

AN ATTEMPT AT THEOLOGIZING THE DOCTRINE OF THE LITTLE WAY OF SAINT THÉRÈSE OF THE INFANT JESUS

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Saint Thérèse of the Infant Jesus is a special case in spiritual theology. A deep person, she was also simple. Reflective, yet she did not systematize. While intuitive, her form remained affective. As a mystic, she narrated the unnarratable, and as a messenger, she implied herself in the message. This sort of literary 'genre', is capable of revealing her crucial doctrine even to the ordinary people. When one tries to analyze her message or even a concept, one has to understand it according to the way she received and conceived it in herself. The way she conceived and received this message into her life was particular to her character, feminine in nature and determined in all her existence. In the history of Christian Spirituality, the re-discovery of the evangelical message of Love and its application in an original way in the life of Thérèse marked the beginning of an anthropo-theocentric awareness in the minds of the faithful. People were aware of a new spirit of 'Childhood', a re-living the heart of the Gospel message, inaugurated in a new way by Thérèse in the late nineteenth century. Recognizing her weakness, she searched for a new way which she found very straight, very short and totally new (Ms. C 2v, SS. 207)¹. The way Thérèse

¹ Throughout this essay I have followed the short-form of both French original and its English translation of Thérèse's autobiography, giving the references together. *SAINTE THÉRÈSE DE L'ENFANT JÉSUS ET DE LA SAINTE-FACE, Histoire d'une Ame; manuscrits autobiographiques*, Nouvelle édition du centenaire (Paris: Cerf-Desclée de Brouwer, 1992); *SAINT THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX, Story of a Soul*, CLARK, J. trans. (Washington: ICS Publications, 1972).

discovered could be put in one word: Love. The main feature of the spirituality of Thérèse is to love God the Father as a child loves its parents. She writes: "Jesus deigned to show me the road that leads to this Divine Furnace, and this road is the *surrender* of the little child who sleeps without fear in its Father's arms". (Ms. B 1r, SS. 188).

The Doctrine of the Spiritual Childhood is essentially theological. It is simple and at the same time very profound such that even ordinary people can understand it and theologians can discover in it new insights concerning the mystery of God. Eminent theologians and writers like Hans Urs von Balthasar, François-Marie Léthel, Conrad De Meester and Guy Gaucher, have underlined the theological value of the message of Thérèse. "It is a message of admirable spiritual penetration" proclaimed Pope Pius XII². Hans Urs von Balthasar stated that "Thérèse's life is full of germs of doctrine which theology has to develop to be richly fruitful"³. Thérèse gave not only a living light concerning the mystery of God, but she enlightened equally the way souls had to follow in faith, hope and love. In the following section, our interest is to make an attempt to synthesize the Doctrine of Spiritual Childhood basing it on the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Love, and thus, to visualize the doctrine of Spiritual Childhood on the basis of a true theology.

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES AND THEIR INTER-RELATION

"Faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13: 13). Love is the greatest of the three theological virtues. Theology, in its profound sense of the term, is the knowledge of God, depending in effect on love, since "love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 Jn. 4: 7-8).

² Radiophonic Message of July 11, 1954. Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 46 (1954) p. 404.

³ H. U. Von BALTHASAR, *Thérèse de Lisieux: Histoire d'une mission* (Paris: Médiaspaul, 1972) p. 132.

The Theological Virtue of Faith

The Encyclopedia of Religion takes up the Biblical definition of faith and defines it as the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen⁴. The intellectual character of the assent to faith has a theo-central dimension, because faith, as an adhesion to the truth that God pronounces, directs one first of all towards God and things divine. In regard to the various dimensions of faith, one can speak of confidence as an important element. Thus faith is a confidence or trust in God⁵. This confident faith is explained in John's Gospel as something to believe and receive from Christ (Jn. 1: 12; 5: 43), and come towards Him (Jn. 5: 40; 6: 44; 6: 68). This element of confidence is based on the fact that one who believes in God will have security. The Psalmist says: "God is my shepherd, I lack nothing" (Ps. 23; 27: 62); and also because God is conceived as Rock and Light (Cf. Ps. 18: 29; 27: 1; 36: 10; 89: 16). This is the same when John says: "Those who believe in me, will not be walking in the darkness" (Jn. 12: 46; 8: 12; 12: 35)⁶. In the theological view point, God is the unique cause of the virtue of faith. It is not something that is gained, but a gift from God. The theologians are unanimous in saying that faith is a participation in the personal life of the Trinity, God being the Light of it. Faith is the basis of all spiritual life. It disposes one to salvation, because it inaugurates the redemptive mystery of the passion and resurrection in the believing soul⁷.

The Theological Virtue of Hope

The Encyclopedia of Religion conceives hope as necessarily transforming because it focus on, ways of liberation or salva-

⁴ J. PELIKAN, "Faith," in M. ELIADE, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 5 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) 250-255, p. 250; see also Heb. 11:1.

⁵ In the Old Testament some important texts on the virtue of trust in God are: Ps. 16: 1; 25: 2; 28: 7; 55: 23; 62: 8; Is. 12: 2; Jer. 30: 10.

⁶ Cf. A. BOVIS, "Foi," in A. RAYEZ *et al.*, eds., *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* Tome 5 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1964) 529-603, pp. 534-544.

⁷ Cf. A. BOVIS, "Foi," pp. 550-551.

tion, often expressed in terms of a movement from death to full life, error to right knowledge, disease to perfect health, despair to assurance of ultimate satisfaction⁸. The Bible treats hope in the sphere of perfection. St. Paul underlines this idea in his letter to the Romans (cf. Rom. 9: 4). The Israelites were a promised people. It is God's promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3; 13: 14-18) and through which, Paul instructs the Christians and leads them to the truth of the promise of the Messiah and of the Church (Gal. 3: 6-9, 15-18). This hope depends on faith in the promise, and this promise, if divine, excludes all doubt. Therefore, hope is related so intimately to faith. The object of Christian hope is God in Christ. When one speaks of Christ, there is novelty in the Christian hope. "...a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God" (Heb. 7: 19), "...according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus" (1Tim. 1: 1). It is the hope that supports Christians to live with determination in the midst of trials (1 Cor. 15: 12-33)⁹.

The Theological Virtue of Charity/Love

The core of the New Testament understanding of love is drawn from two texts of the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 6: 5 ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might"), and Leviticus 19: 18 ("...you shall love your neighbor as yourself"). This is informed by a novel idea that is unique to Jesus' own message, namely, that God's love is available to all people everywhere. The essence of a human being's response to God's love is summed up in the commandment to love God with one's whole mind, heart and soul, and without reservation. This new commandment enjoined all people to love their fellow beings as they love themselves (cf. Mt. 22: 37-40). The source and inspiration of this love of both God and fellow-human beings, is God's love

⁸ P. SLATER, "Faith," in M. ELIADE, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 6 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) 459-462, p. 460.

⁹ Cf. J. H. NICHOLAS, "Espérance," in A. RAYEZ et al., eds., *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* Tome 4/2 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1961) 1208-1233, pp. 1208-1212.

unsought by human beings and freely bestowed by God. Jesus said: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15: 13). The most poetically sublime expression of the New Testament view of Jesus' teachings about love is contained in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 13). A wider theological scope for understanding this selfless form of love is provided in the first letter of St. John, where the love of human beings for one another is based upon God's prior love of human beings, "for God is love" (1Jn. 4: 8, 16). God manifested His love in a supremely altruistic fashion by sending His only Son into the world to die on behalf of the entire humanity, in order that human beings might live eternally through knowledge and love of Him. So, even as God has loved humanity, so human beings should love one another. For, "God is love", and whoever lives in a state of love, lives in the presence of God and God in him/her (Mt. 22: 40)¹⁰.

The Inter-Relation between the Three Virtues

The theological virtue of charity/love is not possible without the virtue of faith. Faith is oriented towards charity. Faith affirms on the one hand that God is love, and His love is manifested in Jesus Christ; and on the other hand, it affirms the mystery of one's existence in God (Cf. Rom. 5: 5), and that one should devote his/her life to others. In other words, the intention of faith is love/charity. This faith also speaks in favor of charity. The love for truth keeps up the faith and is intensified by love. Faith and love tend one another to the same end, God¹¹. The Biblical language unites easily the two virtues of faith and hope; they are intimately related, but not identified. Hope supposes faith, but it is not faith. From faith flows hope. There is certitude with regard to faith, but the same need not be with hope. But hope can vivify and animate faith. This fact makes faith dynamic¹².

¹⁰ Cf. J. B. LONG, "Love," in M. ELIADE, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 9 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) 31-40, pp. 37-38.

¹¹ Cf. A. BOVIS, "Foi," pp. 529-568.

¹² Cf. J. H. NICHOLAS, "Espérance," pp. 1219-1221.

Love is the principle of hope. Hope brings to love what is hoped for, and it is theological, God Himself. Hope guides one to charity/love and determines a complete abandonment. Abandonment is the fruit of hope (1 Jn. 4: 16). The principle of abandonment is love. A true abandonment is an attitude of the loving soul who has not yet its beloved and the perfect and ultimate union with Him, and it waits with patience with the hope of attaining Him. Love is the object of hope. The virtue of hope is more than humane; it takes the heart of a human being to something transcendent¹³.

AN ATTEMPT AT SYNTHESIZING THE DOCTRINE OF SPIRITUAL CHILDHOOD

Thérèse knew well that the God is love (1 Jn. 4: 8) is also the God of hope (Rom. 15: 13). The littleness in Thérèse, was at the service of her love for God. This littleness had become in her essentially a synonym for hope, full of confidence, and the hope of a little child *vis-à-vis* its father. Thérèse hoped ardently for this love in her life. This was the *résumé* of her desire to holiness. She knew well, that: "C'est la confiance et rien que la confiance qui doit nous conduire à l'Amour"¹⁴. Thérèse approached the merciful love of God with audacity and she entered into the divine intimacy in love and faith. The desire of Thérèse for this Divine intimacy is expressed by her in one of her letters:

I see what I believed
I possess what I hoped for
I am united to Him whom I loved
with all my power of loving¹⁵.

¹³ Cf. J. H. NICHOLAS, "Espérance," pp. 1226-1232.

¹⁴ *Letters* 197, Thérèse to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (September 16, 1896) p. 1000; (cf. also C. DE MEESTER, *Les mains vides: Le message de Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris: Cerf, 1994) pp. 42-44).

¹⁵ *Letters* 245, Thérèse to Mother Agnès of Jesus, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, and Sister Geneviève (June 1897) p. 1128.

For Thérèse, faith was something that came from her loving adhesion which she called confidence and abandonment. One has to distinguish this theological virtue of faith from hope and love in Thérèse. But one knows that she loved God in faith and hope and thus, these elements are inseparable in her¹⁶.

Once Thérèse discovered her place in the Church, she identified herself with the Love that was at the heart of it. "In the heart of the Church I will be Love," says she (Ms. C 3v. SS. 194). Such a personal identification with Love was due to her great comprehension of the reality that "God is Love" (1 Jn. 4: 8, 16). In finding out the reality of Love as the heart of the Church, she deepened her life according to its demands. Thus came the motto of her mission, i.e. "to love and to make Love loved"¹⁷, and that too universally, at all times and in all places. This comprehension of the mystery of Divine Love is the basis of the theology of hope. It was living that love without reserve, abandoning herself completely to that love, that Thérèse lived in the life of hope. Having been taken up by the fire of Love in the Holy Spirit, Thérèse identified herself with that fire in faith and hope and she put all her interior energy to live out these theological virtues in her life¹⁸.

A synthesis of the doctrine of the Spiritual Childhood with the theological virtues of faith, hope and love are what is aimed at in the following section. The order followed here is based on the importance given by St. Paul as he puts it succinctly: "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13: 13).

¹⁶ Cf. L. MENVIELLE, "Le regard de foi qui provoque la miséricorde," in G. GAUCHER, ed., *Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: Docteur de l'Amour* (Venasque: Éditions du Carmel, 1990) 201-236, pp. 202-203.

¹⁷ *Letters* 220, Thérèse to Abbé Bellière (24 February, 1897) p. 1060.

¹⁸ C. NIQUEUX, "L'espérance aveugle en la miséricorde divine," in G. GAUCHER, ed., *Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: Docteur de l'Amour*, pp. 237-238.

A. THE MYSTERY OF LOVE IN THE MODEL OF TRINITY

Fr. Roberge Guston¹⁹ shows that the spirituality of Thérèse is based entirely on Love; and this love she discovered first in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity²⁰. Since Thérèse was truly planted in Love and built on Love, she wished for herself no other function, than the gift of the Holy Spirit, namely Love. This mystery of love, Thérèse experienced all throughout her life. She explains:

¹⁹ R. GUSTON, *A Little Way to God* (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash Anand, 1984) pp. vi-vii; (Here one is reminded of the fact that Thérèse's mission was not to enlighten the world on the Trinitarian relations in God. For her, what was important was to experience and explain the mystery of the Merciful Love of God the Father expressed through the Incarnate Word in Jesus Christ. The relationship of Thérèse with the Trinity is thus entirely based on her concept of love. For her, the Father and the Son have the same merciful love. The Son is the merciful love of God Incarnate (cf. K. HEALY, "Saint Therese and the Fatherhood of God," *Carmelus* 20 (1973) 9-17, p. 17).

²⁰ Actually, Thérèse was not a theologian who attempted to give an enlightenment on the mystery of the Trinity after the manner of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, a Carmelite Nun of the same period (1880-1906). Thérèse addressed herself in a surprisingly dominant way to Jesus, the second person of the Trinity. As a matter of course, Thérèse's attention was riveted on Christ, in particular as the Incarnated Word. No doubt, her writings provide more than one explicit reference to the Father and to the Spirit and to the Trinity as a whole; however, the main thrust of her devotion is unmistakable: the Lord Jesus. In her 'Act of Oblation to the Merciful Love of God,' she easily slips from 'Trinity' or 'God' to 'Jesus' without scruples about the distinctions (cf. R. M. VALABEK, "The Holy Spirit in the Life of Saint Therese," *Carmelus* 20 (1973) 44-93, p. 45); Hans Urs von Balthasar gives further reasons on this point. He says that Thérèse did not see further into the interior life of the Trinity and its reflection in the economy of salvation. The reason is that Thérèse's teaching was far too narrowly conditioned by her own life; or in other words, Thérèse had first of all to demonstrate her doctrine in her own life (cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Thérèse de Lisieux: Histoire d'une mission*, p. 236). Since Thérèse was more concerned and interested in her life with the love of God, the intention here too will be concentrated on the mystery of this love in its Trinitarian perspective.

God was pleased all through my life 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 (Ms. A 4v. SS. 17).

After her first communion, Thérèse knew the unitive power of the love of Jesus for her. She remembers:

Ah! How sweet was that first kiss of Jesus! It was a kiss of love; I felt that I was loved, and I said: "I love You, and I give myself to You forever!" There were no demands made, no struggles, no sacrifices; for a long time now Jesus and poor little Thérèse looked at and understood each other, that day, it was no longer simply a look, it was a fusion; they were no longer two, Thérèse had vanished as a drop of water is lost in the immensity of the ocean. Jesus alone remained; He was the Master, the King (Ms. B 34v. SS. 77).

In this same period Thérèse realized her desire for suffering, a true source of love for her²¹. It was by entering into the crucible of suffering that Thérèse experienced the mystery of the love of God. She would express it at times as a great and deep blow, a blow of love²². It was through her response to such experiences that one knows how deep was her experience of the mystery of love. She continues: "God is admirable, but He is especially lovable; let us love Him, then..."²³. Through such experiences, Thérèse knew and grew in the divine love. She entered deeply into the mystery of love through the passion of Jesus²⁴.

²¹ Often during her Communions, Thérèse repeated the words of Imitation: "O Jesus, unspeakable *sweetness*, change all the consolations of this earth into *bitterness* for me." (*The Imitation of Christ* III, 26: 3; quoted in the Ms A. 36v. *Story of a Soul*, p. 79).

²² *Letters* 94, Thérèse to Céline (14 July, 1889) p. 577.

²³ *Letters* 94, Thérèse to Céline (14 July, 1889) p. 577.

²⁴ F. GIRARD, "Les profondeurs de Dieu: l'Amour qui veut se donner," in G. GAUCHER, ed., *Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: Docteur de l'Amour*, pp. 158-160.

Thérèse Probes into the Mystery of Trinitarian Love

It was in the Merciful Love of God that Thérèse experienced and offered herself to the love of the Trinity. It is a communion of love coming from God, Father of all gifts, which is given to humanity through His incarnated Son, Jesus Christ, in the fire of the Holy Spirit. This is same with regard to Thérèse's 'Spirit of Love' when she identified it with Jesus. In one of her poems, she would pray: "Alors l'Esprit d'Amour te couvrant de son ombre, Le Fils égal au Père en toi s'est incarné"²⁵. The same she says to Jesus: "Ah! tu le sais, Divin Jésus, je t'aime. L'Esprit d'Amour m'embrasse de son feu, C'est en t'aimant que j'attire le Père"²⁶. It was this 'Spirit of Love' that gave her access to the Trinitarian communion and it was always through Jesus. Her communion with the Holy Spirit was always through a communion with Jesus, a communion accomplished through love. The 'Act of Oblation to the Merciful Love of God' by Thérèse was a response to God's love for her. This Oblation was a sign of total holocaust, or in Thérèse's own words, one could say that it was, "L'Amour a tout brûlé"²⁷. In the Holy Spirit who is fire of Love itself, Thérèse gave herself to Jesus, and through him to the Father, the Source of all love. The 'Act of Oblation to the Merciful Love of God' was an oblation to the whole Trinity, but the centre of this Oblation was Jesus himself²⁸.

The Trinitarian Christo-centrism of Thérèse

The person of Jesus was central to Thérèse's application of the act of love. It is clear in her expressions of 'Jesus I love you', and in 'loving you'²⁹; but this was in reference to two other Divine Persons, the Father and the Spirit. Animated by charity, the Christo-centrism of Thérèse was perfectly Trinitarian; it was in loving Jesus that she lived in the communion of the three

²⁵ *Poésies* 54, *Pourquoi je t'aime ô Marie* (Mai, 1897) p. 243.

²⁶ *Poésies* 17, *Vivre d'Amour* (26 Février, 1895) p. 97.

²⁷ *Poésies* 17 Stanza 6, *Vivre d'Amour* (26 Février, 1895) p. 97.

²⁸ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," pp. 138-139.

²⁹ *Poésies* 17, *Vivre d'Amour* (26 Février, 1895) p. 97.

Persons of the Trinity. Thus, the expression 'Jesus I love you' cannot be considered as a sentimental expression of Thérèse, but rather, as an experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit in her heart. Also in this context, we are told by St. Paul, that 'nobody can make an act of faith if we are not in the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12: 3). When Thérèse made her fundamental act of the Christological charity, expressed in the words: "Jésus, je t'aime, l'Esprit d'Amour m'embrasse de son feu"³⁰, it was the acceptance and proclamation of the great mystery, that "the Holy Spirit is personally the Love in the Trinity, proceeding eternally as mutual love of the Father and the Son. It is therefore, that in loving Jesus in the Spirit that Thérèse attracted the Father"³¹. In the 'Act of Oblation to the Merciful Love of God', Thérèse invoked the Trinity; and then she addressed the Father:

O my God! Most Blessed Trinity, I desire to *Love* You and make You *Loved*, to work for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls on earth and liberating those suffering in purgatory. I desire to accomplish Your will perfectly and to reach the degree of glory You have prepared for me in Your Kingdom. I desire in a word, to be a saint, but I feel my helplessness and I beg You, O my God! To be Yourself my *Sanctity*! Since You loved me so much as to give me Your only Son as my Saviour and my Spouse, the Infinite treasures of His merits are mine. I offer them to You with gladness, begging You to look upon me only in the Face of Jesus and in His heart burning with *Love*³².

In this text, Thérèse spoke explicitly of the Son sent by the Father, the fire of Love which burns in the heart of the Son and that which the Father gives to a human person through the Son. "God so loved the world that He gave it His only Son" (Jn. 3: 15). The prayer of Thérèse to the Father also reflects this line, a line that expresses the personal dimension of this union: "Since

³⁰ *Poésies* 17, *Vivre d'Amour* (26 Février, 1895) p. 97.

³¹ F. M. LÉTHEL, "Le Jésus de l'Amour," *Vie Thérésienne* no 144 (Décembre, 1996) 7-50, pp. 13-14.

³² The First two paragraphs of the 'Act of Oblation.' (See *Story of a Soul*, p. 276).

You loved me so much as to give me Your only Son as my Savior and my Spouse..". In this personal address of Thérèse to the Father, Thérèse employed three titles of Jesus- 'Your Only Son' (Votre Fils Unique), 'my Saviour' (mon Sauveur), and 'my Spouse' (mon Epoux). A pure Christology is resumed here in these three titles: Jesus as the Only Son of the Father; He is the Savior of all human beings; and He is the Spouse of the Church³³.

Thérèse's Experience of the Trinity as the True Exchange of Love

The total love of Jesus for Thérèse, a communion of love between Jesus and Thérèse, was a dynamic reality. It was an admirable exchange, "a true interchange of love" (Ms. A 46v. SS. 101). Thérèse was aware of how much 'Jesus desired to be loved' (Ms. A 84v. SS. 181). This idea, she expressed in her letter to her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart:

See, then, all that Jesus is asking from us. He has no need of our works, but only of our *love*, for this God, who declares He has no need to tell us if He is hungry, did not hesitate to *beg* for a little water from the Samaritan woman. He was thirsty... But when He said: "Give me to drink," it was the *love* of His poor creatures that the Creator of the universe was asking for. He was thirsty for love³⁴.

The one who gives us the living water of love to drink, is at the same time thirsty for our love. Requesting a little water from the Samaritan woman, crying of thirst on the cross, and at the same time crying always through the suffering human beings, Jesus is indirectly expressing his own desire to be loved: "I thirst" (Jn. 19: 28). He desires that one renders Him love for love (Ms. B 4v. SS. 196-197).

Thérèse experienced and learned that the definition of this love is something reciprocal. She expressed it herself in other

³³ F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," pp. 137-138.

³⁴ *Letters* 196, Thérèse to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (13 September, 1896) p. 995.

words: "To love means to give, and to give oneself"³⁵. This exchange of love is rooted in the communion of the Holy Trinity. It was in the spousal dimension that Thérèse lived this admirable exchange. Concerning this exchange, Thérèse would express her longings even at an early age: "Ah! How sweet was the first kiss of love; I *felt* that I *was loved*, and I said: 'I love You, and I give myself to You forever'" (Ms. A 35r. SS. 77). To love is to give. Thérèse described symbolically how this exchange of love became a complete exchange of hearts: "I think that the heart of my Spouse is mine alone, just as mine is His alone, and I speak to Him then in the solitude of this delightful heart-to-heart, while waiting to contemplate Him one day face-to-face"³⁶. In her poem 'Jésus mon Bien-Aimé, rappelle-toi', she sings to Jesus: "Mon coeur, il est à Toi... Ton Coeur, Il est à moi"³⁷. This heart-to-heart relationship of Thérèse with Jesus revealed well a proper Christological knowledge in Thérèse, especially when she contemplated the Infant Jesus in the hands of Mary and said: "You think of me," and in contemplating Jesus in His agony: "Jesus, You see me"³⁸.

Thérèse, Theologian of the Love of God the Father

The message of Thérèse, if put in one word, is 'Love.' She says: "The charity gave me the key to my vocation.... my vocation, it is Love" (Ms. C 3v. SS. 194). When she spoke of love, it was about the infinite love of God: the love that comes from God, and the love that makes humanity God's children. It was in loving Jesus and his humanity that Thérèse experienced the love of God the Father. For her, to love Jesus was to love God.³⁹ Thérèse had translated this reality by giving it a more personal

³⁵ *Poésies* 54, *Pourquoi je t'aime ô Marie* (Mai, 1897) p. 244.

³⁶ *Letters* 122, Thérèse to Céline (14 October, 1890) p. 709.

³⁷ *Poésies* 24 stanzas 8 and 20, *Jésus, mon Bien-Aimé, rappelle-toi* (21 Octobre, 1895) pp. 137, 141.

³⁸ *Poésies* 54 stanzas 6 and 21, *Pourquoi je t'aime ô Marie* (Mai, 1897) pp. 243, 247.

³⁹ M. PAISSAC, "Sainte Thérèse, Docteur de la charité," in G. GAUCHER, ed., *Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: Docteur de l'Amour*, p. 184.

interpretation through her life: 'Jesus is my unique Love.' The love of God the Father in Jesus, was the greatest reality which Thérèse witnessed, a unique reality that contained all the other realities, all the mysteries of God and of humanity. She considered her vocation to holiness as a call to love God the Father in truth and plenitude, and that, in a 'unique way'⁴⁰.

According to Kilian Healy, Thérèse was completely absorbed by her perception of the Fatherhood of God. God was her loving Father, she his child, and with childlike abandonment she sought protection in His arms. When she thought and spoke of God, she was thinking more often, than not, of the divine nature without a distinction of the Trinitarian relations. She was thinking of the merciful love of God the Father, which she also found incarnate in Jesus. Thérèse's concept of the love of God was always based on the love she had from her own dear father. For her, the goodness of her father was a direct reflection of the goodness of God. The Word of God would only confirm what she knew of God from her personal experience⁴¹.

Thérèse, Theologian of the Love of God the Son

Thérèse reflected the Christological understanding of her historical period. The high or descending Christology begins in pre-existence with the eternal Word of God who condescends and becomes one with all humanity in self-emptying love. The prologue of St. John's Gospel provides this scenario. In one of her Christmas plays, "Angels at the Manger," Jesus was portrayed as showing signs, even in the manger, of some fore-knowledge of his future passion. This imagery is consistent with the descent Christology. While Thérèse reflected more traditionally known Christology, in no way does this understanding create an abstract or idealistic relationship to Christ as viewed in her plays. Images of commitment and strength, suffering and doubt, and particularly of marital or spousal relationship, describe the individual's involvement with Christ. Flowing from this loving

⁴⁰ F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," p. 113.

⁴¹ Cf. K. HEALY, "Saint Therese and the Fatherhood of God," pp. 14-17.

union with Christ, a person identifies with the self-emptying love of the Savior⁴². In the theology of the Saints, love is the key to all their knowledge of the mysteries. It is central in knowing the mystery of Jesus too. There is a special privilege for femininity in the love of Jesus; and it is in this perspective of feminine theology that one now thinks of the Christology of Thérèse. François-Marie Léthel says that women are more mystical than men, which is to say, they are more capable of entering into the depth of the love of God. The love of a woman saint for Jesus, the God-man, synthesizes admirably all her love for God and all her love for humanity in Jesus. It is therefore, that the feminine Christo-centrism of Thérèse would synthesize all reality in her unique love for Jesus⁴³. The name of Jesus is present all through the writings of Thérèse, used around 1,600 times, and this was employed principally as a Divine name. It designated, first of all, the Divinity united to the humanity in the person of Jesus. It was this same Divine name *par excellence*, that Thérèse employed more often as equivalent to the name of God, with frequent alterations and parallelisms to the expressions: "My God," and "my Jesus". The name 'God' was designated sometimes as the Person of the Father or the Spirit or all the Trinity, but always in a Christological perspective⁴⁴.

The expression, 'Jesus is my Unique Love', is the Christological interpretation, and a great affirmation of the Revelation: "God is Love" (1 Jn. 4: 8, 16). This central text of Scripture was never cited by Thérèse⁴⁵, but rather, it was the theological content of the her view. According to Thérèse, this text was interpreted Christologically, and this interpretation of Thérèse on the scriptural affirmation of 'God as Love', was very much personal to her, inte-

⁴² J. RUSSEL, "The Religious Plays of Saint Thérèse of Infant Jesus," in J. SULLIVAN, ed., *Experiencing Saint Thérèse Today* (Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing Center, 1995) 41-58, p. 55.

⁴³ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "Le Jésus de l'Amour," p. 9.

⁴⁴ F. M. LÉTHEL, "Le Jésus de l'Amour," p. 10.

⁴⁵ The inscription, "Jésus est mon unique Amour," that Thérèse attached to the partition of her cell, could signify as a symbol and synthesis of all that the Holy Spirit had written in the life of Thérèse, and it is the *résumé* of her writings.

grating all the dimensions of subjectivity by the expression 'pour moi' (for me) (Ms. A 47r. SS. 102). This aspect of subjectivity is more an essential aspect of Feminine Theology seen as modelled in Thérèse, says François-Marie Léthel⁴⁶.

The 'love' of Jesus, in Thérésian language, has got two characteristics: its totality and infiniteness. Thérèse writes: "I would so much like to love Him!... Love Him more than He has ever been loved!... My only desire is to do the will of Jesus always!"⁴⁷ This was the same love she demanded from Jesus on the day of her profession: "The Infinite love without limit, the love for me, my Jesus"⁴⁸. Thérèse also prayed for a totality of love. Accepting all her limitations and littleness, Thérèse knew that she could become all, being divinized through love. The totality that Thérèse embraced in this Love, included also the whole of humanity, past, present and future. Thérèse hoped for the salvation of the whole of humankind and prayed for all souls: "Let there be not a single damned soul"⁴⁹.

Thérèse Experiences the Kenosis of God's Love

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name. (Ph. 2: 6-9).

⁴⁶ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "Le Jésus de l'Amour," pp. 10-11.

⁴⁷ *Letters* 74, Thérèse to Sister Agnès of Jesus (6 January, 1889) p. 500.

⁴⁸ SAINTE THÉRÈSE DE L'ENFANT JÉSUS ET DE LA SAINTE-FACE. *Récréations pieuses- Prières* (Paris: Nouvelle édition du centenaire, Cerf-Desclée de Brouwer, 1992). *Prières* 2, *Billet de Profession* (8 Septembre, 1890), pp. 507-508. (There are altogether 21 Prayers by Thérèse that are included in the Critical Edition of the complete works of Thérèse. Here after, the Prayers of Thérèse will be cited as *Prières* with the number, name and date (if any) of the Prayer given in the Critical Edition).

⁴⁹ *Prières* 2, *Billet de Profession* (8 Septembre, 1890) pp. 507-508. See also F. M. LÉTHEL, "Le Jésus de l'Amour," pp. 17-18.

The supreme paradox in this passage, one notes, is the cross that marks the extreme point of Jesus' abasement, and the mystery of his elevation (cf. Jn. 12: 32-33). The fact is that the cross of Jesus is inseparably ignominious and glorious; his passion is painful and at the same time blessed. Thérèse had entered into this line of abasement through love, a love that demanded total abandonment and humility. This dynamism of love as the dynamism of abasement, Thérèse expressed in powerful words: "...that Love be fully satisfied, it is necessary that It lower Itself, and that It lower Itself into nothingness and transform this nothingness into *fire*" (Ms. B 3v. SS. 195).

The love of God in all the mysteries of Jesus' life, from incarnation to the cross, from the great poverty of the manger unto the total humility and nudity on the Calvary are resumed in Thérèse's understanding. Jesus was wrapped up in swaddling clothes and slept in a manger; he was disposed of his clothes and made to rest naked on the cross. It is the poverty or the *kenosis* of the Infinite God. St. Paul says "...though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8: 9). The Incarnated Son is presented as poor in the sense of the Old Testament. It is this poverty and humility that he demanded from his followers⁵⁰. The richness would correspond to the Divinity of Jesus; the poverty, then, to his humanity in the condition of a slave, i.e., in all his self-emptying in this earthly life: it is his *Kenosis*. There is a real paradox, a paradox of the 'suffering servant' and the Resurrected Jesus in his 'glorious state'.

In the theology of Thérèse, or to say, in her contemplation on the self-abasement of Love, the mysteries principally dealt with are 'Incarnation', 'Passion' and 'Eucharist'⁵¹. For her, the hidden life of Jesus was not limited to his life at Nazareth, but rather it was the sum total of his life here on earth, from incarnation to resurrection. In this self-abasement or *kenosis* of Love, Thérèse saw three degrees: First, Jesus was evidently hidden in the Mystery of Incarnation. She writes: "Dieu caché sous les

⁵⁰ M. F. BERROUARD, "Enfance spirituelle," p. 692.

⁵¹ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "Le Jésus de l'Amour," pp. 19-21.

traits d'un Enfant! Je te vois rayonnant, et déjà triomphant!"⁵² In the infant of the manger, only faith and hope can recognize the Word of God. Secondly, the Crucified one at Calvary was hidden from the eyes of humanity: "He, the King of Kings, humbled Himself in such a way that His face was hidden, and no one recognized Him"⁵³. The third degree of abasement is the Eucharist, where Jesus is hidden under the appearance of bread and wine. Thérèse was so sensible in her poems: "Le Dieu caché du tabernacle, Qui se cache aussi dans nos coeurs"⁵⁴; and, "Tu vis pour moi, caché dans une hostie"⁵⁵. Writing to her sister Céline, Thérèse says: "To find a hidden thing one must hide oneself: our life must be a mystery. We must be like Jesus, Jesus whose face was hidden"⁵⁶. It was in the Eucharist that Thérèse contemplated the extreme humility of God.

Caché dans l'Eucharistie
Je vois le Dieu Tout-Puissant
Je vois l'Auteur de la vie
Bien plus petit qu'un enfant!...⁵⁷

The two mysteries of Incarnation and Redemption, visibly represented by the manger and the cross, had a fundamental importance for Thérèse's life and doctrine⁵⁸. It evokes the meaning of the name of Thérèse, namely, 'Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus et de la Sainte Face', the 'Holy Face' for her being the face of Jesus in his passion. This expressed all the movements of her

⁵² *Récréations pieuses* 2, *Les Anges à la Crèche de Jésus* 4v. (25 Décembre, 1894) p. 99.

⁵³ *Letters* 137, Thérèse to Céline (19 October, 1892) p. 761 (there is also a reference to Isaiah 53: 3).

⁵⁴ *Poésies* 40, *Les Sacristines du Carmel* (Novembre, 1896) p. 192.

⁵⁵ *Poésies* 17, *Vivre d'Amour* (26 Février, 1895) p. 96.

⁵⁶ *Letters* 145, Thérèse to Céline (2 August, 1893) p. 809; see also G. GAUCHER, *Jean et Thérèse* (Paris: Cerf, 1996) pp. 134-140.

⁵⁷ *Récréations pieuses* 2, *Les Anges à la Crèche de Jésus* 4v. (Décembre 25, 1894) p. 100; (cf. also F. M. LÉTHEL, "Le Jésus de l'Amour," pp. 19-21 (own translation: Hidden in the Eucharist, I see God the Almighty, I see the Author of life, smaller than a child).

⁵⁸ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," pp. 128-129.

life that led her to spiritual maturity through the self-emptying in 'littleness' and 'suffering' (for Thérèse, these terms meant 'Incarnation' and 'Cross' respectively)⁵⁹. She desired to hide her own life too in Jesus: "Tu vis pour moi caché dans une hostie, je veux pour toi me cacher, Ô Jésus,"⁶⁰ for Thérèse felt that "the Carmel was the desert where God wanted me to hide myself" (Ms. A 26r. SS. 58). On Thérèse's joining the Carmel, she wrote to her sister:

Ask that your little daughter always remain a little grain of sand, truly unknown, truly hidden from all eyes, that Jesus alone may be able to see it, and that it may become smaller and smaller, that it may be reduced to *nothing*⁶¹.

And again: "It is in Your hands I come to hide myself"⁶²; and also in 'his Heart:' "Ah! Laisse-moi me cacher en ton Coeur"⁶³, and under the mantle of the Virgin (Ms. A 57r. SS. 123). This is an echo of the Scriptural message: "When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Mt. 6: 3). It was the action of God that made Thérèse hide herself. She writes: "Without any noise, without any show, Jesus began to teach me in secret" (Ms. B 1r. SS. 187). Jesus communicates to souls only in a hidden way (Ms. A 49r. SS. 105).

The Paradoxical Nature of the Scripture Message

Thérèse followed Jesus in all the movements of his self-abasement, from the poverty of the manger to the deprivation

⁵⁹ Cf. J. CHALMERS and C. MACCISE, "Revenir à l'Évangile," *Vie Thérésienne* 36 (1996) 51-68, p. 54.

⁶⁰ *Poésies* 17, *Vivre d'Amour* (Février 26, 1895) p. 96.

⁶¹ *Letters* 49, Thérèse to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (12-20 May, 1888) p. 427.

⁶² *Poésies* 36, *Jésus seul* (15 Août, 1896) p. 184.

⁶³ *Poésies* 33, *Ce que je verrai bientôt pour la première fois* (12 Juin, 1896) p. 173.

on the cross. She became a spouse to Jesus, first in the mystery of incarnation, and then in the paschal mystery of redemption. According to François-Marie Léthel⁶⁴, Thérèse communicated, a more profound and extreme aspect of the mystery of Jesus, in four dimensions, the four cardinal points – breadth and length, height and depth – of the love of the cross. It could be symbolically represented as the four extremities of the cross: the ‘greatness’ at the height, in its depth the ‘littleness’, at the right the ‘light’ and at left the ‘darkness’. François Marie Léthel also gives an explanation to these four levels. According to him, the vertical line that unites the infinite greatness and the extreme littleness corresponds to the mystery of incarnation. The horizontal line that unites the light of love and the darkness of sins corresponds to the paschal mystery of redemption. It is the definitive meeting place between the light and the darkness in the passion of Jesus, and it is the triumph of the light in resurrection⁶⁵.

In the mystery of incarnation, the Son of God the Most High, had taken up the extreme littleness of humanity; and in the mystery of redemption, he had humbled himself more to live the misery of humanity, i.e., carrying humanity’s sins and making amendment for it in his suffering and death on the cross. It was through the spousal love of Jesus that Thérèse had taken up these two mysteries of incarnation and redemption. The little way, or the littleness taken up by Thérèse, was the littleness of Jesus, so to say, the extreme littleness united to the infinite greatness of the Divinity. One has also to see that the darkness of the thorns that characterizes the passion of Jesus and that of

⁶⁴ Père François-Marie Léthel ocd, has made a deep study on the doctrine of Spiritual Childhood. He developed the theology of the love of Jesus viewing it in a paradoxical perspective: the supreme greatness in the extreme littleness. He developed this theme basing it on the Mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption and applying it to the life and doctrine of Thérèse. My approach in this whole section on the ‘Mystery of the Love of Jesus’ is based significantly on his essay titled, “L’Amour de Jésus.” (I am indebted to François-Marie Léthel’s article for my basic structure at explaining the theology of Thérèse’s love).

⁶⁵ F. M. LÉTHEL, “L’Amour de Jésus,” p. 129.

Thérèse, are finally conquered and met with, by the light of Love. One has to see these four cardinal points of the mystery together: the infinite greatness and the extreme littleness in the vertical line; the light of love and the darkness of sin in the horizontal line. Also one cannot forget the absolute difference between the extreme littleness of humanity and the infinite greatness of the Divinity; and again the radical opposition between the light of love and the darkness of sin. And paradoxically, the mystery of Jesus unites all these in an intimate way⁶⁶.

The Mystery of Incarnation: The Paradox of Extreme Littleness and Greatness

The Mystery of Incarnation is the intimate union between the infinite greatness of the Divinity and the extreme littleness of humanity in the same and unique person of Jesus, the Son of God. For Thérèse, it was the mystery of love. The Word became flesh in Jesus. This Jesus, in the words of St. Paul, is he “who was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8: 9). His poverty was to enrich humanity. Thus humanity has partaken in the Divinity; or in other words, God became a human being so that human beings should become God. Thérèse found out the basis of the nature of God’s love. She writes:

I understood, too, that Our Lord’s love is revealed as perfectly in the most simple soul that resists His grace in nothing as in the most excellent soul; in fact, since the nature of love is to humble oneself, if all souls resembled those of the holy Doctors who illumined the Church with the clarity of their teachings, it seems God would not descend so low when coming to their heart... He has created the poor savage who has nothing but the natural law to guide him. It is to their hearts that God deigns to lower Himself (Ms. A 3r. SS. 14).

Thérèse understood well that the nature of love is to humble oneself, lowering oneself to the extreme that it partakes of

⁶⁶ F. M. LÉTHEL, “L’Amour de Jésus,” pp. 129-130.

the fruits there of. Greatness is in littleness. This idea is more clear when she states: "I prefer to agree very simply that the Almighty has done great things in the soul of His divine Mother's child, and the greatest thing is to have shown her littleness, her impotence" (Ms. C 4r. SS. 210). It is the *Magnificat* of Thérèse; for she knew that the Almighty has shown His kindness towards not only her lowliness but the lowliness itself, her orientation towards her littleness, and her humility. She had not resisted the designs of his grace and that Mercy is shown to her on account of this openness. Thus it becomes clear that humility and confidence are the bases on which the love of God is founded⁶⁷.

Thérèse, through her doctrine of Spiritual Childhood, illustrated the great paradox of Scripture according to which the smallest here on earth becomes the greatest in the kingdom of God (cf. Mt. 18: 4). Supreme greatness is in extreme littleness. She assumed this truth through interpreting the words of Scripture in its real spirit and letter. She naively disregarded the scientific method due to her ignorance of it. It is therefore, one would say that Thérèse inhaled the 'perfumes' (Ms. C 36v. SS. 258) of the life of Jesus in reading Scripture⁶⁸. The God-man, for Thérèse, was the maximum of the divine condescension: Jesus as the incarnated Mercy. She had a tender feeling while singing the songs of Christmas. What was accomplished was 'for our love'⁶⁹, says she. In a pious image representing the birth of Jesus, she had copied a small dialogue of St. Bernard: "Jesus, what has made You so little? the Love"⁷⁰. Again, she quotes St. Paul while writing to Marie Guérin: "He was rich, but made Himself poor" (2Cor. 8: 9)⁷¹. For Thérèse, it was her life that became theology, in the sense, that her words were a pure re-

⁶⁷ Cf. F. GIRARD, "Les Profondeurs de Dieu: l'Amour qui veut se donner," pp. 174-175.

⁶⁸ F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," p. 116.

⁶⁹ *Letters* 201, Thérèse to Père Roulland (1 November, 1896) p. 1014.

⁷⁰ *Letters* 162, Thérèse to Céline (26 April, 1894) p. 852.

⁷¹ *Letters* 109, Thérèse to Marie Guérin (27-29 July, 1890) p. 642; see also C. DE MEESTER, *Dynamique de la confiance. Genèse et structure de la "voie d'enfance spirituelle" de Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris: Cerf, 1995) pp. 425-426.

flection of the Biblical texts. Here one can speak of a subjectivity as well as an objectivity in Thérèse's approach to her theological life. She was in Jesus so much so that Jesus was in her; she could neither speak of Jesus without speaking of herself, nor speak of herself without speaking of Jesus.

It was in the mystery of incarnation that God lowered Himself to its extreme. The Son of God had become a child and servant through the mystery of incarnation. This plan of God to lower Himself is explained again by Thérèse: "O Divine Word! You are the Adored Eagle whom I love and who alone *attracts me*! Coming into this land of exile, You willed to suffer and to die in order to *draw* souls to the bosom of the Eternal Fire of the Blessed Trinity" (Ms. B 5v. SS. 199). It was through the description of her conversion through the 'grace' of Christmas of 1886, that Thérèse would explain the mystery of incarnation. She writes:

On that luminous *night* which sheds such light on the delights of the Holy Trinity, Jesus, the gentle *little* child of only one hour, changed the night of my soul into rays of light. On that *night* when He made Himself subject to *weakness* and suffering for love of me, He made me *strong* and courageous, arming me with His weapons (Ms. A 44v. SS. 195).

In the mystery of Christmas, the strong and powerful God had become feeble and small. He had become a feeble child of one hour, wrapped up in swaddling clothes (Lk. 2: 7). It was by showing his feeble and fragile nature, that Jesus could change Thérèse into a grown up child. It is in weakness that we are strong, says St. Paul (2 Cor. 12: 10). It was by being born at night that he gives light. In the life of Thérèse too, this fact had been concretized. She became an adult child spiritually, imbibing the mysteries of the infancy of the child Jesus⁷². In the last poem of Thérèse, 'Pourquoi je t'aime ô Marie', one finds a contemplation of the mystery of Christmas and it reveals the paradox of greatness and of littleness:

⁷² F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," p. 131.

Quand je vois l'Eternel enveloppé de langes
 Quand du Verbe Divin j'entends le faible cri
 O ma Mère chérie, je n'envie plus les anges
 Car leur Puissant Seigneur est mon Frère chéri!..
 Que je t'aime, Marie, toi qui sur nos rivages
 As fait épanouir cette Divine Fleur!....⁷³

The paradoxical expressions of Thérèse, seeing the "Eternal wrapped up in swaddling clothes," and listening to the "feeble cry of the Divine Word," are expressed admirably with theological accuracy. Thérèse knew, that it was Mary who was nearest to Jesus' poverty and littleness. The Infinite was reduced to the finite; richness to poverty and greatness to littleness. Only one thing is necessary: Love, love to the last. This is Incarnation.

The Mystery of Redemption: The Paradox of the Light of Love and the Darkness of Sin

The description of the 'grace' of Christmas, which expressed the communion of Thérèse with the mystery of incarnation as an admirable exchange between the greatness and the littleness of Jesus, was immediately followed by another description of grace equally important to Thérèse's life. This expressed the communion of Thérèse with the paschal mystery of redemption as an exchange between the light of love and the darkness of sin, between the Savior and the sinners. Through the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus gave his life to those who put him to death. The incarnation and redemption are two distinct but inseparable mysteries. The love of Jesus with which Thérèse communicated so profoundly on the night of Christmas, is the same love that operates salvation for all the sinners in the darkness of

⁷³ *Poésies* 54, *Pourquoi je t'aime ô Marie* (Mai, 1897) p. 244 (own translation: When I see the Eternal wrapped up in swaddling clothes, When I hear the feeble cry of the Divine Word, O my dear Mother, I am no more jealous of the angels, For their Powerful Savior is my beloved Brother, Ah! I love you Mary, It is you who blossomed this Divine Flower into the shore of humanity).

Good Friday. By the first grace, Thérèse was standing near the manger, but by the second one, she stood under the cross⁷⁴.

Like the mystery of incarnation, the passion and death of Jesus too, speak of love to Thérèse. The first sermon that she understood in her infancy, was on the passion of Christ, and this touched her deeply. She writes: "I listened attentively to the sermons which I understood very poorly. The first *I did understand* and which *touched me deeply* was a sermon on the passion preached by Father Ducellier and since then I've understood all the others" (Ms. A 17v. SS. 42). In Carmel, her piety towards the Holy Face was famous. She writes: "Jesus is on fire with love for us... look at His adorable Face!.. Look at His eyes lifeless and lowered! Look at His wounds... Look at Jesus in His Face... There you will see how He loves us."⁷⁵

The episode of the criminal, Pranzini was next to the Christmas 'grace' in the life of Thérèse. She writes: "I felt charity enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please others" (Ms. A 45v. SS. 99). The love Thérèse experienced and lived near the manger through the 'grace' of Christmas in her more personal relationship with Jesus, manifested itself present in the other-oriented dimension of love for others, in her experience of the image of the cross. And thus in the heart of Thérèse, the love of Jesus crucified became explicitly a spiritual maternity. Near the cross of Jesus was standing his mother (cf. Jn.19: 25). It was there in the same place that Thérèse joined her when she affirmed: "I was resolved to remain in spirit at the foot of the cross and to receive the divine dew" (Ms. A 45v. SS. 99). As Mary became the Mother of the whole humanity standing and living under the painful cross, Thérèse too understood, that it was in obscurity and in the pain of calvary, wherein unveils all the dynamism of spiritual motherhood. "The light of Mother Mary shines ever more in the obscurity and darkness", says Père Marie-Eugène de l'Enfant Jésus.⁷⁶ It was Jesus the Savior who

⁷⁴ Cf. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," p. 143.

⁷⁵ *Letters* 87, Thérèse to Céline (4 April, 1889) p. 553; see also C. DE MEESTER, *Dynamique de la confiance*, p. 426.

⁷⁶ MARIE-EUGÈNE DE L'ENFANT JÉSUS, *Je veux voir Dieu*, p. 893.

confided sinful humanity to the motherly love of his mother Mary saying, "woman, this is your son" (Jn. 19: 25). In the same way it was in and through the image of the cross of Jesus, that Thérèse had the feeling of charity entering her heart and her consequent resolution of being under the cross to be a spiritual mother. She writes:

One Sunday, looking at a picture of Our Lord on the Cross, I was struck by the blood flowing from one of the divine hands. I felt a great pang of sorrow when thinking this blood was falling to the ground without anyone's hastening to gather it up. I was resolved to remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross and to receive the divine dew. I understood I was then to pour it out upon souls. The cry of Jesus on the Cross sounded continually in my heart: "*I thirst!*" These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a *thirst for souls* (Ms. A 45v. SS. 99).

The great desire of Thérèse was that the blood of Jesus was not lost for nothing, but for the salvation of sinners; that it could rejoin the whole human race for whom it was shed. Thus, Thérèse participated in the great desire to save souls for Jesus, an infinite desire to bring all men and women to him, symbolized by the thirst of Jesus on the cross. Thérèse, therefore, spoke of her thirst for souls as being her desire to save them for Jesus.⁷⁷ Thérèse liked very much the Songs of Isaiah on the 'Suffering Servant of Yahweh.' In her letter to Céline, she quoted a passage from the book of Isaiah 53:

He appeared to us as an object of scorn, the least of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with suffering!... He truly took our infirmities upon himself, and he was burdened with our offenses... He was pierced for our iniquities, he was broken for our crimes⁷⁸.

⁷⁷ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," pp. 143-145.

⁷⁸ *Letters* 108, Thérèse to Céline (18 July, 1890) p. 631.

Thérèse espoused completely the mystery of redemption through her experience of the passion from the Easter 1896 until her death. This fundamental principle of the redemption in regard to the love and the sin of the world pierced the heart of Thérèse. It is the relation between the light and darkness, between the infinite light of the love of God on the one hand, and the immensity of darkness caused by the sin of the world, on the other. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5: 20). The passion of Jesus is the unique place where the abundance of love had met all the abundance of sin; it is the unique place where the light had entered into the depths of darkness and conquered it at the price of the suffering of Jesus on the cross. This passion of Jesus is the greatest proof of his love for humanity. Thérèse cites Jesus himself: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15: 13) (Ms. C 12r. SS. 220).

In espousing perfectly the passion of Jesus, Thérèse experienced the extremity of the light of love and the darkness of sin. Through experiencing the passion, Thérèse communicated the terrible exchange of the redemption, an exchange of the two extremes of light and darkness. This passion and death in love was what Thérèse desired, the death that tore the veil of faith apart that Thérèse loved and lived⁷⁹.

The darkness of sin described by Thérèse was only a prelude to her description of the other extreme, the splendor of love. Redemption was enhanced of these extremes, for, the light Thérèse acquired in its maximum was through the passion or the cloud of darkness. The description of Thérèse about the splendor of love was her masterpiece⁸⁰ with its density, profundity and luminosity. Thérèse had defined her life as a heart-to-heart relationship with Jesus. Her heart grew in loving him. Thérèse, who chose all, kept all in her heart, opened it for the

⁷⁹ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," pp. 149-151.

⁸⁰ The letter Thérèse wrote to her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (Manuscript B) is a masterpiece on the description on Love. It was Thérèse's prayer, an act of love for Jesus, when she said: "Je t'aime mon Bien-Aimé; mon unique Amour." It was a love that embraced all the realities of heaven and earth; the love that contained the greatest wisdom.

outside world in love. She kept the infinite greatness and the extreme littleness in its perfect equilibrium. All the more, the dominating tone of this text is that of the light of love. It was the light that shone out in the darkness (Jn. 1: 1-4), the light that conquered the darkness through the passion, and the light that sparkled on the morning of Easter Sunday. It was the moment of the diffusion of light, the light of love which filled the heart of Thérèse. It was the fire of love, the fire of the Holy Spirit that shone in the heart of Jesus and through his passion and resurrection, shone out to the whole world through the Church. It was the fire that burned the hearts of the faithful on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-8)⁸¹.

The theological structure of the description of Thérèse on Love in her Manuscript B, is simple and at the same time profound. It is simple because it was a description of the communion of Jesus with his Church in the Holy Spirit. And it becomes profound when, in experiencing the infinite dimensions of this flame of the Holy Spirit, Thérèse discovered all the dimensions of the Church, that it embraced all time and place, that it comprised all vocations, and that the Church is present in heaven on this earth and in the life here-after (Ms. B 3v-4v. SS. 194-196). The suffering and trials that Thérèse encountered did not disappear at this stage. It was only the morning of the Resurrection, only in heaven that Thérèse's desire for heaven would be complete. And it was for this that she desired heaven more than anything else. She writes:

What attracts me to the homeland of heaven is the Lord's call, the hope of loving Him finally as I have so much desired to love Him, and the thought that I shall be able to make Him loved by a multitude of souls who will bless Him eternally⁸².

'Love Jesus and to make him loved' was the vocation and mission of Thérèse. It is the same for us believers too. Called to holiness, we are to become incandescent and transparent for the love of Jesus.

⁸¹ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," p. 154.

⁸² *Letters* 254, Thérèse to Père Roulland (14 July, 1897) p. 1142.

Thérèse, Theologian of the Love of God the Holy Spirit

In the writings of Thérèse, one may note a significant factor that the name 'Jesus' recurs throughout; but at the same time the name 'Spirit' appears very rarely. However, it is significant and sufficient to show that in reality the Spirit was always present for Thérèse as being l'Esprit d'Amour' (The Spirit of Love). She wrote to her spiritual brother:

You tell me that you pray very often for your sister. Since you have the charity, I would be very glad if every day you would say this prayer for her, it includes all her desires: 'Merciful Father, in the name of our sweet Jesus, of the Virgin Mary and the saints, I ask you to inflame my sister with your Spirit of Love and grant her the grace to make you greatly loved'⁸³.

It was in prayer that Thérèse strove for a greater theological precision than elsewhere. In this particular prayer (the prayer that she requested from her spiritual brother), she has already invoked the Father, Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the saints. Hence, it is logical to conclude that her reference to the 'Spirit of Love' was to the Holy Spirit⁸⁴. Thérèse reflected on this 'Spirit of Love' in the mystery of her mission as the love for the other. It was this 'Spirit of Love' that the Church experienced on the day of Pentecost (Acts. 2: 1-4). This same 'Spirit of Love' came to Mary (Lk. 1: 35)⁸⁵ to operate in her the incarnation of Jesus. This symbol would speak first of all, of the action of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation; and secondly, on the day of 'Pentecost'⁸⁶. Or in

⁸³ *Letters* 220, Thérèse to Abbé Bellière (24 February, 1897) p. 1060.

⁸⁴ R. M. VALABEK, "The Holy Spirit in the Life of Saint Therese," p. 83.

⁸⁵ In the latter part of Thérèse's poems especially in "Pourquoi je t'aime ô Marie" (*Poésies* 54, Mai 1897), she refers to the theme 'Spirit of Love' (cf. Lk. 1: 35), where the working of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation is explained. That Thérèse should name him the 'Spirit of Love' is easily understandable, since, in the common Christian teaching, the Spirit is the love of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father (cf. R. M. VALABEK, "The Holy Spirit in the Life of Saint Therese," p. 84).

⁸⁶ F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," p. 119.

other words, it was by the action of this 'Spirit of Love' that the Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary in the mystery of incarnation, and the birth of the Church was from the paschal mystery of redemption enacted by Jesus. The heart that burned with love in her prayers, was first of all, the heart of Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit⁸⁷. This is the 'Spirit of Love' that enlivens, activates and carries one to love Jesus entirely. Thérèse experienced this love of Jesus in the Holy Spirit; for it was this flame of love that united her to the paternal love of God. The whole life of Thérèse was in correspondence with this love which was in God and gave itself to her in the Holy Spirit⁸⁸. According to Thérèse, it is in the love of Jesus that people of today can find and deepen all the realities of the faith which is truth in God the Father, God the Son and the God the Holy Spirit.

B. THÉRÈSE'S PILGRIMAGE IN FAITH

Thérèse's spiritual journey in faith could be explained in three phases: the maturation of faith through her infancy, her probe into the mystery of Love through faith, and finally her trials or the darkness in faith.

The Cradle of Faith-experience in Thérèse

Thérèse's memories of childhood in her growth towards mature faith were the real basis for her spiritual journey. Thérèse was formed in a silent intimacy with God since her childhood. The family atmosphere played an important role in her life of faith. Her mother would teach her to offer her heart to the Lord everyday at rising. Pauline would explain to her the goodness of God, and afterwards they would kneel down and say their prayers together (Ms. A 13v. SS. 36). Thérèse would offer her heart very often, making use of the formula her mother taught her (Ms. A 15r. SS. 38). Thérèse, even at the age of six, would

⁸⁷ F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," pp. 119-120.

⁸⁸ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," pp. 123-127.

never miss the opportunity to visit the Blessed Sacrament with her father every afternoon. She would concentrate on the praying face of her father on Sundays, at evening prayers, and while listening to sermons (Ms. A 17v. SS. 42). With Victoire, the servant-girl, Thérèse would make the month of the Marian devotion together. Thérèse herself would prepare the altar in her 'own style' (Ms. A 15v. SS. 39). In fact, the familial atmosphere was a boost to her pilgrimage and growth in her Christian faith. The child Thérèse manifested a thirst for God in her prayers and meditation. She desired to be alone with God and God had become for her *Bien-Aimé* (Beloved). She longed to see God in silence (Ms. A 31v. SS. 71). After her first communion, she said: "It is no longer I who live, but Jesus is in me. Since that communion, my desire to receive Jesus grew more and more" (Ms. A 36v. SS. 79). Even at the age of fourteen, she was able to correspond well with her friends about the secrets of perfection. With her Christmas conversion of 1886, she was able to make a 'giant's step' forward⁸⁹.

Thérèse Probes into the Mystery of Faith through Love

Thérèse's doctrine of the Little Way is fundamentally theological, and it is a way for every one to have access to the loving God in faith. It was in faith she experienced the love of Jesus. She recognized in faith that Jesus was burning with love for her⁹⁰. The doctrine of the Little Way would show Thérèse's regard for faith in her Beloved, to know him in a 'science of LOVE' (Ms. B 1r. SS. 187)⁹¹, which would tell in turn, how much he

⁸⁹ Cf. L. MENVIELLE, "Le regard de foi qui provoque la miséricorde," in G. GAUCHER, ed., *Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: Docteur de l'Amour*, pp. 204-206.

⁹⁰ *Letters* 87, Thérèse to Céline (4 April, 1884) p. 553.

⁹¹ Thérèse used this expression 'science of LOVE' to describe her experience of love through her letter to her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart. This expression was actually from the *Little Breviary of the Sacred Heart*, a book that was used in the Lisieux Carmel. (The words of Our Lord to Saint Margaret Mary: "Here is a teacher whom I am giving you; he will teach you everything that you must do. I want to make you read in the book of life, wherein is contained the science of LOVE").

loves and transforms the human person in his love if one lives in him. It was in faith that she had this 'science of love'⁹². To go deep into the Thérésian faith in the Merciful Love of God, it would be enough to analyze the merciful presence of God in the life of Thérèse, as an experience that penetrated her whole life profoundly. She came to know that the acceptance of one's own nothingness was a necessary condition to love God. In her weakness, she dared to approach God and presented herself to Him to be completely taken up by His goodness. In the same way, faith in the Divine Mercy was a positive step to open oneself with confidence to the infinite love. Thus, humility and faith in the Merciful Love of God are two conditions to engage oneself in the 'Little Way'. For Thérèse, the condescension of God was incomprehensible (Ms. A 72v. SS. 156), ineffable (Ms. B 5v. SS. 200), and His merciful love was an ocean without limit⁹³. In the life of Thérèse, faith and love were so united so as to say that she was with Jesus in her thoughts, actions and words. She was in the presence of the one she loved.

In fact, it was in her union with God, by the experience of faith unmistakably fixed on God, that Thérèse had received her knowledge of the living and deep divine mysteries of God's Mercy. She understood that this mercy is something which 'gives' itself. It was in the measure of dedication to the love of the cross that one receives this experience of faith, and this faith then, becomes a permanent loving experience. She understood well that confidence and abandonment were consequences of the divine love which had the same characteristic of this experience of faith, i.e., the gift of self⁹⁴. This basic faith demands a loving union with God in prayer, which becomes a means of collaboration of human beings with God. The role of a human person is to fix his/her eyes on God in prayer, with pure faith and confidence. Thus prayer becomes a continual act of faith. According to St. John of the Cross, "through faith one touches

⁹² Cf. L. MENVIELLE, "Le regard de foi qui provoque la miséricorde," pp. 208-211.

⁹³ Cf. C. DE MEESTER, *Dynamique de la confiance*, pp. 430-431.

⁹⁴ L. MENVIELLE, "Le regard de foi qui provoque la miséricorde," p. 234.

God and receives Himself"⁹⁵. This faith is the action of God. Through the darkness or the trails of faith, Thérèse had touched the Divine, experienced the summit of Divine union in the fullness of love⁹⁶.

The Darkness of Faith

The desire of Thérèse for a loving union with God in heaven had made her faith so strong, living and clear, that even the thought of heaven transported her with so much joy at heart. But a darkness of faith overshadowed her so suddenly that then the thought of heaven became the cause of torment and struggle. She writes:

During those very joyful days of the Easter season, Jesus made me feel that there were really souls who have no faith, and who, through the abuse of grace, lost this precious treasure, the source of the only real and pure joys. He permitted my soul to be invaded by the thickest of darkness, and that the thought of heaven, up until then so sweet to me, be no longer anything but the cause of struggle and torment (Ms. C 5v. SS. 211).

It was in fact in suffering that Thérèse found herself deserted by God and the saints. However, her love remained so strong for them. This temptation was not on the question of the existence of God, but that she had a negative feeling of nothingness (Ms. C 6v. SS. 212). This trial of faith started in April 1896 and continued until her death. Thérèse gives us a description of this darkness:

Then suddenly the fog which surrounds me becomes more dense; it penetrates my soul and envelops it in such a way that

⁹⁵ JOHN OF THE CROSS, ST., *Cantique spirituel*, B. 12: 4 in A. PEERS, ed., *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross*, 3 volumes (London: Burns & Oates, 1943).

⁹⁶ Cf. L. MENVIELLE, "Le regard de foi qui provoque la miséricorde," pp. 234-236.

it is impossible to discover within it the sweet image of my Fatherland; everything has disappeared! When I want to rest my heart fatigued by the darkness which surrounds it by the memory of the luminous country after which I aspire, my torment redoubles; it seems to me that the darkness, borrowing the voice of sinners, says mockingly to me: "You are dreaming about the light, about a Fatherland embalmed in the sweetest perfumes; you are dreaming about the eternal possession of the Creator of all these marvels; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog which surrounds you! Advance, advance; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for but a night still more profound, the night of nothingness (Ms. C 6v. SS. 213)".

Thérèse shows us through her experience, the depth of her sufferings. This darkness of sins against the faith touched her life so deeply⁹⁷. This trial of faith was a final preparation for Thérèse. The ultimate purification of faith would consist in the disappearance of all the natural basic elements on which the soul could support its faith. The disappearance of these basic natural elements of faith is really a night for the soul, for it can't now support itself on anything natural. It cannot believe, desire or love God on account of God. Thérèse had the same kind of trials and she fought against this temptation of faith with more acts of faith. She would say:

I believe I have made more acts of faith in this past year than all through my whole life. At each new occasion of combat, when my enemy provokes me, I conduct myself bravely. Knowing it is cowardly to enter into a duel, I turn back on my adversary without deigning to look him in the face; but I run towards my Jesus. I tell Him I am ready to shed my blood to the last drop to profess my faith in the existence of *heaven* (Ms. C 7r. SS. 213-214).

The prayer of Thérèse to Jesus then, was a simple look of love in peace of heart. Her love was already purified. She iden-

⁹⁷ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," pp. 152-154.

tified her sufferings with that of Jesus. She found peace in this identification. It was in love, and in loving alone, she found peace. This is in line with the demands of her doctrine of Spiritual Childhood⁹⁸. Through this anagogical act of faith, Thérèse could sing:

Non, rien ne m'inquiète
Rien ne peut me troubler
Plus haut que l'alouette
Mon âme sait voler⁹⁹

Thérèse's Experience of Kenosis in Faith

For Thérèse, littleness and poverty were a dynamic reality. The love in Jesus found its clearest expression in his self-emptying on the cross. Thérèse understood this truth clearly which she expressed as: "the nature of love is to humble oneself" (Ms. A 2v. SS. 14). Further more, she says, "...in order that Love be fully satisfied, it is necessary that It lower Itself, and that It lower Itself to nothingness and transform this nothingness into fire" (Ms. B 3v. SS. 195). Concretely, Thérèse experienced this *kenosis* of love by the last stages of her life through her passion, in undergoing truly a trial of faith. At the center of the trials of faith and precisely through the totality of her blind hope, Thérèse continued to express in a deep level, the joy of love, a joy in darkness. It seems to be paradoxical. But she says:

Inspite of this trial which has taken away *all my joy*, I can nevertheless cry out: "*You have given me DELIGHT, O Lord, in ALL Your doings*". For is there a *joy* greater than that of suffering out of love for You? The more interior the suffering is and the less apparent to the eyes of creatures, the more it rejoices You, O my God!... Never have I felt before this, dear Mother, how sweet and merciful the Lord really is, for He did not send me

⁹⁸ Cf. L. MENVIELLE, "Le regard de foi qui provoque la miséricorde," pp. 233-234; see also G. GAUCHER, *Jean et Thérèse*, pp. 112-113.

⁹⁹ *Poésies* 52, stanza 16, *L'Abandon est le fruit délicieux de l'Amour* (31 Mai, 1897) p. 235 (own translation: No, nothing can worry me, Nothing can trouble me, Higher than the lark, my soul is able to fly).

this trial until the moment I was capable of bearing it (Ms. C 7r-7v. SS. 214)¹⁰⁰.

Thérèse accepted her suffering lovingly, and this loving acceptance was the result of her self-*kenosis* through faith¹⁰¹. Thérèse believed that this *Kenosis* in faith was not a confusion in or against faith. It was the result of a pure love which she had for Jesus. And it was through this love itself that she enjoyed happiness and peace of heart. Or in other words, it was in the depth of passion that Thérèse was happy, this happiness being the result and demand of her love for Jesus¹⁰².

C. THÉRÈSE'S HOPE IN THE DIVINE MERCY

Christian Spiritual Theology today is more concerned about reflection on Christian hope. The theological virtue of hope tends one to the great mystery of God. St. Paul speaks of hope in his epistle to the Romans: "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8: 24-25). Thérèse described hope as the greatest force of the soul, whatever the nature of the soul be. Concretely, she lived this hope as a prelude to her progress towards the other two theological virtues of faith and love. She considered hope as an indispensable virtue for one's progress towards the love of God. Thérèse offered through her doctrine of Spiritual Childhood, a poeticized theology of an eschatology in brief. The message of love as she understood it, the doctrine of confidence she put forth as central to her message, would take the soul where it should reach, namely, to the reality of 'not yet.' Thérèse's eschatological perspective was typical of her period in history: the futurist understanding of the period views the life of heaven,

¹⁰⁰ Cf. C. DE MEESTER, *Les mains vides*, pp. 138-140).

¹⁰¹ Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "Le Jésus de l'Amour," p. 27; G. GAUCHER, *Jean et Thérèse*, pp. 110-111; and also M. DORGAN, "Thérèse, A Latter-day Interpreter of Saint John of the Cross," pp. 114-115.

¹⁰² Cf. F. M. LÉTHEL, "L'Amour de Jésus," pp. 153-154.

as a release from exile, fulfillment of faith, hope and love, and a completion and consummation of the spousal relationship with Christ. It would call for an active relationship with the pains and groans of the society and the world at large¹⁰³. A three-phased explanation of Thérèse's living of hope would lead us to a clear synthesis of our attempt at theologizing Thérèse's doctrine of the Little Way of Spiritual Childhood: the cradle of the virtue of hope in Thérèse; the place of hope in her doctrine and finally Thérèse's kenotic experience of death in love.

The Cradle of the Virtue of Hope in Thérèse

In all the events of Thérèse's life, whether it be sickness, suffering, timidity, lack of affection, aridity, trial of faith and the like, she had an admirable confidence in the good God, a hope in His powerful action for her life. All these trials she had lived in love, in union with the sufferings of Jesus, her unique Love. Describing her Christmas conversion, she would say that what she couldn't achieve in ten years, she had attained in a moment (Ms. A 45r. SS. 97); and that too, through her pure hope in the Lord. In this 'one-moment' transformation Thérèse had realized the infinite distance between the divine moment and human efforts, a reality one could only hope for. It was on the basis of this transforming experience that Thérèse developed her theology of Hope and the doctrine of the Little Way. She placed herself in the absolute mercy of God, with all the force of her love. Thérèse understood that God is love, a love of the father for its child. Thérèse, as a child, responded to it with absolute confidence and self-renunciation in hope. She had so much hoped and desired, so much waited for God, and "God surpassed all her expectations" (Ms. B 3r. SS. 208). According to Père Conrad De Meester, the point of departure of hope is the human finiteness through which one understands the im-

¹⁰³ Cf. J. RUSSEL, "The Religious Plays of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux," p. 57; B. ULANOV, "Thérèse and the Modern Temperament," in J. SULLIVAN, ed., *Experiencing Saint Thérèse Today*, p. 169; and also C. NIQUEUX, "L'espérance aveugle en la miséricorde divine," p. 238.

possibility of loving God with the same measure of the love He has for the human being. We are all debtors before God¹⁰⁴, says he. One recognizes his/her powerlessness, littleness, and poverty in regard to the love of God. This acceptance through humility leads one to hope in the unfathomable love of God. Thérèse brought out this reality and expressed her hope through her poem:

C'est ton amour, Jésus, que je réclame
 C'est ton amour qui doit me transformer
 Mets en mon coeur ta consumante flamme
 Et je pourrai te benir et t'aimer
 Oui je pourrai t'aimer comme l'on aime
 Et te benir comme on le fait au Ciel
 Je t'aimerai de cet amour lui-même
 Dont tu m'aimes, Jésus, Verbe Eternel¹⁰⁵

The Place of Hope in the Little Way

The theological virtue of hope in Thérèse's life is the medium between love and faith. The characteristic marks of love are profoundly marked in this virtue of hope too. Thérèse lived the essence of faith in hope. And the hope itself was the result of her basic motto of confidence and poverty. This poverty and hope are intimately related; in other words, those who have everything, would not hope in anything. Thérèse wanted to be a saint, that was her hope. But she found herself little, poor and powerless to achieve the heights of perfection. She based her hope in God alone. She prayed: "Je veux donc, ô mon Dieu, fonder sur *Vous seul* mon espérance"¹⁰⁶. Wherever there is emp-

¹⁰⁴ Cf. C. DE MEESTER, *Les mains vides*, pp. 164-167.

¹⁰⁵ *Poésies* 41, *Comment je veux aimer*, (fin 1896) p. 192 (own translation: It is your love, Jesus, that I ask for, It is your love that should transform me, Put in my heart your consuming flame, And I would praise and love you, That I would love you and praise you as one would do it in Heaven, I will love you with the same love, with which you love me, Jesus, the Eternal Word).

¹⁰⁶ *Prières* 20, *Prière pour obtenir l'humilité* (16 Juillet, 1897) p. 529.

teness, renunciation and poverty, there is the presence of the Merciful Love, which is actualized through the medium of hope. Thérèse wanted a total renunciation. She tried not to gain, but to loose; not to ascend, but to descend¹⁰⁷. The Way of Spiritual Childhood implies poverty and hope wherein God acts vehemently¹⁰⁸. Often Thérèse employed the words hope, confidence and abandonment with the same connotation. Hope was almost a synonym for confidence to her. She confided herself to the fidelity of God, made deep her love for Him. It emanates from faith in the goodness of God, flows through hope, and leads to the love where it desires to be united deeply and intimately¹⁰⁹.

To have an intimate communion with the Mystery of Jesus, Thérèse knew well that she had to humble and lower herself as a dew-drop in the flower of the garden¹¹⁰. For Thérèse, to be little meant to accept her nothingness, a complete dependence on God for everything as a little child for its father. Thérèse was very sure of the way to attain this end as she wrote once: "what pleases Him is *that He sees me loving my littleness and my poverty, the blind hope that I have in His mercy*"¹¹¹. Thus, it is in the theological virtue of hope in Thérèse that one would discover the holiness of the Little Way. Animated in love, her hope became confidence. Lived in the spirit of poverty, she turned to God as to her father, and thus she had a filial attitude towards Him in confidence¹¹². This confidence, says Père Marie Eugène, is theological hope animated by love¹¹³. The perfection of hope that Thérèse translated in terms of abandonment and confidence, was all the fruit of the divine action. Only the divine action regulates the activities of the soul, both human and di-

¹⁰⁷ *Letters* 137, Thérèse to Céline (19 October, 1892) p. 761; and also *Letters* 165, Thérèse to Céline (7 July, 1894) p. 861.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. G. GAUCHER, *Jean et Thérèse*, pp. 123-132.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. DE MEESTER, *Les mains vides*, pp. 178-180.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Letters* 141, Thérèse to Céline (April 25, 1893) p. 785.

¹¹¹ *Letters* 197, Thérèse to Céline (17 September, 1897) p. 999.

¹¹² Cf. C. NIQUEUX, "L'espérance aveugle en la miséricorde divine," pp. 263-264.

¹¹³ M. EUGÈNE, *Je veux voir Dieu*, p. 837.

vine. This divine action is deigned to be directed by the Holy Spirit. Thérèse's dependence on the action of the Holy Spirit is clear when she conveyed it through her letter to Céline:

"We do not know how to ask for anything as we ought, but the spirit pleads within us with unutterable groaning" (St. Paul). We have, then, only to surrender our soul, to *abandon* it to our great God. What does it matter, then, if our soul be without gifts that sparkle exteriorly since within us the King of kings shines with all His glory¹¹⁴.

Thus, Thérèse found out the great theological virtue of hope through knowledge and experience of the divine gift of the Holy Spirit. She found out that it was through humbling oneself to the love of God, making oneself poor in spirit before God, that the progress in the virtue of faith, hope and love is achieved. It is poverty that makes one's hope perfect, in its purity¹¹⁵.

The Theological Implication of Hope in the Little Way

The role of the theological virtue of hope emerges from the theological basis or more exactly from its Christological basis: "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men... even death on a cross" (Phil. 2: 5-8). This movement of extreme humility, is a sign of the great love that God had for humanity. Humanity is associated by a communion of grace and love. Thérèse had understood that the more love humbles itself to give itself to others, the more will it manifest its profound nature. In the allegory of the little bird which Thérèse explained in her Manuscript B, she shows how her hope rested on the capacity that love could bring the soul towards those in whom one can confide fully. She writes:

¹¹⁴ *Letters* 165, Thérèse to Céline (7 July, 1894) p. 863 (cf. also Rom. 8: 25-27).

¹¹⁵ Cf. C. NIQUEUX, "L'espérance aveugle en la miséricorde divine," pp. 256-258.

One day I hope that You, the Adorable Eagle, will come to fetch me, Your little bird; and ascending with it to the Furnace of Love, You will plunge it for all eternity into the burning Abyss of this Love to which it has offered itself as victim (Ms. B 5v. SS. 200).

Père Marie-Eugène also held this same idea when he wrote: "This movement of hope is truly the law of the presence of the love of God. That is why the whole hope of Thérèse rested in this habitual movement of the Word of God Incarnate".¹¹⁶ The more one humbles oneself, the more will be the manifestation of the love of God in him/her. Thérèse too humbled herself to attain to this end. She says: "Abasing myself so high that I was able to attain my end" (Ms. B 3v. SS. 194). This was the basis of Thérèse's hope, a hope through humility and self-abasement.

Hope at the Service of Love

Thérèse wrote to her spiritual brother:

The thought of eternal beatitude hardly thrills my heart... What attracts me to the homeland of heaven is the Lord's call, the hope of loving Him finally as I have so much desired to love Him, and the thought that I shall be able to make Him loved by a multitude of souls who will bless Him eternally¹¹⁷.

The theological virtue of hope makes one desire for himself the eternal possession of God. This aspect 'for himself' is essential to the virtue of hope and its universality. The hope for others develops itself in love towards them. It was in loving that Thérèse hoped for the salvation of others¹¹⁸. Love brings hope. An ardent love leads to a new hope and this new hope is at the same time an expression of love and a supplication to be made anew in God. Therefore, love in hope and hope in love would

¹¹⁶ M. EUGÈNE, *Je veux voir Dieu*, p. 1031.

¹¹⁷ *Letters* 254, Thérèse to Père Roulland (14 July, 1897) p. 1142.

¹¹⁸ C. NIQUEUX, "L'espérance aveugle en la miséricorde divine," p. 267.

become the basic element of the Little Way¹¹⁹. Thérèse is one of the great witnesses of this unlimited hope, which consisted even hoping in everything without being neither limited by any form of despair for herself nor for others. It was in order to base herself in this strong, unlimited hope that Jesus had allowed Thérèse to have her first 'child' (Ms. A 45v. SS. 99), the criminal Pranzini.

This is the true hope, that, animated by charity, 'hopes all things' (Cf. 1 Cor. 13: 7). The letter Thérèse wrote to her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, is a significant text in regard to the hope of Thérèse in line with her desire to love. Thérèse expressed her object of hope and the desire of their accomplishment in this letter. She found the response to her immense desires in Love itself. It was charity alone, as St. Paul says, the excellent way that leads surely to God. This was also the response of Thérèse to her desire for hope; and this truth was what gave the key to her vocation (Ms. B 3v. SS. 194).

The 'Already but Not-Yet' Character of Hope

Thérèse found out that charity was the reality which animated her, and made her feel to be everything as she had been before her Beloved Jesus. She knew for certain that the complete possession of this hope would not be possible here on earth. It is like the hope of a navigator for the Light-house that would lead him to the Port. If the navigator is sure of the fulfillment of his hope, then he would be in a peaceful state. The peace that follows hope was the same in Thérèse too. She writes: "O luminous Beacon of love, I know how to reach You, I have found the secret of possessing Your flame" (Ms. B 3v. SS. 195). Thérèse knew for certain that it was hope that had been the driving force behind her journey to the perfection of love. She also knew that this hope had an 'already-but-not-yet' character. It was this character that strengthened her love for God and was thus associated with her whole life. Thérèse discovered that the love of God did not put limits on her hopes; but rather it hoped every-

¹¹⁹ Cf. C. DE MEESTER, *Les mains vides*, p. 180.

thing. The desires of Thérèse, which were 'greater than the universe' (Ms. B 3r. SS. 193), were her true and pure desires for the 'not-yet' reality of God's love in the life to come.

Heaven was an object of a profound hope for Thérèse. Since her early childhood, she had learned to direct herself to the hope for heaven and discover there her loving God. Heaven was, after all for her, a place of perfect communion with God; it is the place where everybody would meet after their earthly life. This will be a time when all things would appear in their plain truth and under their true face. Heaven also represented for Thérèse, a place of the accomplishment of all her personal hopes and desires. In this sense, it is apt to say that heaven meant for Thérèse a place and time of the accomplishment of a 'not-yet' aspect of an 'already' reality. She tried to see this place of refuge in connection with the love of God. On the day of her first Communion, when Thérèse received Jesus for the first time, she spoke of a fusion of love and unity between herself and Jesus: "That day, it was no longer simply a look, it was a fusion; they were no longer two, Thérèse had vanished as a drop of water is lost in the immensity of the ocean. Jesus alone remained; He was the Master, the King" (Ms. A 35r. SS. 77). This experience was, for Thérèse, a fore-taste of what was to come. Thérèse spoke of this day as a day in heaven. She considered this as an occasion to grow in the love of God. She wrote:

It wasn't because heaven did not excite my desire, but because at this time my heaven was none other than Love, and I felt, as did St. Paul, that nothing could separate us from the Divine Being who so ravished me (Ms. A 52v. SS. 77).

The hope of Thérèse in the reality of the beauty and the richness of heaven, wherein is the love of God, overtook her whole life. It was the love of God and her personal love for Jesus that led her to the thought of heaven, wherein she knew was the place of ultimate union. Her hope of heaven and the love for it were well expressed again in her letter to her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart:

I feel that I shall have tasted *more sweetness in my martyrdom and my folly* than I shall taste in the bosom of the *joy of the Fatherland*, unless You take away the memory of these

earthly hopes through a miracle. Allow me, then, during my exile, the delights of love. Allow me to taste the sweet bitterness of my martyrdom (Ms. B 4v. SS. 197).

This hope for Thérèse was expressed in a double way: by way of experiencing the fore-taste of it here already, and a further hope for its complete realization in the 'not-yet' sphere. Or in other words, the perfection of love in heaven was her desire and hope for the 'not-yet-reality'¹²⁰.

Thérèse's Hope for 'Death in Love' - a Real Kenosis

Thérèse lived her life of love in the hope of its full accomplishment in heaven. It was her great desire to love, and to save souls. For this, Thérèse offered the sufferings of her whole life. And she died in this love for God and for others. To 'die of love' (mourir d'Amour) was the heart of the hope of Thérèse. It was her desire to die for love like the death of Jesus on the cross, a death in extreme anguish and suffering, a death lived in the love of Jesus in the realization of her paschal mystery¹²¹. It was through death in love that one triumphs eternally, says Thérèse. This idea is spontaneously expressed in her poem, "Vivre d'Amour:"

Mourir d'Amour voilà mon espérance
Quand je verrai se briser mes liens
Mon Dieu sera ma Grande Récompense
Je ne veux point posséder d'autres biens¹²².

She expressed her desire of 'dying in/of love' to her Prioress, Mother Marie de Gonzague: "Dear Mother, it seems to me now that nothing could prevent me from flying away, for I no longer have any great desire except that of loving to the point of dying of love" (Ms. C 7v. SS. 214). This same could be seen in

¹²⁰ Cf. C. NIQUEUX, "L'espérance aveugle en la miséricorde divine," pp. 243-246.

¹²¹ Cf. C. NIQUEUX, "L'esperance aveugle en la miséricorde divine," pp. 269-270.

¹²² *Poésies* 17, stanza 15, *Vivre d'Amour* (26 Février, 1895) p. 99.

her Canticle to her sister Céline: "Ô Jésus! Que je meure un jour d'Amour"¹²³. In this poem, one could see a relationship between the Trinitarian fire of love and Thérèse's desire of being a martyr of love. This death in love of Thérèse was in deep harmony with her Little Way. It has to live in and through the night of faith and hope¹²⁴. The trial of faith in Thérèse had its implications to her trial of hope too. It is clear when she states:

It seems to me that the darkness, borrowing the voice of sinners, says mockingly to me: "You are dreaming about the light, about a fatherland embalmed in the sweetest perfumes; you are dreaming about the *eternal* possession of the Creator of all these marvels; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog which surrounds you! Advance, advance; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for but a night still more profound, the night of nothingness" (Ms. C 6v. SS. 213).

This trial was so deep in Thérèse. She knew well that she was going to be discouraged by this trial, and she thought that this would break her hope. Thérèse confronted and fought this trial of hope by the weapon of faith and love in her Beloved. She would say: "At each occasion of my combat... I would profess my faith in the existence of heaven" (Ms. C 6v. SS. 213-214).

Thérèse knew well that only through abandonment of the self by way of confidence and love that one could conquer the trials of hope; and she did it extra-ordinarily, dying in and for love. St. John of the Cross upon whom Thérèse depended so profoundly for her doctrine, speaks of hope as a power of self-purification, of a detachment from all that is not God, in order to bring one towards the direction of the divine. By hope, he says: "the soul detaches its heart from all things, she hopes on nothing of what the world can give; she lives only in waiting for the eternal things"¹²⁵. And again he says: "She is so denied to

¹²³ *Poésies* 18 stanza 52, *Le Cantique de Céline* (28 Avril, 1895) p. 111.

¹²⁴ Cf. G. GAUCHER, *Jean et Thérèse*, pp. 159-166.

¹²⁵ JOHN OF THE CROSS, ST., *Dark Night*, book 2, ch. 21, 6, in A. PEERS, ed., *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross* (3 volumes (London, Burns & Oates, 1943).

the possession of things of this world, her only support and desire is for God, she lifts her eyes only to God"¹²⁶. It is hope that would direct one to look forward; a march forward to attain the end. Père Marie-Eugène says: "La foi découvre; la charité possède dans l'eternité; l'espérance est toute tendue vers l'objet qu'elle ne connaît pas par la foi et qu'elle ne possède pas dans toute la mesure du désir de la charité"¹²⁷. The hope of Thérèse took the measure of her love and it was in love she discovered its greatness, immensity and its scope. Thus the hope of Thérèse attained its universality in *Kenosis*. In this *Kenosis* she discovered the reality of her existence and her vocation to love and to make Love loved¹²⁸.

CONCLUSION

The 'Little Way' of Thérèse is the modern realization of the Gospel injunction: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18: 3). Thérèse construed her way towards holiness based on her existential insufficiency, of weakness and of littleness, naturally pertinent to a little child. But she knew well to transform it in a state of hope in the Merciful Father. In this hope, which gave rise to a sure and loving confidence, she discovered a new dynamism, a dynamism of *kenosis* through faith, hope and love. The trials of faith in Thérèse had helped her to purify her love and hope. This was really a 'test for her way of confidence and love', says Renault Emmanuel¹²⁹. In the perspective of the redemption, one can say that through the darkness that invaded the spirit of

¹²⁶ JOHN OF THE CROSS, ST., *Dark Night*, book 2, ch. 21, 6.

¹²⁷ JM. EUGÈNE DE L'ENFANT JÉSUS, *Je veux voir Dieu*, p. 825 (own translation: The faith discovers: the charity possesses in its embrace; the hope is tended towards the object that it does not know through faith and that it does not possess in all the measure of the desire of charity).

¹²⁸ Jcf. C. NIQUEUX, "L'espérance aveugle en la miséricorde divine," pp. 238-239; 248-252.

¹²⁹ JR. EMMANUEL, *L'épreuve de la foi: Le combat de Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris: Cerf, 1991) p. 16.

Thérèse at the end of her life, she had experienced and announced in a prophetic manner¹³⁰ the 'night' of the modern day. Thérèse would join the anguishes and distresses of many today. She offered herself to the love of God even in her crises. Her model of combating this 'night' with more acts of faith and love, will enlighten the heart of this age. Like Christ, Thérèse too suffered for others, for their salvation. The mystery of the suffering of Christ and of Christians, is the mystery of love transfigured by the light of the world, the Christ. Thérèse lived this trial of faith in the heart of modernity, in carrying its spiritual ups and downs in the form of dechristianization, and of atheism in all its forms. Thus, Thérèse is at the heart of the Church living this painful passion of the trial of faith. She continues to draw the attention of the world through her desire for only the truth. She stood in times of trial, with faith, hope and love. This is to be the model for today: sufferings enveloped in the splendor of love. In the same vein Thérèse continues to sing in the same manner:

L'amour, ce feu de la Patrie
 Ne cesse de me consumer
 Que me font la mort ou la vie?
 Jésus, ma joie, c'est de t'aimer!¹³¹

¹³⁰ Cf. M. MICHEL, "Thérèse missionnaire de l'an 2000," pp. 66-65.

¹³¹ *Poésies* 45 stanza 7, *Ma joie* (21 Janvier, 1897) p. 210.