fautes,” were noted and repeated at a weekly chapter meeting (“le Chapitre”), where nuns would further accuse themselves and each other of “infractions.”³⁰ Due punishments were imposed. A “kind of death watch” was “kept on the self,” so much so that self fault-finding runs as a seam through Thérèse’s text.³¹

Nevin’s observation that the *circulaire* served as a guide to what Therese might include in her writing, helps us to be mindful of spiritual fashion, and of this writing’s overall goal. The *circulaire* was a vehicle to express things about one’s self, in relation to the prevailing Carmelite tradition (then Jansenist). Thus we might expect to find Thérèse sharing candid thoughts in the context of proving she is graced by signs, favour, and divine-aid to her efforts. We return to Thérèse’s life passage. On realizing her hope to become a hermit in the desert with Pauline (Carmel), Thérèse faces a new horizon.³² With much time to search interiorly, she faces “the heart’s common query: Who or what is there that will allow me to be as I am?”³³

e. Life-Passages in Thérèse

Thérésian scholars, interested in movements of change in Thérèse’s perception of God/self, have sought to identify significant life-passages that preceded that change. These are relatively easy to track in Thérèse, as her written thoughts on God – a progressing response to external influences – transparently reveal what she was engaging with. Of the passages catalogued by Thérésian writers, we note three.³⁴ De

³⁰ Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 132, 139. Faults were observed by a “zélatrice” (an appointed observer) who repeated them at the chapter meeting (a practice later removed by Pauline).

³¹ Though serving community harmony, this had the potential to deteriorate into a stylized ritual. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 145 – 146.

³² McDargh analyses two women who ‘rewrite’ themselves in middle age. He describes middle age as a *kairotic* time in a life history by reason of the impress of “religious questions and decisions: questions of ultimate meaning and value, decisions about how to live out with integrity and passion the last quarter of one’s traditionally allotted “three score years and ten.” McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 153.

³³ Each of the women in McDargh’s analysis ask whether they might be what was earlier refused them. McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 183.

³⁴ These are my summaries from De Meester’s *Power of Confidence*, 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), and Constance Fitzgerald, “The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux.” *The Way Supplement* (Summer, 1997), pp74-96.

Meester finds Thérèse moves from ‘wanting to *do* for God’ to ‘audacious confidence in God’. Six, who centres a shift around Thérèse’s ‘loss of heaven’, finds that Thérèse initiates a new daring standard, in not guiltily fleeing from her state of unbelief, and in expressing surrender to Jesus through sexual imagery. Fitzgerald observes that mothering develops through mimesis, and that Thérèse mothers ‘sinners’ (and her readers) in the way she was mothered. This last is particularly helpful as it suggests that felt-knowing about merciful love, to be available to repeat on an intuitive level, refers to a previous ‘imprint’ of mercy (however submerged or overlaid by competing interests).

Written chronologically in the final eighteen months of Thérèse’s life, *Manuscripts A, B, and C* form a theological unity by the relation between Thérèse’s reflection on the past and her progressing self-perception. De Meester and Fitzgerald observe progressing self-perception in Thérèse recollecting her “whole life:” De Meester observes a refinement and intensification of her “little way;” Fitzgerald names an operation – Thérèse’s activity raises an awareness lying dormant in her psyche.

In the first chapter of her autobiography, Thérèse sees herself in the eyes of her own mother whose letters, written before Thérèse was four, attest to how the baby daughter has been mirrored to herself by a loving mother. By documenting what Thérèse knows experientially but perhaps not consciously, these letters bring an awareness the affirmative experience of love lying dormant in her psyche, thereby enabling her to tell us that her “first memories...are stamped with smiles and the most tender caresses.” These mother-letters become part and parcel of her identity so that the autobiography actually mirrors the letters while the letters mother the autobiography.³⁵

In *Man A*, Thérèse states that she will write the story about herself (her soul) only to “...sing... *The mercies of the Lord.*”³⁶ Mentioned only twice in her writing before 1895, “mercy” suddenly becomes frequent in Thérèse’s writing in 1895, where it is found about twenty times.³⁷ Does this point to a shift away from Arminjon’s theology? We

³⁵ Constance Fitzgerald, “The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux,” 75-76.

³⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 13.

³⁷ 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), 151-152.

present a short overview of Thérèse's path from reading Arminjon to writing *Man A*, with help from de Meester.

f. The Passage of Thérèse's Thought from Arminjon to Writing Man A

After Christmas 1887 and reading Arminjon, Thérèse wants to save souls to please Jesus. Pleasing Jesus also means to become his virginal spouse, separated from "the world," which she prepares for by resisting the attraction of temporal things. She welcomes the refusal of early entry into Carmel as from God, allowing her to practise accepting denial, befitting her future Carmelite life. Thérèse gains entry in April 1888, but life in Carmel brings new feelings of being misunderstood, lack of formal direction or commendation for spiritual progress. When her father is overcome by mental instability, she suffers helplessness. In a climate of shame over such matters, she writes to Céline that she yearns to return to her father the love he gives her; recognizing this as an impossibility, she will ask God to console him.³⁸ Her sense of loving Louis inadequately, she then applies to God.³⁹ Louis' condition worsens in 1889. In 1890 Thérèse reads Isaiah's text of the "suffering servant." She expresses solidarity with Christ's humiliation and rejection by defending her father as if he, too, is a suffering servant.⁴⁰ During this year she reads the works of St John of the Cross and his spousal imagery enters her writing.

In 1889, suffering aridity, Thérèse is directed by Pauline to fix herself on Jesus' suffering face.⁴¹ De Meester notes that Thérèse aims to become "more and more little to love: to love more, to love exclusively, and ... more purely,"⁴² but her understanding of weakness has not yet arrived at weakness as powerlessness due to filial smallness; weakness is thought of as "feebly" straining under the weight of suffering (a reward sent by Jesus).⁴³ Thérèse interprets suffering as communicating love,⁴⁴ but not as also

³⁸ Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence Volume I, 1877-1890*, translated by John Clarke OCD (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1982), 460-461.

³⁹ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 499-500. Thérèse writes "... I would so much like to love Him!... Love Him more than he has ever been loved."

⁴⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 283.

⁴¹ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 580-582.

⁴² De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 107.

inviting God's aid.⁴⁵ In October 1891, Fr Prou preaches a retreat, whereupon Thérèse is released from feeling held to ransom over Jesus' suffering by her sin ("hurting Jesus") – an idea present in Arminjon.⁴⁶ In May 1892, Louis returns to his family; in December Thérèse writes she is now at "an age when [her] memories of childhood have a particular charm,"⁴⁷ and in 1893, when Pauline becomes prioress, Thérèse comes to know a love "whose characteristic is to lower Itself."⁴⁸ Where before she wrote that sanctity consisted of "suffering and suffering everything," now she writes that merit does not consist in "doing or giving" but rather in "receiving,"⁴⁹ that the only purpose for doing good is for love; that we do not love God for his rewards but he himself is our reward, and that she does not need a point of reference to see her progress with God.⁵⁰ Thérèse emphasises lowliness to show we are but an instrument, pointing to the primacy of God's action.⁵¹

Before 1894, the image of 'child' is incidental⁵² (entering the Martin girls' vocabulary from the *Visitandine* convent),⁵³ and the word 'little' is associated with

⁴³ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 537. Jesus "strikes and presses down," without simultaneously alleviating. De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 107-111; quote at 111. Thérèse's desire for proving love through martyrdom is consistent with Arminjon's call.

⁴⁴ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: General Correspondence Volume II 1890-1897*, translated by John Clarke OCD (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1988), 629- 631.

⁴⁵ De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 117. She speaks of no longer desiring to see the fruit of her efforts. *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 641.

⁴⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 173-174. Nevin suggests that Arminjon's "pharasaical payoff psychology...fell away from Thérèse perhaps only when she lost heaven, but that deepening, the growing up from celestial mercantilism could have been abetted as early as...1891 ...[through] retreat notes from Agen. "To sanctify one's self to save one's soul, that's permitted, yes, but it is mercenary." Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 158.

⁴⁷ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 765.

⁴⁸ Between 1889 and 1892, with suffering the humiliation of Louis and the distance between herself and Céline, Thérèse uses the symbols of reparative theology where God is to be appeased by their prayers and suffering. In 1893, she turns from the symbol of exterior hiddenness to interior humility. De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 132. See *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 765, 781 (LT, 139, 140), 776.

⁴⁹ De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 134.

⁵⁰ De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 138-139. See *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 809.

⁵¹ *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 813-814.

⁵² This image is sometimes offered to her: Pauline writes in 1890 ("He is carrying you... Does a child in its Father's arms need any other consolation?"). Other times Thérèse uses it to make a point; she writes to

‘insignificance’, such as, affirming an action’s value as not drawn from its size but whether it is done from love.⁵⁴ The image of a ‘child carried’ in terms of powerlessness and ignorance⁵⁵ appears occasionally with Thérèse’s focus on abandonment, and in her effort to comfort Céline.⁵⁶ When Celine enters Carmel, she brings scriptural excerpts new to Thérèse. Thérèse reads Proverbs 9: 4 and Isaiah 66:2-13 (God’s mercy toward the little one), and the appeal of mercy becomes visible in her correspondence. Céline’s arrival, further, brings their early family life afresh to Thérèse’s mind, which she recounts at recreation. Pauline asks her to record this. We turn to Thérèse, to see what she reveals about her present and past God-object representation.⁵⁷

Phase I: Feeling the Mercy of Childhood

a. Introduction

Thérèse introduces her writing by stating that she takes up Pauline’s request as a call to obedience in the manner the disciples were called, and this will serve as an occasion to sing “*the Mercies of the Lord*” (*Les Miséricordes du Seigneur!!!*).⁵⁸ Her present vocation as a Carmelite is not the result of her choosing God, but of God’s merciful choosing of her.⁵⁹ By God’s “mercies” (“*Les Miséricordes*”) Thérèse refers to a particular perception of ‘grace’. In Bérulle’s spirituality, grace is understood as God’s

Céline in 1893 that Jesus’ longing to rest might be found in the “heart of a child.” *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 665; *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 804.

⁵³ “The child’s abandonment on the heart of her father (or of her mother) was the theme of the entire Visitandine tradition and the devotion to the Sacred Heart, in which the Martin sisters were immersed.” De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 143, n29.

⁵⁴ See De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 141-142. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 855.

⁵⁵ In a letter to Mme Guérin, Thérèse describes the motherly heart (gifted by the overflowing love of God) as one which understands (amid her helplessness of being misunderstood). *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 833.

⁵⁶ De Meester, *The Power of Confidence*, 143-144.

⁵⁷ Quotes from Thérèse will replicate italics, capitals, and punctuation, as found in the publication cited.

⁵⁸ She will sing “*the Mercies of the Lord*” as she will do eternally. *Story of a Soul*, 13. Translations from Sainte Thérèse de l’Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face, *Histoire D’une Ame: Manuscrits Autobiographiques* (Editions du Cerf et Desclée De Brower, 1972), 19.

⁵⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 13.

mysterious immanence influencing a person's every earthly moment,⁶⁰ while in Jansenism, it is understood in the light of election and grace; some are saved while others are damned.⁶¹ God arranges destiny by a force called grace, and extends favour through expressions of mercy.⁶² Here, Thérèse, in her feeling she and her family were shown preference (*préférences*) by Mary, heaven's Queen for her family, appears to endorse the Jansenist position.⁶³

Accepting arbitrary election and the inequality that it entails as the ground of reality ("God has preferences," showering "extraordinary favours" and "such favours"),⁶⁴ Thérèse proposes a solution within it. Using the flower as a metaphor, she notes that there are "great" flowers that God might look up at, but there are also little ones who should be content to have God glance down at amongst his feet.⁶⁵ She likens herself to a wildflower which has been graced with simple beauty.⁶⁶ To perfectly reveal God's love is to most fully be the flower one is created to be. Finally, God's love is most perfectly revealed in the simple soul, because it is in this soul that God descends furthest.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 120.

⁶¹ Jansenism involves God's inscrutable and arbitrary free choice, on the one hand, and God's unequal distribution of grace upon his creatures, on the other. Of concern is literal correspondence between human capabilities, and cultural representations of good, and grace. Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 119.

⁶² *Story of a Soul*, 13. Thérèse refers to Romans 9: 13,16 where God calls whom he pleases. In this approach, grace is like an onslaught of another, albeit divine, will. While, in a sense, imperceptible, if we correspond creator and created to parent and child, we see that the simple acquiescing child Thérèse is overtaken by the force of the emotion of the stronger adult (the God posed by her faith) toward an end unknown to her, in a movement sometimes felt as foreign and brusque. She is taken hostage by the force of 'God's emotion' in the form of the present Catholic culture, specifically in relation to how to *do* for God. This often incomprehensible God (present in Arminjon's book, Marie's lessons and others who have assimilated it) occupies a threatening role in her identity formation, and affects her self-development by accentuating her sense of powerlessness. Though Thérèse does not question the incomprehensibility of election, she questions inequality.

⁶³ *Story of a Soul*, 13, 14. Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire D'Une Ame*, 20.

⁶⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 13-14. "pourquoi le bon Dieu avait des préférences?" and "des faveurs extraordinaires," and "de telles faveurs." Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire D'Une Ame*, 20.

⁶⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 14. "...il en a crée aussi de plus petits [fleurs] et ceux-ci doivent se contenter d'être des pâquerettes ou des violettes destinées à réjouir les regards du bon Dieu lorsqu'il les abaisse à ses pieds." Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire D'Une Ame*, 21.

⁶⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 14. "...ses fleurs des champs dont la simplicité Le revit..." Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire D'Une Ame*, 21.

⁶⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 14. "...c'est jusqu'à leurs cœurs [ses fleurs des champs dont la simplicité] qu'il daigne s'abaisser." Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire D'Une Ame*, 21.

Thérèse resolves the problem of inequality by introducing the value of particularity, and by endowing lowliness with value (as associated with love). This is one aspect of her experience of her True Self.

Thérèse offers, somewhat tautologically, “Perfection consists in doing his will, in being what He wills us to be.”⁶⁸ (To be “great” suggests achieving much; can she simply be Thérèse?) In contrast to ‘greatness’, she adds that the wisdom God communicates is love, and “the nature of love is to humble oneself.”⁶⁹ Where this best takes place is in the child “who knows only how to make his feeble cries heard,”⁷⁰ God created occasions of powerlessness, and then chose to become the feeblest of his creations, the child.⁷¹ Thus Thérèse overturns the apparent injustice of Jansenism.

Thérèse states that her writing will constitute her “*thoughts* on the graces God deigned to grant me.” She will “stammer,” (a word Arminjon uses to illustrate human inadequacy in the face of God’s much superior knowing)⁷² when telling of her limitation and how God’s mercy operated through it. “Stammering” suggests elements of both a ‘kataphatic’ response (“verbose,” repetitious talk) and an ‘apophatic’ response (silent awe).⁷³ Thérèse contrasts her limited speech efforts, on behalf of her cognition of felt-impressions, with God the infinite source of those impressions. In the past, others responded to Thérèse’s stammering by anticipating her needs (Zélie had understood infant Thérèse’s “feeble” communications, ‘replying’ with nourishment; Pauline, with education and rewards), and she now asks this of Pauline, “you, who formed my heart,

⁶⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 14. This hints at Thérèse’s “martyrdom” over what her path to sainthood ought to be.

⁶⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 14.

⁷⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 14. Thérèse adds the “poor savage who has nothing but the natural law to guide him.”

⁷¹ *Story of a Soul*, 14 .

⁷² Arminjon, *The End of the Present World*, 134.

⁷³ *Story of a Soul*, 15. For Turner, the kataphatic moment is the “Christian mind deploying all the resources of language in the effort to express something about God, and in that straining to speak, theology ...borrow[s] vocabularies by analogy from many another discourse...”Thérèse does this using flowers, famous conversions, soiling a white robe, a smelter’s crucible, and infancy. Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20.

offering it up to Jesus.”⁷⁴ Thérèse asserts a felt-truth (True Self) about her early experience of limitation. She knows what it means to be misunderstood. She was teased by Marie for her mixed up way of saying things,⁷⁵ and sometimes altogether unheard, by Pauline who left for Carmel without her, did not listen at visits, or ‘hear’ the pain in her letters. Expanding the supportive help given to the child to a transcendent horizon, she asks Pauline (as God’s representative) to supportively anticipate what she means in her “stammering” to explain God’s merciful ways.

b. Thérèse’s Intent Achieved yet Open

Thérèse intends to share with Pauline the “mercies of the Lord” without “constraint” or “false humility,” as something Pauline will understand.⁷⁶ She begins by equating the outcome of her life with God’s intent in a literal way. It was God “who had her born in a holy soil, impregnated with a *virginal* perfume,”

... preceded by eight Lilies of dazzling whiteness. In His love He wished to preserve His little flower from the world’s poisoned breath. Hardly had her petals begun to unfold when this divine Saviour transplanted her to Mount Carmel ... now three Lilies in her [the Spouse of Virgins] presence. ...may the Lilyplant [in exile] be soon complete in heaven!⁷⁷

This sums up in “a few words... what God did for me.”⁷⁸ Asserting earlier “...His mercy alone brought about everything that is good in her,” Thérèse implies that her virginal and Carmelite states – gifts from God – as “everything good in her” are intrinsically good (by divine command).⁷⁹ Her feeling is an allegiance to a cultural interpretation of the Christian message (held by Zélie and Louis, who preferred the

⁷⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 15.

⁷⁵ *General Correspondence: Volume I*, 114.

⁷⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 15, 16 Though it seems that Thérèse here reads God as utterly benevolent, in the light of her acceptance of Arminjon, we must consider that ‘mercy’ may be meant as the favour of privilege, of being pre-ordained as one of the elect, who are known by particular qualities.

⁷⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 15-16.

⁷⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 16.

⁷⁹ She writes: “nothing in herself was capable of attracting divine glances, and His mercy alone brought about everything that is good in her.” *Story of a Soul*, 15.

virginal religious state for themselves). In affirming the above, does she also mean: if I am not a virginal religious, it shows that I love God less, and am loved less by God?

Thérèse's earlier comment, that she is able to glance unimpaired at the past due to maturation "in the crucible of exterior and interior trials," appears to mean that all the difficulties she encountered formed her in the best possible way, but through Arminjon's theodicy, it means that all her sufferings led to this one worthy end.⁸⁰ The assertion that only now is she capable of attracting God's divine glances suggests a False Self, a voice which states that God's love depends on becoming other than a child (refined, restrained, withdrawing). Enculturated to seek a community life based on a particular notion of purity and living the gospel (which has the capacity to alienate her from those who express sexual relations or who belong to the community of humanity alone), Thérèse expresses gratitude for the privilege of now belonging to it.

She, however, does not rest with ordinariness as her glory, *or* the pre-ordination of her Carmelite state as a privilege. By invoking the help of her mother and father (who she assumes have transcended death) to help her to do more than simply stammer about God's mercies, we suggest, she begins to re-engage her interior 'others' in ways she has not anticipated. When she reads Zélie's letters, describing how helpless she was, how much help she needed, and how she was loved and received, she 'hears' Zélie, through older 'ears'. From her position of an adult sense of limitation (existential), poor judgments could be forgiven, while loving ones had the power to strengthen her True Self.

Thérèse's introduction is dense with internal resonance. After asserting that God takes a particular interest in "each particular soul as though there were no others like it,"⁸¹ she gives evidence of this kind of interest through her mother's letters (describing Thérèse's activity so to endear her to her absent sisters).⁸² She quotes a mother who is openly pleased with her child's personality, who watched her actions closely, confident she

⁸⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 15-16.

⁸¹ *Story of a Soul*, 14.

⁸² *Story of a Soul*, 17-18.

knew her intimately, thought highly of her intentions, and recognized the magnitude of her efforts – supporting her declaration that she was surrounded by love, making her expressive of, and receptive to love. The “facts,” Thérèse is about to write, though trifling, are of value in their ability to charm a mother.⁸³ The love Thérèse assumes on Pauline’s part exemplifies the kind of love she plans to speak about.

c. Alençon – Repeating Zélie’s Letters

Stories tumble from Thérèse with little attention to chronological order. She writes playfully, telling how she came from an environment of love, to spread love around in a unique way:

God was pleased to surround me with love and the first memories I have are stamped with smiles and the most tender caresses. But although he placed so much love near me, He also sent much love into my little heart, making it warm and affectionate. I loved Mama and Papa very much and showed it in a thousand ways, for I was very expressive.⁸⁴

Thérèse notes “placed love near me,” and “love into my little heart” as two gifts. Is Thérèse not cognizant of the inter-relation between these in a child’s development, or does she intuit that she introduced a surprising level of affection in an otherwise restrained atmosphere, where spirits were dampened, alluding that this came from elsewhere? Zélie, in her writing, will validate that sense (Thérèse has “a spirit about her that I have not seen in any of you”).⁸⁵ Unaware that Rose Taillé might have been instrumental in this, Thérèse simply takes this up as her unique identity, an enduring part of her character, her True Self, mysteriously endowed (by God).

This introduction leads to an “imp” who wishes death to her mother to pre-empt the happy place of heaven, who swings too high, and needs Zélie’s company outdoors.⁸⁶ Thérèse reads from Zélie’s letters about her creative circumvention of hell, her

⁸³ *Story of a Soul*, 15.

⁸⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 17.

⁸⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 28. “...elle a d’esprit comme je n’en ai jamais vu à aucune de vous.” Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire D’Une Ame*, 37.

⁸⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 17-18.

judgment on the ownership of the family roses, and insistence on a formal procedure for ridding herself of sins.⁸⁷ She is reminded of her confidence in her mother's power and goodness, in her happy solution to the dilemma of naughtiness seizing her:

if I'm not good, I'll go to hell. But I know what I will do. I will fly to you in heaven, and what will God be able to do to take me away? You will be holding me so tightly in your arms.⁸⁸

Thérèse re-encounters her own trust in Zélie's maternal defence, but here she encounters her mother holding no qualms over, even enjoying, her creative initiative to foil God. Thérèse's powerful protector is swayed by her trust,

I could see in her eyes that she was really convinced that God could do nothing to her if she were in her mother's arms.⁸⁹

Thérèse recounts Zélie's perceptiveness of her sensitivity and good intention (with regard to the proper ownership of the rose her mother offered to her: Thérèse held that the roses belonged to Marie and her mother had no right to give Thérèse one);⁹⁰ hearing Zélie's awareness of her predicament (Thérèse had adopted Marie's emotion on the subject), affirmed the validity of her former distress. This is reinforced in Zélie noticing Thérèse's concern over committing 'wrongs' (strenuously pushing to be properly forgiven), in spite of the innocuousness of her 'fault'. Zélie's sensitive attention to Thérèse's desperation to be right according to the rules amid an onslaught of competing demands (love, be honest, be faithful, *and* be good), results in her recognizing Thérèse's emerging sense of right, as an independent self. By repeating Zélie, Thérèse re-lives herself impacting her mother, and feels secure in praise for her tenacity and aspiration, from one familiar with her limitations.⁹¹

⁸⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 18-19.

⁸⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 18.

⁸⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 18. Zélie intimates that she is disarmed by Thérèse's spiritedness. She empowers Thérèse from the past, by responding to Thérèse absorbing her teaching about God.

⁹⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 18.

⁹¹ *Story of a Soul*, 22.

d. *Zélie's Ambivalence*

Thérèse tries to point to her faults by repeating Zélie's words, "As for the little imp...she is so small, so thoughtless!" yet Zélie's assessment, "But still she has a heart of gold; she is very lovable and frank,"⁹² reveals a mother who is impressed by Thérèse's forth-rightness, such as pushing her sister, and then repenting of it (desire to continue the relation results in a confession of "I pushed Celine," with repentance close behind, "I won't do it again").⁹³ Intent on showing a former unruliness, Thérèse uses incidents of frustration as 'faultiness'. First, she recalls losing the sweets (from *Le Mans*) which were to convey her good intention of selflessness toward Céline, but, instead, upon their loss, conveyed loud distress, unshared by Pauline.⁹⁴ Ignoring the element of justifiable frustration (in what amount to demonstrations of independent agency at inconvenient moments), Thérèse uses these to show herself as faulted by "self-love."⁹⁵ A play on words, 'not even able to claim goodness whilst sleeping', illustrated by recalling her disturbance to Pauline and Celine's sleep, seems instead to heartily rejoice in being difficult (next to insipid behaviour),⁹⁶ parading her 'wilfulness' with a pleasure like Zélie's own. Thérèse is amused by her own defiance in the "fault" of "self love" "when she refused to kiss the floor even for a sou, and is similarly amused by her pride in the hope that by wearing her sleeveless blue frock her prettiness might be better noticed."⁹⁷

In the example of frustrated block-building, where "my faults shine forth with great brilliance," Thérèse reads from Zélie, "I am obliged to correct this poor little baby...when things don't go just right and according to her thinking, she rolls on the

⁹² *Story of a Soul*, 22. Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire d'Une Ame*, 29. Here, Zélie calls Thérèse a little ferret: "le petit furet."

⁹³ Thérèse also quotes from Zélie's letter that she would rather sleep in the cellar than give in. *Story of a Soul*, 22.

⁹⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 23.

⁹⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 24. In the struggle with self-love as early sin, Thérèse seems to echo a Jansenist concern with human nature. Yet, she might simply be establishing herself as one of those saints who was formerly self-absorbed and headstrong (*circulaire* material).

⁹⁶ Thérèse plays on the expression "good when sleeping." *Story of a Soul*, 24. Zélie wrote, "The more trouble I have [with her] the better I am!" *General Correspondence II*, 1210.

⁹⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 24.

floor in desperation like one without any hope. There are times when it gets too much for her and she literally chokes. She is a nervous child, but she is very good...⁹⁸

Thérèse's desire to be good, however, is Zélie's last word on the matter. Thérèse comments: "I would have become very bad and perhaps even been lost" (supporting the idea of a fortunate 'saving' upbringing due to election). Because of "excessive *self-love*" ("l'*amour propre*"), early correction of "faults" was needed, but "*love of the good*" (l'*amour du bien*) overcame the first – Thérèse recalls that even the suggestion that a "thing wasn't *good*" impelled her to correct herself.⁹⁹ (In the process of asserting something as 'not good', might there have been suggestion that *she* was not good?) Thérèse then reads that she gave her mother "great consolation," in copying "little acts of penance," yet the greater part of Zélie's letter is devoted to Thérèse's friendship with Céline.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps finally calming her sense of faultiness occurs through Zélie describing Thérèse as "charming, very alert, very lively, and sensitive;"¹⁰¹ as persistent and courageous in her affection for Celine. Zélie relates how Thérèse wished so much to stay in Celine's company; there was no cost too high. Her monumental (pitiful) restraint is now noticed, a vindication of her love and effort:

the poor little thing sits in a chair for two or three hours on end; and is given some beads to thread or a little piece of cloth to sew, and she doesn't dare budge but heaves deep sighs. When her needle becomes unthreaded, she tries to rethread it; and it's funny to see her not being able to succeed but still not daring to bother Marie. Soon you see two big tears rolling down her cheeks!¹⁰²

⁹⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 23. While Zélie affirms Thérèse's "good heart," this was an occasion for Zélie to guide Thérèse's high affective disorganization, in her failure to express her goal. There is indication that Thérèse applied unreasonable expectations to herself, perhaps by trying to imitate the ascetic practices that Zélie and Pauline share. She fails in her efforts to be selfless quite simply because she is not developmentally ready – at this point she is supposed to be asserting a self. Thus she fails inasmuch as her capability *fails her*.

⁹⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 24-25. Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire d'Une Ame*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ "Thérèse qui veut parfois se mêler de faire des pratiques..." Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire d'Une Ame*, 32-33. Zélie simply states that "Even Thérèse at times wants to join in performing the practices." Six months later in 1877, Zélie writes again of Thérèse's practices, adding "she records even a little too much." We do not read of Zélie dissuading this, but while Thérèse practices (role-play), Zélie corrects her ("I told her... to push a bead back"). Thérèse is threatened enough to reply: "Oh! Well, I can't find my chaplet." *General Correspondence: Volume II*, 1226, 1232.

¹⁰¹ Thérèse comments that this was mere imitation of family behaviour. *Story of a Soul*, 25.

¹⁰² *Story of a Soul*, 26.

Thérèse follows with how she loved to be at play with Céline, treasuring the affirmation of their bond more than dessert, the park, or the toys belonging to the Mayor's daughter.¹⁰³ Even Thérèse's 'sacramental life' began with Celine's cooperation, who produced blessed bread at her insistence, by "gravely" reciting "a *Hail Mary* over" bread she obtained.¹⁰⁴ Thérèse then notes Zélie's amusement over Thérèse's confidence in divine matters (when she and Céline try to make sense of God), explaining that "all powerful" means God "can do what He wants."¹⁰⁵ This felt-approval of her past innovation has the potential to strengthen Thérèse's present theological initiatives – in an environment where her spiritual sensibility is largely unheeded.

Thérèse then concludes with an "incident" to summarise her "whole life."¹⁰⁶ When Léonie offered Thérèse and Celine a basket of things she had outgrown, Celine took one object while Thérèse took the whole basket, saying, "I choose all."¹⁰⁷ She interprets the basket as the totality of opportunities to respond to God's advances, where all are free to choose little or much. She would come to choose all that God offers, affirming the spiritual goal of forgetting oneself, suffering, and choosing all that God wills over keeping her own will.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ I "much prefer[red] to stay in our own little garden to *scrape the walls* and get all the shiny stones there, then we would go and *sell* them to Papa who bought them from us with in *all seriousness*." *Story of a Soul*, 26.

¹⁰⁴ Making a sign of the cross over it Thérèse ate it with "great devotion," recalling it "tasted the same as the *blessed bread*." *Story of a Soul*, 26- 27.

¹⁰⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 27.

¹⁰⁶ Nevin, *God's Gentle Warrior*, 164. Nevin observes that Thérèse "imposes portentous meanings upon events and sayings which at the time of utterance they perhaps did not sustain." Though she expresses a "child wit, at once ingenuous and mischievous...familiar to the parents of any half-alert and reasonably expressive youngster," she means here to say more than "was I not a clever child, then?" This is a "self-constructing act," in Paul Ricoeur's words, a "configuration of a prefiguration," where she interprets an "incident as a portent of her will's destiny."

¹⁰⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 27.

¹⁰⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 27.

e. *Beyond Infancy*

Applying one of Zélie's endearments, "rascal" ("Lutin") to herself, Thérèse speaks of entering a phase of dubious initiative.¹⁰⁹ She narrates a dream which she interprets as indicating that even devils flee before the gaze of a child who, here, is felt to be "in a state of grace."¹¹⁰ An early experience of imperviousness to evil — an innocent child who is close to God intuitively knows what and what not to fear, which thwarts evil — is both romantic hagiography and *circulaire* material.

Returning to the present (1895) Thérèse comments (alluding to suffering in between time) that she has resumed the happy disposition, and "firm control over her actions" she once had, which, then, were due to "good" inspiration (rather than meritorious work);¹¹¹ virtue flowed naturally from her desire to be good, and, in 'sunny' circumstances, she was naturally acquiescing.¹¹² Such virtue, situated in the uncomplicated appeal of good, the contentment in family outings, and the beauty of nature felt as poetry in her heart, she feels was without merit — being a child with an unchallenged *natural* desire for good, allowed 'easy' virtue.¹¹³

f. *Summary Remarks for Recollections at Alençon*

When Thérèse begins her autobiography, Pauline is prioress, and Thérèse has recently been reunited with her companion, Celine. Flushed with felt-favour,¹¹⁴ she seems to reaffirm her familiar Catholic values (Jansenism and Arminjon's theology), aiming to show signs pointing to her electedness, and examples of herself as needing correction from an 'original wilfulness', perhaps, later, to list trials that merit a crown. However,

¹⁰⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 28. In Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire d'Une Ame*, 25, Zélie writes "Le Bébé est un lutin..."

¹¹⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 28.

¹¹¹ *Story of a Soul*, 28, 30. Thérèse remembers her natural good will was taken advantage of when her grandmother took her flowers. Though this didn't please her, she preferred to be silent and not excuse herself. "There was no merit here but natural virtue. ...this inspiration has vanished!"

¹¹² *Story of a Soul*, 29.

¹¹³ *Story of a Soul*, 29. This is an allusion to suffering to coming (and present suffering).

¹¹⁴ Louis has died, relieved from humiliation, making way for the possibility of Céline's entry. Approval from Carmel was felt by Thérèse to indicate that Louis has gone to heaven. *Story of a Soul*, 177-178.

as she writes her past, Thérèse encounters anew her mother reflecting pleasure in her, confidence in a “germ of goodness,”¹¹⁵ and pride in a “spirit ... that I have not seen in any of you.”¹¹⁶ Zélie’s approval reads as a tacit encouragement of a spark she herself was deprived of. Thérèse hears that good prevails in her. If Thérèse planned to write a beautiful *circulaire*, to appear once spirited but now tamed, or as reaching the heights of docility toward suffering, this subverts it, as here is a celebration of spirited initiative – how the self healthily begins. Thérèse is in league with her mother’s hope.

We noted earlier Thérèse developed through sensitive care-giving forming a self and object representations in which she felt unequivocally loved.¹¹⁷ Quoting her mother’s letters allows re-engagement with aspects of this experience in a way that might affect her transitional God-object. From them Thérèse feels her good self (and True Self): I was loved (am lovable) and I meant well (am good). She also discovers: I operated the rules given me (and was sometimes praised, found amusing, other times misunderstood). I was expected to change, to try harder even when I was trying hard. Being myself did not draw the kind of attention I hoped for. There are seeds of a bad self here: if I operate their rules better, I will be *not* misunderstood, not corrected, not laughed over, but taken seriously. Almost defiant in goodness, Thérèse forms a False Self which hopes to conquer by pleasing. The following period will accentuate this self. Trying to be good did not keep Zélie present, nor does it keep Louis close by. Nevertheless, at les Buissonnets, when home, Louis gives himself to her as she needs; his companionship compensates for Zélie’s absence.

g. Les Buissonnets

Thérèse reflects on her mother’s death. How small she felt next to death’s reality; how her awareness was underestimated. She recalls, toward the end of her mother’s illness when she and Celine were left to recite prayers in an empty room (in the absence of

¹¹⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 29.

¹¹⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 28.

¹¹⁷ Thérèse’s present sense of unreserved gratitude and peace reflects a foundational experience of being seen and held. McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 221. McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 231.

their mother), discovering that prayer belonged to motherly presence.¹¹⁸ Zélie had kept all securely together. An untroubled (“happy”) childhood ended (once “full of life,” she was now “timid, retiring, sensitive to an excessive degree” and easily reduced to tears), but a further experience of childhood mercy was to be found at “Les Buissonnets.”¹¹⁹ There, Thérèse recalls the consolation of her family together.

Thérèse writes that she replaced Zélie with Pauline, whose care, with Louis and Marie’s, was as God’s “beneficent rays upon” her.¹²⁰ Louis, “enriched now with a truly maternal love,”¹²¹ took her with him on his walks, and patiently accepted the roles she assigned him in her games, enacting his part with humoured reverence: “Papa stopped all his work and with a smile he pretended to drink [my precious mixture].”¹²² He “showered tender love upon his queen” in a way that “the heart feels but which the tongue and even the mind cannot express.”¹²³ She tells of him taking her fishing in the countryside among the flowers and birds, sometimes with the strains of military music on the wind. Here, feeling “sweet melancholy,” she began to meditate.¹²⁴ The jam in her bread symbolized her predicament. Bright when the day was still a promise, it was now faded because the awaited good was coming to an end, and “earth seemed again a sad place.”¹²⁵ With Louis, she had freedom to be delighted by the oncoming storm: “far from being frightened, I was thrilled with delight because God seemed to be so

¹¹⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 34.

¹¹⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 33-35. “for there my life was truly happy.”

¹²⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 35. These beneficent rays are a reservoir Thérèse later draws from in her trial. Nevin, *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 147. With regard to flower imagery (well used in *circulaires*), we enter an array of metaphors which are not consistent. For example, in correspondence with Thérèse, Pauline uses flowers to symbolize a self garden of opportunities where self-denial is the perfume of love. However, it does not seem likely that Thérèse likens Pauline’s care to an opportunity for self-denial.

¹²¹ *Story of a Soul*, 35. Zélie’s passing gives rise to the substituting maternal love of Papa’s “very affectionate heart.”

¹²² *Story of a Soul*, 36.

¹²³ *Story of a Soul*, 37

¹²⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 37.

¹²⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 37.

close!”¹²⁶ (The burden of protection being upon him, Louis was less enamoured by the storm.) Further, on their walks Papa “loved” her expressing charity on their behalf.¹²⁷ Thérèse then tells of her childish indignation at Victoire’s (their maid) lack of compliance with her wishes, for which Thérèse held no remorse, in contrast to her obedience at her first confession, for which Pauline had well prepared her.¹²⁸

“The feasts!” evoked deep happiness Thérèse remembers: Pauline communicated the “mysteries,” and then these were expressed.¹²⁹ The feast illustrates an event infused with emotion which later comes to ascribe value to the event, and now still evokes that emotion. Feast days were associated with being indulged by her family:

first I stayed in *bed* longer than on the other days; then Pauline spoiled her little girl by bringing her some chocolate to drink while still in bed and then she dressed her up like a little Queen.¹³⁰

Mass, the feast’s final expression, included feeling her relationship with Louis admired by onlookers: “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.”¹³¹ Thérèse relates how the priest’s sermon was listened to in the intimacy of their relationship where she witnessed Louis tearful openness to “eternal truths”.¹³² The day coming to end introduces the theme of experiencing “*exile* on this earth” and the feeling of sadness at the dispersion of the family.¹³³ Walking home, with Papa, she

¹²⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 38.

¹²⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 38-41.

¹²⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 39-40.

¹²⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 41. “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.” Thérèse describes a procession on the feast of Corpus Christi.

¹³⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 41.

¹³¹ *Story of a Soul*, 41-42.

¹³² *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.”

¹³³ *Story of a Soul*, 42.

contemplated “the star studded firmament” rather than looking “upon this dull earth.”¹³⁴ She loved their winter evenings: after checkers, she and Celine would sit on “Papa’s knees” while he sang stirringly, or recited poems, rocking them gently, teaching “eternal truths.”¹³⁵ Alone together for prayers, she felt that to see him was “to see how the saints pray;” the day was completed by a ritual kiss and her bid “goodnight.”¹³⁶

Thérèse affirms Pauline’s education and mothering (she found herself strengthened, corrected, and *unspoiled*). Her desire to please Pauline was such, she muses, that in spite of love for Louis, she strove to gain Pauline’s total approval for any activity he proposed.¹³⁷ She recalls how her illness elicited Pauline’s favours, in the sacrifice of her “beautiful knife” and the *promise* of even greater sacrifice and rewards.¹³⁸ Pauline clarified certain theological points for her nourishment, and on one feast day each year she experienced a justice (an award for school work) like a happy “judgment day” on hearing her just sentence read by “the King,” her father.¹³⁹ She shares that she admired her father; but though promoting the idea of him becoming king, she secretly wished to keep him in her possession.¹⁴⁰ On a visit to Trouville, Thérèse recalls her father motioning to suppress a compliment directed to her, then, notes her gratitude in never hearing a compliment from her family, stemming vanity and preserving her innocence.¹⁴¹ She concludes with asserting that she received enough affection to brace her for the “miseries” of “the world.”¹⁴²

¹³⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 43.

¹³⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 43.

¹³⁶ In order of age, Thérèse was bid “goodnight” last of all, taken by the elbows for her kiss, and her reply was in “a high pitched tone.” *Story of a Soul*, 43.

¹³⁷ When Pauline disapproved of her taking a walk, she cried till Pauline gave her a “Yes.” *Story of a Soul*, 44.

¹³⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 44. These took the form of a wheelbarrow ride and planting.

¹³⁹ “How glad I was to see the day of the distribution of prizes arrive each year! In this, as in all other matters, *justice* was strictly observed and I received only the rewards I deserved.” *Story of a Soul*, 45, 46-48. Thérèse then narrates the vision she has of her father’s illness, reflecting on how the truth about the present was already given, albeit veiled, in the past. This serves as a sign to show Louis figures as one of God’s elect.

¹⁴⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 48-49.

¹⁴¹ *Story of a Soul*, 48.

g. *Summary Remarks – Les Buissonnets*

Thérèse recalls that her depleted self was sheltered at Les Buissonnets. Only amongst her immediate family was she “truly happy,” because there her weakness is accommodated.¹⁴³ Thérèse’s need stimulates a new occasion for caregiver mercy. Louis’ cooperates with Thérèse’s play, enabling her to practice roles, important to her development. Also, in the security of Louis’ watchful presence Thérèse is anchored and compassed,¹⁴⁴ allowing her to safely retreat (meditate). Not needing to be guarded, she can “reorganize” herself.¹⁴⁵ This safe environment, like Louis, its instigator, is not consistently present.

The feast is a reconstitution of family wholeness. Louis and Thérèse’s sisters lend joy to the feast, but anticipation of their leaving casts a shadow. The closeness and assurance briefly had by Thérèse dissipates in its passing, revealing commitment to pursuits away from her. The feast is like a warm moment in the cold sea of absence. Louis’ leaving, especially, has the power to affect Thérèse’s God object representation. In Zélie’s absence, Pauline is felt as her effective anchor; an air of ineffectuality and vagueness surrounds Louis’ intermittent presence. God will become Thérèse’s sole friend and the ultimate controller of all events. Thérèse will distance herself from the value of physicality (no human mirror affirmed her physical beauty), leading her to Arminjon’s other-worldliness as her true value. Thérèse accepts Louis’ leaving (on his trips), treating her consequent sadness and difficult behaviour as a fault (emerging false self). Fairburn explains why a child might deny parental deficiency:

It is better to be a sinner in a world ruled by God than to live in a world ruled by the devil. A sinner in a world ruled by God may be bad; but there is always a sense of security to be derived from the fact that the world around is good.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² *Story of a Soul*, 49.

¹⁴³ *Story of a Soul*, 36.

¹⁴⁴ “Compassed” meaning aware of the direction in which her security lay.

¹⁴⁵ Louis shares his love nature with Thérèse, but what is occurring within him? He has lost siblings, four children, and now his wife – is part of him with them?

¹⁴⁶ McDargh, *Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory*, 233.

Thérèse, in the present, acknowledges Louis' former loving care. (Recollecting Louis' fathering presence re-establishes his virtue after his humiliation. His forgotten goodness images Jesus' forgotten mercy). Through her otherworldly focus, Thérèse attributes felt-abandonment with a transcendent value: a sense of exile – true belonging is not to be felt on earth by those who were destined for a home elsewhere. Consolidated by Louis' attention to “eternal truths,” Thérèse feels her real home is “the everlasting repose of heaven, that never-ending *Sunday* of the *Fatherland*.”¹⁴⁷ She points to grace as preventing her from being comfortable in a world treacherously ephemeral; her losses as producing spiritual health – implanting distaste for the physical present. Paradoxically, Louis' lap, “knees,” rocking, a kiss, his voice in poetry and in song, represents the heaven Thérèse will seek.

Her True Self acknowledges Louis' play as something good, and does not deny Louis' absences. Though feeling insecure, Thérèse is reluctant to apportion blame. She does not interrogate the Catholic culture that justifies Louis' travel, but finds fault in life on this imperfect earth (happiness is reserved for heaven), protecting their shared culture. Though devaluing the physical present faults God's creating, Thérèse prefers to view sadness as caused by the passage of life as far from heaven, rather than by her carers.

Experiencing a lively faith in the present, Thérèse describes her upbringing as a graced unfolding. She praises Pauline and Louis' guard against spoiling her and recalls Louis once a year *justly* awarding her a prize.¹⁴⁸ Her father-king rewarded her on her hard-won merit, “like a picture of the Last Judgment” (for the faithful) painted by Arminjon. Thérèse lends the grandeur and benevolence felt in this at-home judgment scene, where she enjoys the favour of family bonds, to the judging Father-God.¹⁴⁹ The ‘fair’ judgment, between parent and child, however, is comprised of awareness of the child's capacity and giving consideration to this. Away from family, there are certain kinds of fairness, but within family, ‘fairness’, in compensating for limitation, favours.

¹⁴⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 42, 43. For heaven as Sunday, with one's family (“at the great hearth of our heavenly Father”), see Arminjon, *The End of the Present World*, 214, 230.

¹⁴⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 45.

¹⁴⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 45.

Thérèse's experience of justice involves the favour of filial bond. In the following section, the absence of family security amid 'Catholic demands' becomes too much.

Phase II: "*The Distressing Years*"

Phase II surrounds the next two chapters from *Man A*, where Thérèse encapsulates what it means to be small by recalling clutching at the mercies it draws, which threaten to fall away.¹⁵⁰ In Phase 1, balanced by her mother's narration, Thérèse makes light of her 'faults' from a now "mature" perspective. While still trying to amuse in Phase II, here are no mere foibles; Thérèse is miserable. A True Self calls for compassion to dignify what was lost.

Thérèse begins "*The Distressing Years*" (*Années Douloureuses*) with the word "poor" to describe her state. She was a "poor little flower" who had to find sustenance in a shared and impartial soil that did not give her "poor little heart" the strength to practise "virtue" (fortitude) in her circumstances, so to "rise above" the "miseries of life."¹⁵¹ This echoes her mother's forgiving tone. Though she continues to 'laugh' at her failings, she now includes self-compassion. Recalling a sense of not-fitting at boarding school, she describes how relief came on her return home: her heart once again "expanded," she jumped "up on Papa's lap," and "his kiss" caused her to forget her troubles.¹⁵² "The poor little thing needed these [rewards of a coin and a 'pretty hoop' for her school successes] family joys very much, for without them life at boarding school would have been too hard."¹⁵³

Thérèse 'hears' in her writing (internally) that she retreated from places at every opportunity to eat from her 'family table', like one starving. Beyond suffering depression, as noted in Chapter Three, Thérèse's poor peer-relations owed to her interests. School-children's games were unlike the spiritual 'rule' which Thérèse had practiced playing. She liked to play hermits, while the Maudelondes liked "*dancing*

¹⁵⁰ These chapters are entitled "*The Distressing Years*," and "*First Communion Boarding School*."

¹⁵¹ "Pauvre petit fleur" Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire d'Une Ame*, 63.

¹⁵² *Story of a Soul*, 53-54.

¹⁵³ *Story of a Soul*, 54.

quadrilles;” she liked to bury dead birds while others played sport.¹⁵⁴ Conceding to her poor companionship, Thérèse remembers she was adept at gathering flowers.¹⁵⁵ She does not suggest these traits to signify holy sensitivity, but to show her failure and inability to ‘grow up’ led to a certain comprehension about life.

Thérèse enjoyed playing “hermits” with her cousin Marie, she recalls, as they understood the rules of the game with one mind.¹⁵⁶ This involved an effusive blessing over cake, and the combination of *unity of wills* and *blind* holiness which caused a disaster. The pairing of naïveté (Thérèse and Marie) was promptly undone.¹⁵⁷ She recalls Céline standing up for her at school, taking care of her health and letting her watch her at play – so becoming known as “Céline’s little girl.”¹⁵⁸ She tells of Céline’s over-attention (which resulted in the arms of her embracing doll going up Thérèse’s nose), and of how they resolved their differences (Thérèse’s dolls behaved badly compared with Céline’s) which mostly involved tears; their “petals swayed in the same breeze,” “what gave one joy or pain did exactly the same to the other.”¹⁵⁹ She experienced Céline’s first communion as her own, and Louis provided her with cherries so that she might have the pleasure of giving them to her.¹⁶⁰ A father like Louis supplied love with which to love, a sister (like Céline) did not refuse companionship.

¹⁵⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 54.

¹⁵⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 54. Nevin *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 162. Nevin observes that here Thérèse takes up a Cinderella role. She didn’t like dancing, but was able to find the prettiest flowers to gather; “I stirred the envy of my little companions.” Nevin adds that Thérèse, though, varies from the fairytale in that she “portrays no wickedness in anyone else. She charges herself with awkwardness and misfitting, an outsider without recriminations. The collectivity of the dance underscores her isolation but is relieved by the visit to the park, where she thrives in both the gathering of flowers and the admiration of the other girls. At last she got one thing right and so much better than anyone else.” Nevin continues, “This passage parallels her conventual life. The one who was not up to chores and could not keep awake at morning prayer had a certain gift she could impart.” Nevin *God’s Gentle Warrior*, 162.

¹⁵⁶ This involved reciting the rosary, screening their faces from the public. *Story of a Soul*, 57.

¹⁵⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 55.

¹⁵⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 55-56.

¹⁵⁹ The tears were toward being reinstated as “Céline’s little girl,” when Céline declared: “You’re no longer my little girl; that’s over with, and I’ll *always remember it!*” *Story of a Soul*, 56-57.

¹⁶⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 57.

a. *Thérèse's Sickness*

Thérèse remembers Pauline agreeing to her suggestion that they might “go away” to “a far desert place” and be hermits together.¹⁶¹ This was not to be. Bitter sadness is felt in Thérèse’s recollection of Pauline’s unexpected departure for Carmel.¹⁶² With mild humour, Thérèse recounts her enterprising but unsuccessful effort to enter Carmel as a nine year old, helpfully arranged by Pauline,¹⁶³ but questions hang. Her serious intent was not treated seriously, Pauline’s ambition was treated as more appropriate than hers, and Pauline’s vocation somehow absolved Pauline from taking care of Thérèse.¹⁶⁴ The scenario cries out ‘does a child matter to God?’

Thérèse recalls how Pauline’s attention to her cousins during her visits to Carmel was felt as an abandonment of her (“Pauline is lost to me!”).¹⁶⁵ She makes no mention of Marie’s strictness or Pauline’s insensitive letters, but recalls that on one evening away from home she began to shiver, and lost the faculty of connecting with her family (which she attributes to demonic influences).¹⁶⁶ She recalls her family’s attentive and prayerful watch while she is helpless to control herself.¹⁶⁷ This watch, which becomes increasingly anxious, was concluded, she writes, by her recovery through the “ravishing smile of the Blessed Virgin” whose “Ray” warmed her with joy.¹⁶⁸ But, vocalizing this healing, Thérèse recalls, marked the beginning of her *spiritual* trials.¹⁶⁹ Though the

¹⁶¹ *Story of a Soul*, 57.

¹⁶² *Story of a Soul*, 58. “Ah! how can I express the anguish of my heart! In one instant, I understood what life was; until then, I had never seen it so sad; but it appeared to me in all its reality, and I saw it was nothing but a continual suffering and separation. I shed bitter tears... ..if I had learned of my dear Pauline’s departure very gently, I would not have suffered as much perhaps...but it was as if a sword were buried in my heart.”

¹⁶³ Was Thérèse respecting her own then hope? *Story of a Soul*, 58.

¹⁶⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 59. “I felt this [Carmel as my vocation] with so much force that that there wasn’t the least doubt in my heart; it was not the dream of a child led astray but the *certitude* of a divine call...”

¹⁶⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 60

¹⁶⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 60.

¹⁶⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 60-67.

¹⁶⁸ “...the luminous Ray which had warmed her again...” *Story of a Soul*, 65- 66.

¹⁶⁹ *Story of a Soul*, 67.

healing (“my grace”) led to a joyful meeting with Pauline, the sisters at Carmel had their own ideas about her experience, envisioning an objective manifestation (a sign of her vocation?), which caused her to feel that she “had lied” about her vision.¹⁷⁰

b. Visit to Alençon

Thérèse recalls dreaming up a name for religious life. Combining a love of her own name and her devotion to “*Little Jesus*,” she arrived at “Thérèse of the Child Jesus.”¹⁷¹ To her joy, Marie de Gonzague, without knowing this, suggested the self-same name. Her childhood love of *Joan of Arc* evoked the desire to not simply become a saint, but to become a “great saint.”¹⁷² Seeing her smallness, she would trust in God to raise her to this level.

Recalling a visit to Alençon, Thérèse contrasts an experience of lightness in the world (being fêted by friends was a mere “bewitching of vanity”) with the reality of death, and the shortness of life (felt in returning to childhood places and praying at her mother’s grave).¹⁷³ She assesses fidelities. Their friends at Alençon “alli[ed] the joys of this earth to the service of God.”¹⁷⁴ Thérèse reflects that people ought to think more on death, that the only good on earth is “to love God ... and to be poor in spirit...”¹⁷⁵ She recalls Pauline getting her to perform acts of renunciation, through the symbol of flowers,¹⁷⁶ Marie encouraging her in this respect, and in prayer, and preparing her for her first holy communion; seated on her lap, Marie passed “her *large and generous heart*.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 66

¹⁷¹ *Story of a Soul*, 71.

¹⁷² *Story of a Soul*, 71-72.

¹⁷³ ‘Shortness of life’ is an idea found in her mother’s correspondence. *Story of a Soul*, 73.

¹⁷⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 73. Valuing her mother’s love rendered other types of happiness, “enchanted...houses and gardens,” as ephemeral.

¹⁷⁵ This is reminiscent of both Arminjon and Zélie. *Story of a Soul*, 73.

¹⁷⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 74.

¹⁷⁷ Thérèse recalls her emerging mental prayer. This reference to her early spiritual development, and to Jesus instructing her in secret, is an election signifier. *Story of a Soul*, 74-75.

c. “*First Communion*”

Thérèse writes that at eleven she was still coddled as a child. This caused her embarrassment during her Abbey retreat, but the support of her family enabled her to take part in it.¹⁷⁸ Describing the associated memories of her first communion, Thérèse does not articulate what transpired (avoiding what occurred with Mary’s smile), noting, “There are certain things which lose their perfume as soon as they are exposed to the air.”¹⁷⁹ She discloses that the “first kiss of Jesus... was a kiss of *love*; I *felt* that I was *loved*,” that she felt herself taken up “in the immensity of the ocean,” and contrary to the speculations of onlookers (over her tears), she did not feel the loss of her mother, but unity with her.¹⁸⁰ (It is as if Thérèse has to shield what makes her feel precious.) She recalls each element of the day as in harmony with family love: embrace, gifts, reunion and feeling special. Consecrating herself to Mary, she felt both special and appropriate: Mary who is with Zélie, who healed Thérèse by her “*visible smile*.”¹⁸¹ Despite some melancholy the following day, the experience of spiritual enrichment intensified.¹⁸² She shares her delight in being granted a second communion through daring to ask for it, which resulted in the happiness of kneeling “between Papa and Marie.”¹⁸³ Finally, Therese recalls her desire to receive the Holy Spirit in the “sacrament of love,” whereupon she felt given the strength to suffer.¹⁸⁴

d. “*Boarding School*”

The feasts over, she recalls that she felt life at boarding school “unhappy;” here, unlike the pleasure her father and sisters expressed, she felt no mercy toward her desire to

¹⁷⁸ Adding humour, she writes that she “made a spectacle of herself” by wearing a big crucifix in her cincture. *Story of a Soul*, 75.

¹⁷⁹ “There are deep spiritual thoughts which cannot be expressed in human language without losing their intimate and heavenly meaning; they are similar to ‘...the white stone I will give to him who conquers, with a name written on the stone which no one KNOWS except HIM who receives it’ [Rev 2:17].” *Story of a Soul*, 77.

¹⁸⁰ Thérèse writes that she appropriated Zélie’s desire to be with God as her own. *Story of a Soul*, 77-78.

¹⁸¹ *Story of a Soul*, 78.

¹⁸² *Story of a Soul*, 79.

¹⁸³ *Story of a Soul*, 79-80.

¹⁸⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 80.

entertain.¹⁸⁵ She found unself-conscious play difficult, but studying catechism and competing for prizes to her taste.¹⁸⁶ This, however, brought tears because repetition was not her strength, and she was ambitious to excel.¹⁸⁷ While successful at school, Thérèse recalls she won no praise at uncle Isidore's home – here she was “incapable,” “stiff” and “clumsy” (leaving God alone to praise her).¹⁸⁸

Her “sensitive and affectionate” heart, she relates, accustomed to certain ways of loving, could not attune itself to the ways of other children. She felt her love misunderstood, and others seemed to be capricious and fickle.¹⁸⁹ Recalling herself unable to succeed at manipulating love, Thérèse exclaims, “O blessed ignorance!”¹⁹⁰ Her inability became a gift of incorruptibility, she reflects, keeping her from being entrapped by the desire to please others. With her natural desire for love, she would have been seduced and “burned entirely by the *misleading light* had I seen it shining in my eyes,” but, she reasons, God chose to spare her from this.¹⁹¹ Knowing that she would fall like the Magdalene, God removed the stone in her path before she encountered it.¹⁹² Thus, she owes God the same gratitude for mercy as a great sinner, because God loved her with the fatherly “love of unspeakable foresight.”¹⁹³

Thérèse recalls her “scruples” (compulsive self-examination and confession) and Marie's patient listening to her while she curled her hair for school.¹⁹⁴ When Celine

¹⁸⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 81.

¹⁸⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 81.

¹⁸⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 81-82.

¹⁸⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 82.

¹⁸⁹ Thérèse writes that while remaining faithful to who she befriended, she did not “beg for an affection that was refused.” *Story of a Soul*, 82-83.

¹⁹⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 83.

¹⁹¹ *Story of a Soul*, 83.

¹⁹² *Story of a Soul*, 83- 84.

¹⁹³ *Story of a Soul*, 84.

¹⁹⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 85.

leaves boarding school, Thérèse, unable to remain there alone, leaves too, continuing her education at Mme. Cochain's house.¹⁹⁵ She recalls enrolling for the Association of Mary to be like her sisters who had belonged to this, but because she no longer belonged to the Abbey, she was without any connection of friendship.¹⁹⁶ So she spent time alone (before the Blessed Sacrament) in conversation with Jesus, who increasingly became her "only friend."¹⁹⁷ She reflects how in her sense of exile,

Sometimes I felt *alone*, very much alone, and as in the days of my life as a day boarder when I walked sad and sick in the big yard, I repeated... "Life is your barque not your home!"¹⁹⁸

The "barque" ("navire"), reoccurring in Arminjon as a "skiff" ("nacelle"), an image enduring to the present,¹⁹⁹ is felt to take her to an eternal family reunion, "around the *Paternal hearth*" of heaven.²⁰⁰

Thérèse tells of her final abandonment, Marie's entry to Carmel.²⁰¹ Marie had become her mother and educator; her departure represented the loss of one who knew her, who helped organize her, especially in relation to her scruples.²⁰² Thérèse recalls that the Guérins tried to cheer her up with a visit to Trouville, but the loss of Marie's guidance led her to confess to vanity in wearing ribbons in her hair, and to cry to draw sympathy for her headache.²⁰³ A second visit was cut short by homesickness. Upon hearing of Marie's departure, Thérèse lost taste for her room, a nest of consolations she created for

¹⁹⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 85-6.

¹⁹⁶ She states that this permission meant as privilege felt cold and painful. *Story of a Soul*, 86-87.

¹⁹⁷ *Story of a Soul*, 86-87. She prayed till Louis came to fetch her. This brought peace as she observed spiritual conversation involved so much self-love.

¹⁹⁸ *Story of a Soul*, 87.

¹⁹⁹ "La vie est *ton navire* et non pas ta demeure." From Lamartine's poem "Reflection." *Story of a Soul*, 87-88. Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire D'Une Ame*, 104. "Skiff" is a boat that helps us reach the shores of heaven. Arminjon, *The End of the Present World*, 304. "Une nacelle enfin qui nous aidera... à atteindre les célestes rivages." Arminjon, *Fin Du Monde Présent*, 106.

²⁰⁰ *Story of a Soul*, 88. "...la famille réunie au foyer *Paternal* des Cieux..." Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire D'Une Ame*, 104. See Arminjon, *Fin Du Monde Présent*, 83.

²⁰¹ *Story of a Soul*, 88-89.

²⁰² "We were sad when we knew Papa was so far away [Constantinople]." *Story of a Soul*, 89.

²⁰³ *Story of a Soul*, 89-90.

herself, and frequently seized Marie with embraces.²⁰⁴ Reflecting on the weakness and poverty of her character, noted by others, Thérèse reasons that God took her to Carmel before Celine to protect her.²⁰⁵ In a final grasp for care, she remembers asking her deceased four older siblings in heaven that they might dote on their youngest sister, with the same affections her living siblings once had. Thérèse recalls “I knew [felt] then that if I was loved on earth, I was also loved in heaven.”²⁰⁶

e. Summary Remarks – Phase II

Thérèse notes her past neediness in a number of contexts. She recalls with astute detail what it means to lose a reliable environment where significant persons are constantly present and protective of those in their care (“circle of security”), true affirmation for her abilities, and an ongoing familiar relational exchange (which for her was affectionate, and affirmed religious values). She describes the goodness of what was had (and the badness of what was not had) in a nuanced way. Her accuracy in this reflects a True Self.

Her baby sweetness faded and the age of cute precociousness outgrown, Thérèse recalls experiencing herself as inconveniently babyish, and painfully self-aware. Without her child-appeal, a mark of her identity and claim to specialness, she was powerless to make herself esteemed for being Thérèse. In spite of Thérèse’s good intentions and efforts to co-operate, her care-givers, one by one, leave to pursue their own God-ends.

A False Self, speaking from the present, diminishes spontaneity and lightness (caprice), characteristic of the child, by aligning these with the enemy, “the world.” She affirms that her weaknesses were for the best; they brought her safely to Carmel. Through vignettes showing her dependence, competitiveness, scruples, social ineptness, and lack of elegance, Thérèse writes that God (who controls all) was her true non-abandoning

²⁰⁴ *Story of a Soul*, 91.

²⁰⁵ *Story of a Soul*, 91.

²⁰⁶ *Story of a Soul*, 93.

friend, who alone taught her.²⁰⁷ God allowed her ‘failures’ and consequent detachment from human friendships so that he could have her to himself, for his own good purpose.²⁰⁸ God, as companion, emerged in the past through her need for praise, and the protection of her hope to be like Joan of Arc. Was to openly want this somehow indecorous – her communion with God and God’s favour not to be articulated, so as to shield its role?

A True Self is re-gathering to re-affirm the strength and confidence that Zélie affirms. From her mother’s letters, Thérèse finds she possessed a spark of goodness other than docility. Concerned with telling Pauline “everything,” from subliminal sadness and anger, her detailed confession doubles as ‘God’s’ irony.²⁰⁹ From a revived True Self, Thérèse tells Pauline of the sad consequences of her leaving. Amid self-effacement and fault-finding, she finds what she is good at (discovering and collecting pretty flowers, an eye for the existing good) – her God-imaging – and offers it as her gift.

Concluding Notes for Phases I and II

Dimensions of a True Self and False Self were found in Thérèse’s reading of mercy expressed to her as a little child, and recalling yearning for mercy when feeling bereft of it. We review those. From her secure place in Carmel, Thérèse is reminded of the path her life took. Searching for the good in that early passage,²¹⁰ she surveys God’s grace as achieving in her a certain Catholic epitome that her mother yearned for.²¹¹ She gives thanks for the mercy that brought her to wear an “immaculate” baptismal robe, as a Lily blooming in “dazzling whiteness,” due to a “holy soil, impregnated with a virginal

²⁰⁷ This is a consistent theme in *Imitation of Christ*. See, for example, À Kempis, *Imitation*, 41, 176-177.

²⁰⁸ Immense suffering (coming from a good God who controls all) is dignified by revealing its purpose was to prepare for a mission.

²⁰⁹ ‘Under obedience’, Thérèse does not spare Pauline the details. *Story of a Soul*, 60.

²¹⁰ Thérèse uses the idea of “God works all things toward the good of those who love him” (Rom 8: 28) as a base truth.

²¹¹ *Story of a Soul*, 200. “...ton amour va jusqu’à la folie.” Sainte Thérèse, *Histoire D’Une Ame*, 228.

perfume.”²¹² Attaining a vocation dedicated to God is not easy (Zélie and Louis were refused, and Leonie failed twice); God’s mercy brings it.

Thérèse questions why she is fortunate where others are not, but not the requirements of the quest she was born into. Her God was conveyed through family love, something which she very much wanted. Family love meant to dream and imagine the Martin culture with them, to hold true what they approved of, to suffer now for a reward later, and to measure oneself by how much one loves Jesus in comparison to others. If the Martins were to be worthy of heaven (as they understood it, and as Arminjon suggested), they needed to love Jesus better than those who would be refused heaven (who loved Jesus poorly). Loving belonged to family togetherness, but this togetherness did not always equate to happy spontaneity. Sometimes it entailed earning, by self-restraint – sitting quietly with Celine, obeying Marie’s rules, and accepting exclusion, such as, being an unsuitable age for Mass.²¹³ Not being good enough for family love, ‘holy’ friendships and ‘holy’ events, formed a False Self construct where Thérèse holds a ‘good’ God as guardian of these, with herself as faulted (a sinner). A True Self feels sins are incapacities and limitations which are fixed/made up for by God, while a False Self defends a practice that devalues her: naming failures produced by the rules of holy friendships (required by Pauline and Marie), and holy events (silence in a convent, such as at Le Mans) as ‘sin’.

A darker side to passing on a culture of faith involves a child’s struggle with the threat of parents severing the parent-child bond if they refuse to support parental faith. A perception (on the parents’ part) that parents who do not turn their child’s heart toward God will be held eternally accountable for their child’s faith, or lack thereof, can lead to a fearful manipulation of the child. The threat of severance does not need to be explicitly stated; it may be implied in how existing members of the family are treated. At not quite three years of age, Thérèse deflects such manipulation (being sent to hell for bad actions) by inventing a way to escape. Next to abundant affection from her family, there is a threat; she might deserve ‘hell’, implying that there are sons,

²¹² *Story of a Soul*, 14, 15-16.

²¹³ Though her parents felt that Mass was too long for Thérèse, she would have felt, in her inability to be silent and for so long, that she was deficient in relation to a holy thing.

daughters, brothers and sisters, who may justifiably be treated this way. It is her family (not strangers) who introduce the possibility that one might be cut off from their presence. She evades the threat by invoking family bonds which she holds more real (sacred) than divine punishment, as she has never felt entirely cast away from her parent's presence (Zélie's face reappeared in Semallé).

Thérèse supports a False Self when she agrees to obey all rules/'keep the faith' at any cost, but True Self, when she assumes that maternal love will spare her from hell (there are some costs she does not agree to). Later, she will offer to others the privilege that she allows herself, by suggesting that if they were to be like her, an audaciously confident child, God, too, will love them. Thérèse bases her correction on the felt-primacy of her bond with Zélie. She appeals to filial privilege, a metaphor that appears in Hebrew literature (God as mother, as shepherd). In New Testament Scriptures, there is talk of family betrayal, and cutting off those who do not believe, for the sake of Christ, and images of an elect who give up their lives for an imperishable laurel, for a judge-God surveying a competition,²¹⁴ talk far from the remonstrating patriarchs and prophets who present God's justice back to God. Thérèse's True Self activity resembles that of the patriarchs and prophets.

Jacob Chinitz reflects on this activity: God limited himself by sharing "reason" with humanity, so that created life could proceed.²¹⁵ Though we cannot "fathom" the overall "reasoning" of events, we have the ability to argue with God about our position of not understanding all.²¹⁶ This is not unlike Thérèse placing the problem of her limitation squarely in front of her caregiver. Chinitz concludes, "perhaps then it is correct to say

²¹⁴ See Mt 19: 29, Mark 10:29-30, Luke 14:26. These ideas, incorporated in the New Testament, reflect some aspects of the Hellenistic "polis," of good and heroic citizenship, functionality, the gymnasium, and a certain kind of education. F.E. Peters, "Hellenism and the Near East" *Biblical Archaeologist*, Winter, 1983, pp 33-39. At 34, The Greeks devised an "effective way to transmit their values. Other societies relied on absorption or mimesis...to orient the young; the Greeks...did not 'orient' but rather instructed their young in schools [not to impart techniques, but] ...to transmit culture." Alexander the Great engaged his young men in studying Homer, based on his analysis: "to fight like a Hellene, one had to think like a Hellene."

²¹⁵ "[T]he logic of events that are inexplicable to us" God reserves for himself. Jacob Chinitz, "Creations and the Limitations of the Creator," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol 34, No 2, 2006, 126-129,128-129.

²¹⁶ Chinitz, "Creations and the Limitations of the Creator," 129. "My children have triumphed over Me, have triumphed indeed" (Bava Mestzia) 59b.

that the limitations upon God and the limitations upon man are not weaknesses but challenges – for the former patience and the latter, steadfastness.”²¹⁷

Hell, Thérèse is taught, is an insurmountable conclusion for those who resist grace, who intentionally dissent from Catholic culture. The threat of being cut off from a parent-creator produces fear. Her True Self rises to correct this. She remonstrates with Zélie, based on the felt-reality of Zélie (a God-object representation) already dispensing mercy toward her limitation, and her tacit acknowledgment of filial privilege – to correct an unacceptable threat. Running away from the reach of a God whose dimensions are Zélie’s province, takes up a tradition which acknowledges the fundamentally interactive character of a filial relationship. Though this example is in the past, it is tinder for the present. We will see Thérèse once again take the liberty of presenting God’s own justice back to God – feeling confident (as she has felt previously) that God will respond to her prayer.

In the present, Thérèse is further expressing her vocation.²¹⁸ God has mercifully realized her desire in part: being in Carmel, with her sisters, fulfils Zélie and Louis’ dream for the religious life for themselves and for her. But there are other pressing desires, such as living this life so that it leads to great sainthood, and affirming herself as much loved, wanted, valued, and *noticed*, defined by familial relations alone, as in former times. Reminded of once feeling the zeal she imagined drove Jean D’Arc, “born for *glory*” (not “evident to the eyes of mortals, [because] it would consist of becoming a great *saint!*”), she does not want to merely receive affection; she wants to show God “proofs of her love.”²¹⁹ Yet, *earning* a palm, through one’s vocation, militates against simply being a ‘darling poppet’, against being valued for daughterly/sisterly relation alone.

²¹⁷ The human response of turning God’s logic back to God leads “to consoling God.” Chinitz, “Creations and the Limitations of the Creator,” 129.

²¹⁸ There is talk of going to Saigon as a Carmelite missionary. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 820.

²¹⁹ Thérèse wrote a pious recreation on Jeanne d’Arc in 1894. *Story of a Soul*, 72.

Can Thérèse reconcile her sense of mission (to make conversions) with simply being *Thérèse*? Next to having her limitation acknowledged, she wants also to feel that God takes her seriously, is impressed by her sense of drama and her poetic ardour, and, in yearning for deep communion with her, desires to share great thoughts with her.²²⁰ She suffers to appear as God's plaything (delighting, without serious influence) – a gift through which to negotiate life – but she feels she is much more. A hidden felt-value to God (involving intimacy and deep communion like the fullness of sexual relating) allows her, interiorly, to rise above appearances. In Chapter Six, Therese finds how to 'be' by turning to her particular being in relation – being as a child.

²²⁰ Pauline asks Thérèse to write and perform "pious recreations," such as, "Jeanne D'Arc" (1894, 1895), "The Divine Little Christmas Beggar (1895), "The Flight into Egypt" (1896), "The Aviary of the Child Jesus" (1896), and "The Triumph of Humility" (1896) – reminiscent of little Thérèse charming her mother with her poetry recitation. *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Volume II*, 1233. See Six, *Light of the Night*, 37, 97-99.