

# THE MISSION OF THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

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## *Introduction*

THE INTENT OF THIS STUDY is not to review what Thérèse of Lisieux's mission has been for the past hundred years, but rather to ask what her mission is now at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Does the young woman called 'the greatest saint of modern times' have anything significant to say to *post-modernity*? Will her writings, in fact, remain spiritual classics like those of the great Carmelites before her, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, or does Thérèse clearly belong to an epoch that has passed or is passing into history? According to American historian, Patricia Byrne, Thérèse captured the Catholic imagination of a whole era precisely because she personified in religious practice and belief a period extending from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the time of Vatican II.<sup>1</sup> She was a major force in helping to shape the spirituality of her time, so that while she was in many ways a daughter of her own time and culture, she was more significantly a mother or forerunner of Catholic life and devotion in the twentieth century.

The question before us is this: will new interpretations of this French Carmelite saint reveal she still has a meaningful, dynamic mission? Have we robbed Thérèse's story of its potential or is there a horizon yet to be discovered? In other words, did Thérèse produce a text that can be read into the twenty-first century? Although these are *my* honest questions about Thérèse, they join a whole history of questioning including not only new people entering Carmel and Carmelites once deeply influenced by her writings but also theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar.<sup>2</sup>

If Thérèse has a mission and message for postmodernity and beyond, she must be able to sustain complex questioning from contemporary experience and from a variety of disciplines, such as feminist studies, theology, psychology, literature, sociology and science, from which new and unexpected meanings of her mission may emerge. If Thérèse is to move into postmodernity, we must allow her to grow up and must ourselves help her writings to 'grow up' by postmodern interpretations.

I am suggesting we need other ways of reading Thérèse that extricate her from the master-narrative of the dominant culture in which she has been so deeply embedded and that allow her to speak anew. She can help us by speaking her own voice from her own otherness in a new way, thereby allowing her autobiography to move us into postmodernity. It is the relishing of those seen as other, different, marginalized, not accounted for, which defines the intellectual as well as the ethical meaning of the present moment in history and which intersects with theology and spirituality today. If nothing else, I hope those who struggle with my interpretation will understand the transformative power of listening as (an)Other Thérèse speaks in a somewhat different voice.<sup>3</sup>

I propose to suggest a contemporary re-visioning of her mission through the lens of mothering and female bonding.<sup>4</sup> I hope to show, first, the relationship between Thérèse's experience of mothering and a widening aperture on the eternal in her life – more specifically, how the successive presence and loss of the mother-face shape the face of God as mother and lover; second, the connection between mother/female bonding and the writing of her autobiography; third, and this follows from the development of the two previous points, how Thérèse's real mission, above all, is her text, which is capable of breaking boundary after boundary.

Although scholars of psychology of religion have made use of psychoanalytic object relations theory as it pertains to mother–infant bonding,<sup>5</sup> interpretation through the lens of *female* bonding, or mother–daughter relationship, using the research of Nancy Chodorow and others, has not, to my knowledge, been seriously employed in the field of religion or theology. Even if this specific focus is now somewhat passé among many postmodern feminists, particularly in the field of literature, nonetheless, I do not believe it has been utilized in interpreting Thérèse whose entire short life unfolds within what is usually considered the domain of woman. Because her circumscribed social location in the small spaces of home and monastery, among women and succeeding mothers, confines Thérèse's life to the sphere of domesticity, and since the issues of mother and the 'reproducing of mothering' are germane to that sphere, it seems critical to look at Thérèse through the lens of mothering. It may well be precisely the matrilocality of *The story of a soul*<sup>6</sup> which creates such a paradox for contemporary readers, inasmuch as it is the misreading of the text's maternal discourse which causes us to misunderstand Thérèse's language of simplicity and 'baby talk'. If Thérèse is not to remain a child for ever, we must understand how this works.

*Mother–daughter bonding*

In the first chapter of her autobiography, Thérèse sees herself in the eyes of her own mother whose letters, written before Thérèse was four, attest to how the baby daughter has been mirrored to herself by a loving mother. By documenting what Thérèse knows experientially but perhaps not consciously, these letters bring to awareness the affirmative experience of love lying dormant in her psyche, thereby enabling her to tell us that her 'first memories . . . are stamped with smiles and the most tender caresses' (p 17). These mother-letters become part and parcel of her identity so that the autobiography actually mirrors the letters, while the letters mother the autobiography.

Thérèse is aware of 'what a sweet imprint' the first years of childhood prior to her mother's death left upon her (p 29). The love which baby Thérèse sees upon looking into the face of her mother (and by extension her surrogate nurse-mother, Rose Taille), her mother's ability to let her tiny daughter see her own reflection in a loving gaze of total *regard*, is foundational for Thérèse's life and her experience of God.<sup>7</sup> Her mother's face functions as the first mirror into which Thérèse looks to discover her own precious identity which is secure and self-assured until her mother dies. In Thérèse we see very clearly the psychological dynamic by which a baby is affirmed in her mother's gaze.

However, in examining the period after two years of age, that stage in childhood development where male theorists, such as Sigmund Freud, his redactor Jacques Lacan, and D. W. Winnicott, believe that healthy, 'normal' and normative development requires a sense of separation, Chodorovian psychologists would suggest that the female child continues to see an affirming reflection in her mother's face while simultaneously recognizing the difference between herself and the mother. The recognition of this dual unity of the female vision has prompted feminist theorists to coin the word (M)Other. What they claim the female child sees in her mother's face at the same time is both her own reflection and the reality of her mother's difference. The child sees both her mother and herself. Classic male theorists suggest that as long as the symbiotic union between mother and daughter exists, even in this residual stage, the child cannot come to healthy maturity. Feminists, however, would argue that this symbiosis is an aspect of female maturity, is, in fact, a necessary aspect if one is to be an effective mother, or to 'reproduce mothering' in a variety of ways in later life.

What is implied by this theory is that the mother is also reflected in the loving *regard* of her child and, therefore, sees herself affirmed so

that the nature of this relationship is a reciprocal one. Precisely because both are female, when the daughter looks at her mother she sees herself *and* she sees her mother, both at the same time, and not as radically separate as is the case with the male child. Thérèse's life and theology clearly embody this articulation and development of Lacan and Freud that Nancy Chodorow suggests. Thérèse can be both daughter and mother, as we shall see. Moreover, the act of being able to be both is an act of maturity and gives us a landmark for what we will later say about Christ as the Other. This mirroring structure, which is the quintessence of mother-daughter bonding, is a key to how women grow.

My use of the word 'regard', *un regard*, throughout this essay is similar to the use of it in the works of American scholars of French literature, Marianne Hirsch and Ronnie Scharfman,<sup>8</sup> inasmuch as I want it to mean both the look or gaze, and one's appearance, that is to say, one's face. It further signifies being face to face as if one were looking into a mirror and considering the face on which one gazes and, therefore, by extension the word 'regard' indicates esteem. For a richer understanding of how the mirroring bond operates in Thérèse's life-text, we need to keep this panoply of linguistic possibilities open to us, especially since in the concordance for the autobiography in French, the word *regard* runs into two columns.<sup>9</sup>

A touching example of the reciprocity as well as multivalence about which we are talking is found in writer Alice Walker's experience with her young daughter. Walker is worried about her three-year-old's discovery one day of her mother's deformed eye. She writes:

She studies my face intently . . . She even holds my face *maternally* between her dimpled little hands [*italics mine*]. Then . . . she says, as if it may just possibly have slipped my attention: 'Mommy, there's a world in your eye' . . . And then, gently, but with great interest: 'Mommy, where did you *get* that world in your eye?'

Crying and laughing, Alice Walker runs into the bathroom and looks into the mirror. There *is* a world in her eye, and she sees it is possible to love herself as she is because of the mothering love of her daughter.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Mother-loss as aperture on eternity*

In the case of Thérèse, she is sure she is loved because she remembers how stricken she was when her mother died. She changes then, she tells us, from being happy and full of life to being timid, withdrawn, hypersensitive, ill at ease, except in the safety, seclusion and intimacy of her own family. She feels like an exile on earth

precisely because she no longer has a mother, because the mother's face is gone, the mirror-bond is broken.

We see an echo of Thérèse's experience in a recent noteworthy novel, *The autobiography of my mother*.<sup>11</sup> Those who have read Jamaica Kincaid's strange, gripping, sad, seemingly nihilistic novel about a woman's life on the island of Dominica may be shocked at this association, but I sense a common terrain and believe these two texts interrogate the same issue: the relationship of the individual to the eternal. Although in language and social location they *seem* to be at opposite poles, both Thérèse and Kincaid's protagonist, Xuela, experience abandonment by their mother; and both, each in her own fashion, see out of their abandonment through to the eternal. Both bring us face to face with the depth of infinity. Thérèse actually sees the face of eternity only to discover finally that the features are not as clear as she thought. And Xuela looks for a face without ever seeing it; eternity is ever at her back; God is at her back looking over her shoulder, as it were. Yet in each case, hiddenness produces transcendence. We must not be fooled by the apparent difference between the two because both may be interrogating the same space and forcing us to deal with the same ultimate questions. Kincaid's novel begins with these words:

My mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind . . . At my beginning was this woman whose face I had never seen, but at the end was nothing, no one between me and the black room of the world. I came to feel that for my whole life I had been standing on a precipice, that my loss had made me vulnerable, hard and helpless; on knowing this I became overwhelmed with sadness and shame and pity for myself.<sup>12</sup>

It is the mother's face that prevents eternity from being nothing, that keeps the child from being faced with nothing at the end.

I missed the face I had never seen; I looked over my shoulder to see if someone was coming, as if I were expecting someone to come, and Ma Eunice would ask me what I was looking for . . . she thought it meant I could see spirits. I could not see spirits at all, I was looking for that face, the face I would never see, even if I lived forever.<sup>13</sup>

For both Thérèse and Xuela, when the mother's face is withdrawn, the 'bleak, black wind' presses in upon them and pushes them toward eternity, compressing, as it were, the time and space between them and

eternity. The face the one has never seen and the other has lost irretrievably constricts time and becomes the condition for their sense of eternity in time and space. Mother-loss becomes an *aperture on eternity*, a kind of tragic bonding with the infinite.

An awareness of the afterlife is real and all-pervasive for Thérèse. In many ways, it controls her story. Legend has it that the first word she is able to read without help is 'heaven', and at only two-and-a-half she wants her mother to die so the latter can go to heaven (p 17). One thing is certain: eternity is writ large into Thérèse's narrative very early. In fact, in her writings, we see convincing evidence that this biographical mythology of eternal life, inherited from her family, functions powerfully in the construction of a self capable of maintaining a focus on and movement toward eternity up to her own death.

After her mother dies, for example, four-year-old Thérèse is so bereft by mother-loss that an all-pervasive sense of loss and mortality permeates her consciousness. Then even a stale, crumbled jelly sandwich is cause for a melancholic yearning for heaven<sup>14</sup> that signals the radical, unbreakable and even prophetic connection being forged, albeit unconsciously, between eternity and mother-loss.

#### *Displacement of the mother-face*

Whereas one would understand how such an irrevocable loss of the mother-face would prompt Thérèse to attribute mother-love to her father (p 35) and would precipitate fear of losing him to heaven, her 'vision' of him in the garden with *veiled face* evidences how profoundly and yet paradoxically the pall of death, the veil of mourning, affects Thérèse's relationship with her father and associates him with the eternal. A traditional reading, suggested by Thérèse herself, sees this 'dream' of the veiled face as a prophecy of his later mental illness (pp 45–47). There is a significance in veiling, however, especially in the concealing or obscuring of appearance without obliterating it, that begs for other interpretations. Considering the importance we have given to the face, the loving look of the mother and the mirroring bond, we need to examine the figure of the veil in more complex ways. The beauty of a text is that many meanings can dance on the head of a pin, and to the degree the reader is able to hold them all, the text becomes very rich.

What is compelling, first of all, therefore, in this 'vision' is Thérèse's relationship to face and to the veiling of the regard, that is, to the withdrawal of the look – the face there and not there, the obscuring of the face, the obstructing of the loving gaze, the clouding of the mirror

or the face-to-face reflection of the self, the putting of the face in shadow. Secondly, the vision is so powerful because of the sheer incongruence of its image. Men do not wear veils, though a widow does wear a veil as a death symbol. In fact, the veil of death which conceals Thérèse's mother, in this vision actually reveals her father as mother. The veil allows us to feminize him, to make him mother.

This means the unusualness of the veil signals to the reader, therefore, what might seem to be an enigmatic relationship. One pole of the mother-daughter dyad is displaced, in this case, upon the father.<sup>15</sup> The affirming relationship is seen to transcend gender so that the father remains father, that is male, but is mother as well. If the father can be mother and if Thérèse can see herself reflected in him, in a 'glass darkly', then we are able to understand later when we see the male-female relationship displaced on the face of Jesus.

The veil then becomes our sign not only for intersubjective transcendence but also for the promise it gives of an even greater transcendent experience with yet another face, the holy, loving Face from eternity. The veil accents the possibility of mirroring despite gender differences, that is, it is a textual marker that something important is occurring, but differently from what we expect, and it begins to prefigure the transcendent reciprocity Thérèse will feel with Christ who is going to be both male and female (though ultimately hidden and beyond gender). What is writ small here in terms of father and Thérèse, we see later writ large in the relationship between Jesus and Thérèse. Even more, however, her father's face, onto which she tries to displace the maternal look of total regard, seems in this mysterious veiling to throw back from eternity a specifically *suffering, obscured face*, a 'Holy Face', in which Thérèse will, in time, find her own face mirrored and her passionate spirituality expressed.

This face of Jesus is certainly not yet altogether real when Pauline, who teaches and nurtures Thérèse even before their mother dies, is chosen by Thérèse as her second mother (p 34). Pauline is her ideal, the one she desires to imitate in everything (p 175), the mirror into which she looks for her reflection. I am convinced Thérèse suffers more deeply from the loss of her mother than we often realize as we read about the intimate, tender, enclosed family life at Les Buissonnets. Nevertheless, the mirroring bond between mother and daughter, integral to her self-understanding and authority as a female self, is not actually broken by Zélie Martin's death. Rather it is assimilated by and displaced not only on to Thérèse's father but even more fully and fundamentally on to Pauline, who is able to provide a consistent, loving regard.

Pauline is the most consciously important mother in Thérèse's life, so much so that Thérèse's great childhood dream is to go with Pauline 'into a far distant desert' where they will be hermits together for ever (p 57). While this desire on Thérèse's part and the ambiguous promise of its fulfilment on Pauline's can be easily seen as prefiguring their life together in Carmel, 'hermit' serves as a metaphor for something more. It foretells a life that *necessitates* an abandonment, a *hidden face*. And initially Thérèse experiences Carmel as abandonment. Her surrogate mother, her dear 'Mamma', her tenderly loved Pauline *abandons* her by entering Carmel when Thérèse is only nine.

Mother-loss is totally activated when the maternal face she has so successfully substituted is withdrawn. When Pauline goes to Carmel, to this small child her face seems forever *veiled*. Even though we know this is not the case, Thérèse experiences the mirroring bond as broken, sending back only shattered, fragmented images of the self.<sup>16</sup> The panic, despair, helplessness and complete confusion of the girl-child in the face of the *rejection* by and *untrustworthiness* of the mother in whose regard her self-image is so invested is heart-wrenching. She writes:

I understood I was about to lose my *second* Mother! [italics mine] . . . in one instant I understood what life was; until then I had never seen it so bad; but it appeared to me in all its reality, and I saw it was nothing but continual suffering and separation . . . I said in the depths of my heart: 'Pauline is lost to me!' (pp 58–60)

Later she adds, 'I believed I'd lost you forever' (p 106).

Kincaid's Xuela, also, talks about abandonment with a kind of power and pathos that helps us to understand Thérèse. One can comprehend the child Thérèse better if one can wrap one's mind around the kind of abandonment Xuela describes, realizing that a fictional character is able to do something that an *enfleshed* character cannot do without sounding overwrought. To the extent that people criticize Thérèse's 'histrionics', these can be understood in terms of this attempt to make abandonment real to her readers. Xuela describes the experience:

At my beginning was this woman whose face I had never seen, but at my end was nothing, no one between me and the black room of the world<sup>17</sup> . . . How to explain this abandonment, what child can understand it? That attachment, physical and spiritual, that confusion of who is who, flesh and flesh, which was absent between my mother and her mother was also absent between my mother and myself, for she died at

the moment I was born, and though I can sensibly say to myself that such a thing cannot be helped – for who can help dying – again how can any child understand such a thing, so profound an abandonment? I have refused to bear any children.<sup>18</sup>

In the face of such pain, Thérèse is affected in two ways. First, she, like Xuela, tasting so poignantly the ephemerality of life, feels again that compression of time as eternity encroaches upon her. She reaches momentarily through the widening aperture on eternity, grasping for a mother-face that will never disappear, will never abandon her. She resolves to hide herself in Carmel, not to regain Pauline, she assures us, sensing the obvious conclusion, but for Jesus alone (p 58). For one brief moment, Thérèse takes her fragile sense of self in her own hands and throws herself and her trust toward eternity, receiving for an equally brief prophetic moment the outline of another Face, another mirror of the ultimate *substitution* or exchange.

From one perspective, what we see Thérèse doing with the face of Christ is displacing the mother's face onto that Face. From another perspective, if we understand that the people who are gifts in our lives are the means by which the divine displaces itself on to physical reality, then the mother's face is the first displacement. In Thérèse we have a series of displacements that from the very beginning lead to the face of Jesus, even though Thérèse does not realize this. The ultimate locus *is* the face of God. This means that the degree to which we understand this reciprocity of placement is the degree to which we experience the mystery of the incarnation even if we do not rationally comprehend this.

For Thérèse, choosing Carmel for Jesus' sake is but a nanosecond of seeing. She cannot hold on to the face of God nor keep open the aperture on eternity, and she is thrown back on what she mistakenly perceives as second-best to Pauline, second-best to God, to mother: Marie. It is as if for this time the nine-year-old girl cannot muster what it takes to produce the same quality of displacement she has achieved with her father and Pauline. If one gets a glimpse of the greater possibilities of transcendence, then those strategies one tries in everyday life must, of necessity, fall short. They no longer have the power to work their magic. With each perceived abandonment Thérèse's struggle to summon the psychic strength to perform the displacement, to replace the mother's face, becomes more and more difficult.

Second, with Pauline's departure, Thérèse's threatened identity faces collapse; it cannot yet sustain the kind of self-transcendence demanded, since God's face is not adequately unveiled and there is nowhere for

her to displace the regard. Although Marie attempts to mother her, Thérèse totters in desperation on the edge of irreparable loss of herself. Because the mirror of love no longer reflects her young self for her – she cannot accept Marie and she does not even have any moments of intimacy with Pauline in the Carmelite parlour – she unconsciously begins to believe she is non-existent and moves toward nothingness feeling a ‘bleak, black wind’ at her back, as Kincaid’s Xuela suggests. This ordeal signals the forging of a connection deep within Thérèse’s psyche between abandonment, the hidden face and utter nothingness – the underside of mother–daughter bonding – the significance of which we are only able to grasp fully at the end of Thérèse’s life. The experience, bleak as it is, makes imperative her final ‘trial of faith’ on the brink of eternity inasmuch as it lays the foundation for work that cannot be accomplished at such an early age but which will have to be done before she dies.

Having been ‘rejected’ by or separated from Pauline who ‘takes the veil’, Thérèse cannot help wanting to disappear, to die, to refuse to be a self or to mother herself. Now the veil shrouds Thérèse; *she* refuses the face, she refuses incarnation. She withdraws from the family, from extreme fear and pain, into illness and depression. She almost dies from her accumulated mother-losses while all the time crying out for ‘Mamma’ in her delirium.<sup>19</sup>

The miracle is that when everything seems blocked, an eternal *regard* breaks through the aperture enabling little Thérèse to find enough inner strength to lift the veil and look into the mirror. She surpasses the protective confines of her relationship with Pauline and reaches out from the tiny core of her selfhood, from the depths of her battered psyche, through the opening on eternity, to be mothered by the infinite abyss, by a transcendent Mother-face suffused with absolute esteem: the smiling gaze of the Blessed Virgin giving her back the totality of her being.

Mary is the beginning of the ‘Mamma’ God. She is the window on the maternal side of God, another opening on eternity. It is no accident the Blessed Virgin *Mother* appears. For Thérèse the aspect of Jesus as Mother is not available in her theological lexicon so she displaces the mother-face on to Mary. She does not know Jesus is mother; we know, however, because of the language she uses.<sup>20</sup> The marvel is that not only her conscious self (choosing Carmel for Jesus’ sake), but even her hidden depths, far below the strata of thoughts and words, finally reach through the widening aperture on eternity for the mother-bond, the

mother-face, giving rise to Mother-Jesus who appears in one transcendent moment as the Christ-face and in another transcendent moment as Mary's face. Both are examples of Mother-God faces.<sup>21</sup>

*The face from eternity: mother and beloved*

The truly extraordinary experience of her First Communion can be seen as a response to this reaching when, she tells us, all the joy of heaven entered her exiled heart:

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 a look, it was a fusion [italics mine],<sup>22</sup> they were no longer two . . . I could not bear it without shedding tears. Oh! no, the absence of Mama didn't cause me any sorrow on the day of my First Communion. Wasn't heaven itself in my soul, and hadn't Mama taken her place there a long time ago? Thus in receiving Jesus' visit, I received also Mama's. (pp 77-78)

We see here an ambiguity of language. It has a double valence. The question is how to read two types of language that seem at first glance to be mutually exclusive or even in opposition. What you can read as mothering also obviously deals with the lover; and when both of them can be read simultaneously, the richness of the narrative is experienced. First of all, let us examine the mother language. Jesus and poor Thérèse look at each other, but it is no longer a look; it is a fusion. The ego bonds are so fluid mother and daughter cannot tell themselves apart; they are one.<sup>23</sup> When we reflect upon mother-daughter here, we see reciprocity. When the adult child and mother bond in this way, neither is the same again for in the fusion an exchange can be made. The daughter can at times mother her parent while the mother can accept the position as child to her own daughter ( $D \rightarrow M/D \leftarrow M$ ). When mother and daughter become one in the First Communion experience, their eyes lock and Mother-Jesus loves her and embraces her for ever unconditionally.

The embrace of motherhood, however, has an erotic valence we many times ignore. We shy away from the knowledge of the sensuality of mother-love. One of the things we know about motherhood is that when the child looks at the mother, or when the mother nurses the child, the mother is affected bodily. Clearly, warm milk which feels part of child is part of mother. While we recognize on reflection that the

language of the First Communion experience is absolutely apropos in our analysis of mother-love, nevertheless, this same language is more easily recognized, on first reading, as a discourse of romantic love.

As a rule, however, first readings participate in what we call the master-narrative; they are the common interpretations that do not disrupt traditional thinking, nor transgress the margins. We feel comfort in them because they do not upset the *status quo*. The ability to see alternative readings, like the mother trope here, allows us to radicalize the text, to read it into our postmodern times, to 'grow it up'. But what one wants to do with this reading is not to dismiss former understandings of the text but instead to embrace them for the richness they add to our understanding. This is why we try to hold both interpretations in our minds at the same time, to see both of these readings present simultaneously. There is a whole tradition in Christian spirituality where Jesus is both Mother and Beloved<sup>24</sup> and to read Jesus only as Lover does not permit us to radicalize Thérèse's text nor to see a greater complexity in the expression of love. Thérèse has been understood, and perhaps canonized, as safely female because she inserts herself so effortlessly into the master-narrative, playing the roles we can understand.

By this I mean that Thérèse does not have to grow out of the mother-daughter relationship to Lover-Beloved; they are not stages in an evolution. The mother as Other is analogous to loving *any* other (D → M/D → (M)Other). This feminist insight allows us to understand that the maintaining of mother-daughter relationships as they are 'reproduced' even into adulthood – even in our experience of God, the Mother – is not a sign of immaturity; and, therefore, even though Thérèse continues to use the language of motherhood into her adulthood, we should not be tempted to infantilize her.

What Thérèse's First Communion experience indicates is that the reciprocity of the mirroring bond has remained intact and has been displaced toward eternity. It is completely congruent, therefore, that the first faint prediction of what Thérèse sees as her mothering of souls, her mission as we have traditionally understood it, appears here in her autobiography as an expression of the gratitude she feels for the loving care her sisters showered upon her in her illness. She promises *to draw from her Beloved's treasures of love* to repay them a hundredfold for all they have suffered on her account (p 64, italics mine). The experience of fusing with the mother transforms one into mother. This is how one gets to be mother. And when one is mothered by the infinite, one participates in the infinite and is, therefore, mother by participation.

The way the reciprocity is experienced is not to mother the infinite but to understand oneself as limitlessly mother to the others.

Important as the First Communion experience is, however, it is not permanent in its effects. It is as if Thérèse must live the experience of mothering and loss again with her sister Marie before she understands it. The act of repetition is an act of painful learning for her, an act she actually repeats afresh in telling her story in her autobiography. *Each time* she relives the mother-loss and sees through the aperture to eternity, she does so with a slight difference and in this movement we see her transformation. Once she can negotiate the act of mothering using Marie as mother, Marie's inevitable loss to Carmel places Thérèse in the frame of mind to be open to her remarkable Christmas Eve conversion. This is not, however, easy for Thérèse. Having accustomed herself to living without Pauline, to seeing between her and Pauline 'impassable walls', Thérèse now depends upon Marie as her sole oracle and guide (p 88).

In reality I had only Marie, and she was indispensable to me . . . Marie knew, then, everything that went on in my soul . . . I loved her so much I couldn't live without her . . . As soon as I learned of Marie's determination, I resolved to take no pleasure out of earth's attractions . . . No longer able to confide in her I turned toward heaven. I addressed myself to the four angels who had preceded me there . . . soon peace came to inundate my soul with its delightful waves, and I knew that if I was loved on earth, I was also loved in heaven. (pp 88-93)

Thérèse could have been broken, should have been broken perhaps. Each succeeding mother-loss seems to collapse more the bright world between her and heaven, opening wider the aperture on eternity and letting her feel the cold bleak wind of loneliness at her back. That the successive reproducing of mothering is, however, gradually putting a face on eternity is evident in Thérèse's Christmas Eve transcendence of herself and her childhood and in the extraordinary love she experiences within herself. She writes, 'I felt charity enter into my soul and the need to forget myself and to please others; since then I've been happy' (pp 98-99).

From this time forward love in her continues to grow. This means that Thérèse's identity is triumphant not only through successive female bonding, but also through the suffering of its seeming withdrawal and the extension of the mirroring bond onto the divine, a Jesus who is mother, a mother who mirrors Thérèse's suffering: Jesus on the

cross dropping the nourishment of his blood – likened to mother’s milk by Bernard of Clairvaux – into her hands for others (pp 99–101). All her love will in time come to rest on this face of the suffering Jesus, the ‘Holy Face’. Furthermore, she will continue, without conscious reflection, to insist on this female/mother aspect of the divine throughout her life, as we see, for example, in the scripture texts she discovers to express her experience and to characterize the spirituality of her ‘Little Way’ (p 208).<sup>25</sup>

### *Reproduction of mothering*

That Thérèse at only thirteen experiences such desires for others to share in this bond, that she invests herself so completely in the criminal Pranzini’s conversion and shares him, moreover, so totally with her soul-mate, Céline, speaks of the vitality of the mirror-bonds. Her capacity to mother another, ‘her first child’, by drawing him into a relationship with her and Jesus, and her willingness to open these relationships to her sister Céline show us how the *reproducing of mothering* occurs (pp 99–101). Once Thérèse has entered into the mothering of Pranzini, the possibility of reciprocity has been established. She has learned the role of mothering without ever needing to forfeit being a daughter in mature mutuality.

This is particularly evident in the relationship between Pauline and Thérèse in Carmel. Although her ‘little mother’ functions in Alençon and Les Buissonnets as a mirror in which Thérèse sees herself as she would like to be, after Thérèse enters Carmel a delicate and deep reciprocity develops in their exchange of looks. In other words, their relationship becomes a two-way mirror capable of reversing the loving *regard* so that the older sister beholds herself in the younger one so full of promise.<sup>26</sup> This kind of female bonding, made indestructible by its openness to a transcendent Face, becomes the basis for Thérèse’s *reproduction of mothering* in her autobiography.

It is obvious Pauline could not have grown into who she was without the creation of the autobiography which was the condition for her own biography. Yet when Thérèse dies, the ‘story of her soul’ is like a fragile infant completely dependent upon Pauline to nurture it toward maturity. Even after Thérèse’s death, therefore, the reciprocity continues. Pauline mothers the text into publication, and Thérèse continues to *reproduce mothering* through the authority of her text which now mediates Pauline’s relationship with Thérèse. In this way, each is made whole by the other. When we realize Thérèse’s spirituality would not have taken root and developed without Pauline’s guidance, if we

acknowledge Pauline propelled Thérèse toward spiritual maturity by commissioning her autobiography, then we have a complex fugue expressive of the bond of reciprocity. The entire publication and canonization process can then be seen not only as a continuing construction of Thérèse by Pauline but also as a sign of how Pauline matures with the text of the autobiography.

What we know about the reading of the texts leads us to speculate on the transformative potential of the autobiography in Pauline's life. When she enters into the long process of interpretation by interacting with the potency of the text, she is compelled by the constraints and politics of publication, dissemination and canonization both to question the meaning and validity of her sister's autobiography and to accept its challenge to her own life and vision. One can only surmise the degree to which she is dispossessed over the span of her life of the fiction of her own selfhood by the discovery of unexpected meanings in Thérèse's text, forcing her to surrender to its transformative and now independent power mothering her into spiritual maturity.

The process in Pauline, moreover, allows us to speculate beyond the text what might have happened to Thérèse if she had lived longer. To understand the way the mirroring bond effects a kind of co-authorship of the text by Thérèse and Pauline permits us to see the *movement toward transformation* in Pauline as an indication of how Thérèse would have lived her own text into old age. Entering the complex politics of community life and responsibility – she was already beginning to move into an administrative role – and moving beyond the ardours of youth, she would of necessity have matured her life text. The stark, passionate, uncompromising holiness of the young might have been displaced by the complex, often misunderstood, battle-scarred holiness of age, harder to canonize but no less inspiring.

By accepting in young adulthood Pauline's commission to write, Thérèse makes concrete her delicate refusal during her Carmelite life to deny the face-to-face mutuality she has experienced and to revert to childhood dependence on Pauline; she passes into adulthood and mothers herself into being. More theologically, she allows the transcendent love-bond with Jesus to mother her into mission as her vision becomes clearer and more defined in the very act of writing.

The writing of spiritual autobiography, according to the Irish historian Margaret MacCurtain, is an avenue to liberty bequeathed to Carmelite women by their own mother, Teresa of Avila.<sup>27</sup> When Pauline, as prioress, asks Thérèse to write her memoirs, or even compose poetry for the community, she is inviting her to construct a

self that not only transcends the world of their relationship but also grows out of a broader, extended female bonding in the Carmelite community. She is placing her within a line of history-making women writers in the Carmelite Order and in monasticism, inviting her to join the matriline of those who have reached through the narrow aperture on eternity to be touched by divinity. Thérèse's ability to write the 'story of her soul' undoubtedly derives from 'the ease with which she is able to insert herself within [this] female history',<sup>28</sup> in the small social space of the Carmel with its completely matrifocal, inter-generational culture.

The importance of female social spaces in allowing women to move from one state of consciousness to another is underlined by Gerda Lerner in *The creation of feminist consciousness*.<sup>29</sup> Historically, monasteries offered women not only powerful female models but also 'a sheltered space in which discourse among women could flourish without challenge as to its validity' and in contrast to women's received definitions as inferior citizens.<sup>30</sup> In other words, all-female spaces have proven valuable, even necessary, in helping women to advance to the level of developing their own autonomous definitions of themselves and their goals, as well as new paradigms that include the female experience and an alternative vision of society.<sup>31</sup> Although those of us who value Thérèse are very conscious of the circumscribed character of her upbringing and the small space of her cloistered Carmelite life, what Lerner helps us to see is that the small female space can certainly be a place of imprisonment and limitation, but it can just as well be the place which, above all, produces depth, transcendence and creativity. And this is what we see in Thérèse.

*Mission as relationship with the infinite and depth of 'heart'*

Within the limited confines of Carmel, of fundamental importance to Thérèse is her connection to Mother Geneviève, the old foundress of Lisieux Carmel, who takes on the role of mythic mother on the mother-daughter continuum in relationship indicative of a very explicit gift of selfhood. It is not enough that 'the saint' gazes on Thérèse face to face with a loving *regard* validating her vocation; not enough that when this mother in death breaks through the opening on the eternal, the joy of her completion is mirrored to Thérèse as if Thérèse, herself, had moved through the aperture, but from *this* mother Thérèse receives the sign of her mission: the heart, in which she discovers the deepest meaning of her life.

Mission is another way of looking at relationship with the infinite. Having displaced the mother-face onto Mother Geneviève, Thérèse,

after this mother's death, receives back from an *eternal regard* the mother's heart bequeathing her whole self, that is, wholeness and the influence of a foundress, to Thérèse. This means the heart Thérèse receives in a dream is not only signalling that Mother Geneviève loves her, but is commissioning her to love and this *commission* is bigger than mothering. It breaks open the prison of mother discourse, moving beyond even what is perfect for us who have mythologized motherhood to mean 'unconditional love'. What Thérèse desires and seeks to achieve is a love even greater than mother-love and what Geneviève bequeaths to Thérèse, then, is permission to seek that transcendent love. Through the ever-expanding aperture, an eternal fire is laying hold of Thérèse and absorbing her. In that communion she is given a mission not only to seek love but *to be love* connecting, illuminating and energizing everyone and everything and thereby engendering love in others. Her transformation imagines a universe of love.

That this mission is validated and intensified for Thérèse is evident in her dreams of yet another mother of mythic proportions, Anne of Jesus Lobera, founder of Carmel in France. The *veiled face* of this courageous pioneer, who fought to keep the *inner-directed* spirituality of the Carmelite Reform from disappearing, functions, in this instance, not to conceal but to open to Thérèse a pathway to her own truth and authority, and to indicate the tenuousness of the space and time between Thérèse and eternity. She is taken under Anne's veil to be identified with *this mother from eternity* whose face mirrors a totally affirming *regard*. What Thérèse sees in *Mother Anne* is what she herself has become: '*filled with love*' (pp 190–191).

It is hardly surprising that Thérèse is no longer content to be mother in the usual, expected manner. To be 'Spouse' and 'Mother of souls' does not suffice for her because she feels within herself a yearning beyond these 'privileges' that traditionally distinguish the Carmelite vocation (p 192). In her soaring text (pp 190–200), she recasts the radical impulse to subversion, characteristic of the Spanish mothers who stand behind her (Anne of Jesus and Teresa of Avila) into the acceptable, orthodox, idiom of love, but she does not submit; and there is a way in which her refusal to participate any longer in the politics of spiritual motherhood redefines this motherhood to cosmic and limitless dimensions.

Being mothered by the infinite, Thérèse participates in the infinite and the passion of her desires and longings 'reach even to infinity', transcending the confinement of a very circumscribed landscape, an extremely limited intellectual space, a remarkably small language;

stretching even beyond the way women are socially constructed, beyond what is expected; surpassing boundary upon boundary. She would be doctor and prophet, missionary and martyr; she would be priest and she would go to the ends of the earth, with 'desires . . . greater than the universe' (p 192). These are extravagant gestures for a nineteenth-century French Catholic nun barely out of childhood.

Such standing on the abyss either precipitates madness or forces depth, depth of *heart*, where Thérèse with all the strength of her selfhood lays claim to the cumulative love mirrored to her by eternity, by the maternal, holy face of Jesus become Beloved, become fathomless abyss all at once. 'I have found my vocation . . . My vocation is love. In the heart of the Church *my Mother* I shall be love.' If we look at Church, as tradition suggests, as the body of Christ, if we are able to imagine the universe, as Sallie McFague suggests, as the body of Mother God,<sup>32</sup> that is, 'that which supports all life [and is] the matrix out of which everything evolves', then we might be able to understand *mother* in this climactic text as a metaphor for the '*heart*' of all that is, and see Thérèse as the 'core' within the core, or the heart-beat within the heart. Then we comprehend how Thérèse experiences herself, first, as united and one with the Love-energy of the universe, and second, as a life-giving love-power essential to all living things. Her centre coincides, as it were, with the infinite Centre, God, and thus she is the essence of 'Church' abiding everywhere for ever (p 194). All Thérèse's expressions of extravagant love build up to this point where the mirror-bond with eternity is pure unbreakable reflection and the aperture on the infinite thrown permanently open, impelling her to reach constantly through the veil for immortality by transcending boundaries emotionally, intellectually and spiritually with whatever tools she has.

Thérèse, therefore, in all the pain of her limited possibilities, limited life span and confined world, chooses depth to cross the threshold to ultimate meaning and in so doing flies in the face of the strictly material notions of eternity with which she began life. Her choice, her mission if you will, is love, a love breaking the prison of every small space, every small life, every suffering great or small, every limitation and every expectation. This love she makes effective and concrete in everyday life, everyday suffering and everyday transcendence of herself. Here is where we discover the excess in her life, that is, it is here that even the word 'love' and our social understanding of it is not sufficient. Postmoderns would find both Thérèse's linguistic excess and its lived-out extravagance illustrative of the excess they search for in

the text of a life.<sup>33</sup> It is in this sense that we must understand her words written toward the end of her life:

Your love has gone before me, and it has grown with me, and now it is an abyss whose depths I cannot fathom. Love attracts love, and my Jesus, my love leaps toward yours; it would like to fill the abyss which attracts it . . . (p 256)

For Thérèse the grandness and *bottomlessness* of the abyss engender awe, *desire* and almost hypnotic magnetism, but when she faces her own death, this immensity generates only terror and radical doubt. She is unable, after all, to fathom the abyss and at the end of her life doubts the very existence of an eternal love-bond. We should not wonder that her endmost suffering would focus on the faceless Face, the face of God-Hidden, on heaven, the most important context of her life. Her life necessitates it; her death demands it. One last time, she faces the severing of the mother-bond in the loss of her very self and fears *ultimate* abandonment by the Beloved One who seems to disrupt all continuity and confidence. She fears that the final bridge to the beyond leads only to a 'night of nothingness' as she stands on the brink and peers into the aperture wide open on darkness. Unable to see the Face now, she is suspended in this dark space haunted by the spectre of final emptiness.

The darkness of this unknowing completely clouds the reciprocal mirroring of love, decentering Thérèse and disintegrating the experiential structures of her selfhood. There is at the centre of selfhood a love-bond which is unknowable, even to her, where she is being recentred in infinite love beyond any possibility of experience and which is 'a "nothing" and a "nowhere"'.<sup>34</sup> To this her insight on 'heart' prophecies and attests.

In her decisive life experience, an experience of absolute barrenness in the face of shattering 'Otherness', Thérèse prefigures the atheism of the century through which we have just passed and lays bare the superficiality of so much modern talk about God which refuses to face the radical hiddenness present in so much human experience of God, and particularly in disintegration and death. Thérèse shows in her last suffering how self-destructively sentimental it is to allow our understanding of the God who is Love to be separated from the hidden God.<sup>35</sup>

Like her first 'child' Pranzini who was in darkness until the end, Thérèse at her end is in darkness – barren, powerless, one with all those who have nothing and no one. Waiting for the knife of tuberculosis to

cut her down, she *gazes at the crucifix*,<sup>36</sup> *the Face*, like Pranzini, and throws her life through the opening into eternity, into the infinite abyss, hanging on to the mirror-bond with the words, 'My God, I love you'.<sup>37</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In summary, if Thérèse has a mission today, her mission is, above all, her text where the reproduction of mothering, the mirroring bond, continues in the very act of reading. The text is mother when it produces a bond between itself and us, the daughter-readers, analogous to the one explored within it between Thérèse and her mothers, more importantly between Thérèse and Mother-God. Deep reading allows us to identify with the fullness of her experience and make use of it for the transformation of our lives.

It is important to understand that while the autobiography is Pauline's biography, it is also ours. This is why we feel we are reading the story of our own souls. We identify with the weaknesses and foibles of Thérèse because they mirror our lives; we empathize with her great desires for love because they are our own and we struggle to comprehend her seeming fixation with suffering because we yearn for the passion she possesses. Not only does she mother us in this way, but without her text there would be no mission for Thérèse, no way for her to 'spend [her] heaven doing good upon earth'.

Theologian Michael Buckley unveils another aspect of the maturity and complexity of Thérèse's text as mother when he suggests that the experience of the mystic is the one conclusive warrant for asserting the existence of God in her overwhelming love; a life of holiness is the highest form of the unequivocal disclosure of God.<sup>38</sup> Buckley wants to reinsert the mystical into the world of the intellectual, to overcome the split between theory and practice. What is important about this for the argument of this study is that Buckley understands that despite the tendency of theology to consign mysticism or religious experience to the lesser part of a binary world as cognitively empty and theologically irrelevant to the question of the existence of God, mystics have always subverted their way back into the discourse. John of the Cross is particularly significant in this regard, according to Buckley, though I suspect theology finds it easier to understand John than Thérèse because John, mystic *and* theologian, moves linguistically between both worlds.

However, no matter how simple Thérèse seems, her work is strong enough and intellectual enough to support the theological scrutiny of her text for the assurance it presents of the reality of the hidden God.

Moreover, she can encourage theology to explore the constant complexity of the love-bond between God and the human person and to embrace it in its seeming obscurity and paradox.

On the surface Thérèse's mission, as we have known it throughout the past hundred years, has seemed to fit gender-specific definitions of women very closely. This has not only made her exceptionally unthreatening to the institutional Church and traditional contemplative/Carmelite life as we have known it, but it has also made her canonization very convenient. One can only hope that those who proclaim her a Doctor of the Church<sup>39</sup> do it not to trivialize the intellectual life and scholarship of contemporary women theologians, but to underline the critical importance of contemplative women's experience and contribution to spirituality and to the theological endeavour.

If Thérèse is to survive as a living, strong woman mystic within the matriline of history-making women writers before her, we will have to continue to let her grow up and to let her text grow up. Although she speaks out of the dominant discourse of family with its stress on 'littleness', we should not be deceived into believing her text is small. It is capable of breaking boundaries, as I have tried to show in this interpretation, which is just one example indicating the richness of the text. Other readings are possible that have the potential to make Thérèse's text live and give life into the twenty-first century.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Patricia Byrne, 'American ultramontanist', *Theological Studies* 56 (June 1995), p 316, note 84: 'The saint who personified ultramontane spirit for Catholics of this era was Thérèse Martin . . . , who captured the imagination of an era, undoubtedly because she was so much a part of it'.

<sup>2</sup> See *The von Balthasar reader*, edited by Medard Kehland and Werner Loser (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp 398–399: 'Did not this little Thérèse have her hour at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century? Does she not stand and fall with a becalmed, perhaps even complacent bourgeois Catholicism to which the entire milieu of her family . . . and even the supremely insignificant cloister in which she spent her few years of life bear living witness? . . . Someone has irreverently said that the Thérèse-boom is over for good.'

<sup>3</sup> See Susan Ross and Mary Catherine Hilkert, 'Feminist theology: a review of literature', *Theological Studies* 56 (June 1995), pp 328–330; David Tracy, 'The hidden God: the divine Other of liberation', *Cross Currents* 46 (Spring 1996), pp 5–6.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted for my interpretation to Nancy Chodorow's seminal work *The reproduction of mothering* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> For more in this field, including a valuable bibliography, see Diane Jonte-Pace, 'Object relations theory, mothering and religion: toward a feminist psychology of religion', *Horizons* 14 (Fall, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> *Story of a soul, the autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, translated by John Clarke OCD (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996). References in the text refer to this edition of the autobiography.

<sup>7</sup> As I have written in 'The discipleship of equals: voices from tradition – Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross' in *A discipleship of equals: toward a Christian feminist spirituality*, edited by Francis A. Eigo (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1988), following D. W. Winnicott, 'Transitional objects and transitional phenomena', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953), pp 89–97; and Elizabeth Koenig in her study on Julian of Norwich: 'Whether a child sees herself as beloved or blameworthy, worthwhile or "bad", is dependent on what she has seen in the face of her mother. Face has a primary association with mother . . . When an infant looks at her mother, what the baby sees is not the mother, but the baby herself. The mother is looking at the baby but what she looks like [to the baby] is related to what she, herself, sees' (p 76).

<sup>8</sup> See Ronnie Scharfman, 'Mirroring and mothering in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Telumée Miracle* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*' in *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), pp 88–106.

<sup>9</sup> See *Manuscrits autobiographiques* Tome III, Table des Citations (Office Central de Lisieux, 1956), pp 172–173.

<sup>10</sup> Alice Walker, *In search of our mothers' gardens* (San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p 393.

<sup>11</sup> Jamaica Kincaid, *The autobiography of my mother* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996). Sue E. Houchins, former professor of Literature, Women's and Black Studies at the Claremont Colleges and now a new member of the Baltimore Carmel, introduced me to this work for comparison with Thérèse's autobiography. I am indebted to Sue for her exchange and critique during the writing of this essay.

<sup>12</sup> Kincaid, *Autobiography*, pp 3–4.

<sup>13</sup> Kincaid, *Autobiography*, p 5.

<sup>14</sup> Thérèse writes about this experience: 'The beautiful bread you [Pauline] had prepared had changed its appearance: instead of the lively colors it had earlier, I now saw only a light rosy tint and the bread had become old and crumbled. Earth seemed a sad place and I understood that in heaven alone joy will be without any clouds . . . Earth then seemed to be a place of exile and I could only dream of heaven' (p 37).

<sup>15</sup> I am not suggesting that Thérèse's relationship to her father, as father, is not worthy of its own interpretation but what I am investigating in this essay is mother-mirroring/bonding and mother-loss.

<sup>16</sup> See Scharfman, 'Mirroring', p 101.

<sup>17</sup> Kincaid, *Autobiography*, p 3.

<sup>18</sup> Kincaid, *Autobiography*, p 199.

<sup>19</sup> See Ida Görres, *The hidden face* (New York: Pantheon, 1959), pp 70–80, for a perceptive interpretation of Thérèse's loss of Pauline.

<sup>20</sup> Although the awareness of God as mother is in our archaeology, and we access it all the time even if we do not give conscious credence to it, still we cannot uncover it consciously until someone excavates it for us.

<sup>21</sup> See Scharfman, 'Mirroring', pp 97–99, to whom I am indebted for a description of this dynamic from a psychoanalytical theoretic perspective in literature.

<sup>22</sup> The French reads '*un regard mais une fusion*'.

<sup>23</sup> Scharfman writes about these fluid ego bonds. Even fusion falls into mother–daughter relationship since Chodorow and the French feminists.

<sup>24</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as mother: studies in the spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), who explains that a flowering of the image of Mother Jesus after the patristic period appears in the twelfth century in the works of the Cistercian monks Bernard of Clairvaux (1153), William of St Thierry (1148), Aelred of Rievaulx (1167), Gueric of Igny (1157), Isaac of Stella (1169), Adam of Perseigne (1221), Helinand of Froidmont (1235) and the Benedictine Anselm of Canterbury (1109) from which the Cistercians perhaps borrowed the idea of Mother Jesus. Bernard writes of being nurtured from the breast of Mother Jesus, while the blood of Jesus is associated with milk by the patristic writers.

<sup>25</sup> Critical texts are Proverbs 9:4; Isaiah 66:13.

<sup>26</sup> See Scharfman, 'Mirroring', p 93.

<sup>27</sup> In a lecture at the Carmelite Monastery, Baltimore, MacCurtain referred to the work of Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau, *Untold sisters, Hispanic nuns in their own words* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989). They suggest Teresa opened *four* avenues to liberty for the women of Carmel by modelling for them the writing of memoirs of the soul, poetry, letters and obituaries.

<sup>28</sup> Scharfman, 'Mirroring', p 89.

<sup>29</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The creation of feminine consciousness* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Lerner, *Creation*, pp 227, 233.

<sup>31</sup> See Lerner, *Creation*, pp 279–280.

<sup>32</sup> Sallie McFague, *Models of God: theology for an ecological, nuclear age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp 109–112.

<sup>33</sup> Thérèse's seemingly extravagant movement toward suffering, comprehensible only within the context of this love, is, I believe, another locus of excess calling for further study. It may be that in our necessary and healthy turning away from such attitudes toward suffering, we have forfeited passion and depth.

<sup>34</sup> I value and utilize the perceptions of Denys Turner, *The darkness of God: negativity in Christian mysticism* (Cambridge/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p 251.

<sup>35</sup> I am indebted to Tracy, 'The hidden God', pp 11–13.

<sup>36</sup> The Hidden God is the Crucified God, according to David Tracy, 'The hidden God', p 9.

<sup>37</sup> The Epilogue in the French text reads: '... Thérèse prononce distinctement en regardant son crucifix: "... Mon Dieu... je... vous aime! Soudain ses yeux reprennent et fixent un point un peu au-dessus de la statue de la Vierge. Son visage reprend l'apparence qu'il avait en pleine santé, elle semble en extase. Ce regard dure l'espace d'un Crédo...' See *Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face, Histoire d'une âme, Manuscrits autobiographiques* (Bar le Duc, France: Cerf, 1992), pp 311–312.

<sup>38</sup> 'The rise of modern atheism and the religious epoché', *Proceedings of CTSA*, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> As this essay goes to the publisher, it seems *almost* certain that Thérèse will be declared a Doctor of the Church on 21 August 1997.