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**Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor of the Church
A Study of the Cause, Process and Proclamation of October 19, 1997**

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A Thesis

In The Department

of

Theological Studies

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor of the Church

A Study of the Cause, Process and Proclamation of October 19, 1997

Mary-Ellen Malolepszy

This study is an exploration of the circumstances and events which preceded the declaration of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church in 1997. The emphasis is placed on the major Vatican documents outlining the details of the October 19, 1997 proclamation, especially the Apostolic letter issued by Pope John Paul II. The title “doctor of the church” is examined through both a history of the term and its meaning in the contemporary Roman Catholic Church. The implications of the proclamation of Thérèse of Lisieux as the only doctor of the church to be named by John Paul II, and the third woman to have received the title are highlighted.

To
Andy, Jill and Paula

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INTRODUCTION

In 1993, the journal *Commonweal* published a chronicle of its past two decades entitled, *Being Catholic: Commonweal From the Seventies to the Nineties*. One of the people who had dealt with the question of the greatest challenges facing U.S. Catholics, was Georgetown University theologian Monika Hellwig. In 1989, Hellwig had considered that the greatest challenge of the years ahead to 2000 was “whether or not we can put ordinary Catholic believers in touch with...their heritage in ways that will make the fullness of the heritage their own.”¹ She worried that ordinary Catholics were likely to resist all changes and lose a sense of direction because they had not been provided resources that could help them discover a sense of continuity. Hellwig had found her own Catholic identity “by looking along a historical axis for continuity and consistency in the midst of change.”² These ordinary believers however, “unspecialized in theology or church history,”³ tended to see discontinuity, and for this reason they were likely to resist changes indiscriminately.

Hellwig had made another statement. She claimed that there was a small minority of Catholics “who were both intellectually curious about their tradition and wholeheartedly committed to it.”⁴ The present thesis is the result of my own intellectual curiosity and commitment to the tradition. I hoped to find my Catholic identity as Hellwig had done by “looking along a historical axis for continuity and consistency in the midst of change.” I also hoped to provide resources for others through my becoming specialized in theology and church history in one particular area.

¹ Rodger Van Allen, *Being Catholic: Commonweal from the Seventies to the Nineties*. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1993). 147.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

This thesis is the articulation of a trajectory that began with the apostolic letter proclaiming Thérèse of Lisieux a doctor of the church. I must confess that my curiosity was related to the category of doctors of the church and did not immediately extend to a study of Thérèse herself. My inquiry is essentially animated by my desire to understand precisely what the title doctor of the church means. This question led me through a series of explorations and strangely, the fact that Thérèse of Lisieux had been given this title became a secondary focus for my exploring the initial question.

For this reason I began to familiarize myself with some of the themes in the life of Thérèse. I had already read *Story of a Soul* and so had a sense of who she was through her own words. However, I did not really understand how this saint could have generated so much interest that the number of works devoted to her life and “little way” seemed disproportionate to what I knew of her. I had found Thérèse’s theme of wanting to suffer to be difficult reading and I had wondered why there were rave reviews for this “Spiritual Classic” when the author insisted on being little and talked about Jesus as her playmate. I wanted to learn who she was through the words of others, yet always with the underlying question concerning what is a doctor of the church. The specific works that I then explored were concerned with why Thérèse would likely be named a doctor of the church. I discovered that my question around Thérèse was particularly implicated in what the Church had to say about her and so began a quest to know who she was through her status as doctor of the Church. The official proclamation of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church on October 19, 1997, provided an opportunity to explore the institutional Church’s understanding of who she was. I also wanted to know as much as possible about the history and the process behind the proclamation.

⁴ Ibid.

Again it is important to emphasize that the animating question guiding this thesis is: What does it mean to be a doctor of the church? Correlated to this was my subsequent interest in Thérèse's being named a doctor of the church. While I knew something of Thérèse prior to my interest in the meaning of doctor of the church, it was the fact that she was being named a doctor of the church that motivated my desire to understand her more deeply.

The rationale of the way I have set up this thesis is directly linked to my own trajectory in exploring this whole issue.

Overview of Thesis

Chapter One begins with an introduction to the history of the cause for Thérèse of Lisieux being named a doctor of the church. Part I outlines the steps of a process that began in 1932 and presents important stages of the cause between 1932 and 1970. The issue of gender is examined in relation to the history of Thérèse's cause and this includes a treatment of the subject of the first women as doctors of the church. Part II continues the history with details of the cause between 1970 and 1997. This part considers the subject of why Thérèse of Lisieux is deserving of the title and raises some of the problems related to particular ways of describing this saint.

In Chapter Two, the emphasis is on ways of defining the title of doctor of the church. It presents the difficulties associated with trying to find a standard definition or understanding of the title and raises the problem of sources in relation to an attempt to determine a definition.

Chapter Three presents a short history of the doctors of the church and introduces a few of the individuals holding the title. It examines the significance of the Reformation

from the perspective of the practice of proclaiming doctors of the church.

Chapter Four which is the longest and most detailed chapter of the present paper, is concerned with the process leading up to the proclamation in 1997. Part I presents and critiques one interpretation of the events that preceded the proclamation. In Part II the subject is the “paper trail” of the process and attempts are made to trace the details of this trail and determine what actually took place. As a way of presenting the details, two sources are compared throughout Part II.

Chapter Five outlines important themes vis à vis their contemporary value. These themes are drawn from Vatican II except for suffering which is treated minimally in this chapter because it is linked here with the Vatican II theme of ecumenism.

Chapter Six focuses on the contributions of Thérèse of Lisieux as seen in the official documents of the church. The theme of wisdom is introduced with emphasis on its meaning for doctors of the church. Also discussed are the implications of an emphasis on the notion of “little”.

Chapter Seven highlights the manner in which Thérèse’s doctrine is presented in the official documents as both a teaching and a way of life. Emphasis is on the specific use of language in the Vatican documents as they present the doctrine. Here I examine the particular doctrine of the “little way” through evidence of its definition in the Vatican documents. I also consider the theme of Scripture as the source of Thérèse’s writings.

The final chapter is concerned with the implications of the proclamation of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church, especially as it regards the title itself. Here I revisit and examine the issue of gender from the point of view of the 1997 declaration.

I conclude the thesis with some observations and insights gleaned through the course of my study.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY OF THE CAUSE FOR DECLARING THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Part I (1932-1970)

1.1 Introduction

Although the subject of Thérèse of Lisieux becoming a doctor of the church began to gain interest in the early 1990's, it was not the first time that this saint had been considered a candidate for the distinction. We know that there had been an earlier attempt in 1932, to have Thérèse proclaimed a doctor of the church, but the fact that there was such an attempt is absent from most sources. This chapter will examine details surrounding the 1932 cause and present evidence that the issue of gender, considered the major obstacle to the naming of particular saints as doctors of the church, had "interrupted" Thérèse's cause between 1932 and 1970. The proclamations of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena as the first women to be granted this title, reveal the nature of the problems associated with gender, and in particular a concern with Paul's precept in I Cor. 14: 34 that women are to remain quiet in the assemblies.

1.2 Thérèse's Cause Begins and Ends in 1932

Pius XI did not accept a recommendation to have Thérèse of Lisieux declared a doctor of the church in 1932 "because she [Thérèse] was a woman."⁵ Although most sources have, in general, included reference to her canonization in 1925 as well as her being named patroness of the missions in 1927, the 1932 recommendation that Thérèse be named a doctor of the church is rarely mentioned. Further, if we consider the subject

⁵ John F. Russell. "St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor of the Church?" *America* 167: (October 10, 1992): 250.

of Pius XI in the majority of documents, it is the pope's claim that Thérèse of Lisieux was "the star of his pontificate" that we find most often cited.

1.3 Looking Backward from the 1997 Announcement that John Paul II would declare Thérèse a Doctor of the church

One source that offers an explanation of the complete process by which Thérèse's case for being declared doctor of the church eventually gained official approval in 1997, including the details surrounding the 1932 recommendation, is a joint pastoral letter issued to all members of "the Carmelite family" by Father Camilo Maccise of the Sacred Hearts, superior general of the Discalced Carmelites, and Father Joseph Chalmers, prior general of the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance⁶. This letter, issued on October 1, 1997, the feast day of Thérèse of Lisieux, followed the August 24 announcement by John Paul II that he intended to proclaim Thérèse of Lisieux a doctor of the church. Since the official proclamation would not take place until two weeks later, on World Mission Sunday, October 19, there is no reference in this source to John Paul II's apostolic letter, the major document outlining specific details of the proclamation. In the Carmelite letter, information regarding the process by which Thérèse, the saint, received approval to become Thérèse, the doctor, is found within a section entitled, "A Long Road towards the Doctorate". In the first part, the subject of petitions for the cause of Thérèse as a doctor of the church is introduced. On the occasion of the inauguration of the crypt of the Lisieux Basilica in 1932, there was a congress "at which five cardinals, fifty bishops, and a great number of faithful participated"⁷. Fr. Gustave Desbuquois, SJ, proposed Thérèse as a doctor of the church and the response to the proposal was positive. Most interesting

⁶Maccise, Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. "Thérèse a Doctor for the Third Millennium" <<http://www.netins.net/showcase/solitude/Thérèsedoc.html>> (Accessed Nov 6 1999). Hereafter cited as Carmelite Letter.

⁷ Carmelite Letter, 2.

is the fact that it was the bishop of Trois Rivières, Quebec, who then sent letters to all bishops throughout the world in preparation for a petition to the pope.

This petition, as noted earlier, was not accepted. However, the additional information that Pius XI had also “replied negatively” to an earlier petition for the cause of Teresa of Jesus (Teresa of Avila) to be named a doctor of the church is included. The reason for the refusal was “*Obstat sexus* (Her sex stands in the way)”.⁸ In this part of the letter, entitled, “The Obstacle of Being a Woman”, we are told that following the reply of *obstat sexus*, Pius XI announced that he would leave the decision about Teresa of Avila to his successor. An important statement which would seem to offer an explanation for the dissolution of the cause of Thérèse as a doctor of the church is the following: “After the Vatican’s negative response, and by its order, the gathering of signatures in favour of Thérèse of Lisieux’s doctorate was interrupted.”⁹

Although the authority of the Vatican, or “its order” would appear to be the reason that the case for Thérèse as a doctor of the church did not continue, the authors introduce the subject of the negative reply to the petition for the cause of Teresa of Avila, with the rather innocuous claim that “The time was not yet ripe for a woman to be declared a Doctor of the Church.”¹⁰ Then in the next section entitled, “Circumstances Change”, the problem of *obstat sexus* with regard to Thérèse is shown to have been resolved by way of the declarations of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena as doctors in 1970. According to the authors, this event “eliminated completely any obstacle to naming a woman doctor. As a result, the proposal for the doctorate of Thérèse of Lisieux was taken up again.”¹¹

⁸ Carmelite Letter. 2.

⁹ Ibid.. 2-3.

¹⁰ Ibid.. 2.

¹¹ Ibid.. 3.

1.4 Issue of the “*Obstat sexus*” in the Proclamations of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena

Before continuing with the circumstances of this proposal, however, it is necessary to examine the claim that the naming of the first two women as doctors of the church in 1970, eliminated completely any obstacle to naming a woman doctor. It would appear that the authors do not consider it necessary to provide any further details surrounding the event, details which may or may not have served to shed light on how this *obstat sexus* was eliminated. Who made this decision? Was there opposition to it? What was the reaction, if any, of various groups within the church i.e. theologians, bishops, priests, laity, to the proclamations? Unfortunately it is not only this source, which fails to provide information that could possibly help answer these questions. In fact, until the publication of Bernard McGinn’s¹² comprehensive work on the doctors of the church in late 1999, no sources had offered any further information as to the details surrounding the 1970 proclamation than does this Pastoral letter to the Carmelites. Regarding the lack of works, McGinn makes a very important observation. He notes that, “Given how much has been written about the pontificate of Paul VI (1963-78), it is odd that there has been little discussion of his initiative in elevating the first two women to the status of doctor.”¹³ He then adds in parenthesis, “Major biographies of Paul either do not mention these declarations, or treat them in a few lines.”¹⁴

On the subject of the *obstat sexus*, however, it is surprising that McGinn includes neither reference to the 1932 petition to have Thérèse of Lisieux named a doctor of the

¹² Bernard McGinn. *The Doctors of the Church: Thirty-Three Men and Women Who Shaped Christianity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999). Hereafter, cited as *The Doctors of the Church*.

¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ McGinn. 18.

church, nor specific mention of Pius XI's refusal to respond favourably to the case for Teresa of Avila. What he does provide, nonetheless, is highly significant information about how this *obstat sexus* was eventually eliminated. McGinn informs us that on September 27, 1970, Paul VI gave a homily on the occasion of proclaiming Teresa of Avila, a doctor of the church. Acknowledging that the sermon "says nothing about the process used in the case,"¹⁵ it includes a defence of the declaration of a woman as doctor, which had been, until then, unprecedented. McGinn also adds in parenthesis, that this was something Thomas Aquinas had not thought possible. Parts of the homily are paraphrased by McGinn and include his own interpretation that, "These brief but pregnant words reflect the transformation of attitudes that was begun with the Second Vatican Council and that still, though sometimes painfully, is progressing in the Catholic Church."¹⁶ He refers, in this instance, to Paul VI's response to a question, which he raises in the homily. This is the question of whether or not Paul's precept in I Cor. 14:34, "Women are to remain quiet in the assemblies",¹⁷ is violated by the naming of a woman as a doctor of the church. McGinn's paraphrasing of the response is the following: "Not at all, says the pope. The title of doctor is not connected to the hierarchical function of the magisterium. Through baptism, women participate in the common priesthood of all the faithful."¹⁸ Then quoting directly from the homily, McGinn continues with Paul VI's own words, "In such profession of faith, many women have arrived at great heights, even to the point where their words and their writings have become lights and guides for their

¹⁵ McGinn. 18.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ This subject of a woman not speaking in the assembly is treated by James D.G. Dunn in *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998). The author raises the question that "if a woman should not speak in the church, how could she pray or prophesy as I Cor. 11.5 assumes?" He also considers that this contradiction has caused some scholars to resolve it by treating 14.34-35 or 14.34-36 as a later interpolation. Dunn cautions that "in the absence of strong support from the textual tradition, an interpolation hypothesis should always be a device of last resort." 589.

¹⁸ McGinn. 18.

brethren.”¹⁹ Since McGinn does not comment on who the “many women” might be, he leaves the reader wondering what lights and guides Paul VI was actually referring to. It is possible that one of these women may well have been Thérèse de Lisieux since another pontiff would also use the word “guide” in his homily for the occasion of naming this woman a doctor of the church.

It is very difficult to see how this “defence” of a woman as a doctor of the church differs significantly from a defence of any layperson in the church, male or female. Since Vatican II, “the common priesthood of all the faithful”, would also refer to all who are baptized, not just the “ordained” priesthood. For this reason the question of why Paul VI chose to use this defence must be raised. In addition, why did he not set a new precedent, one which included Teresa of Avila’s status as a saint? As we have already seen, an attempt in 1932 to have Pius XI accept a petition for Thérèse of Lisieux’s case, had failed because this pope had previously “replied negatively” to the case of Teresa of Avila and would leave the decision to his successor. It is interesting to note that it would be more than one successor later, with several more additions to the list of doctors of the church, before Paul VI would eventually name a woman as recipient of this title. Pius XI had, in fact, already declared four doctors of the church before 1932, and one of these, Peter Canisius, had been both canonized a saint and named a doctor of the church at the same time, in 1925. While McGinn makes no mention of Pius XI’s refusal in 1932, he makes the following statement about this pope and his naming of doctors of the church: “The later years of Pius XI’s pontificate were overshadowed by the gathering clouds of war, and no more doctors were named.”²⁰

McGinn’s optimism in relating the words of the homily of Paul VI, on the

¹⁹ McGinn. 18.

²⁰ Ibid.. 17.

occasion of naming Teresa of Avila a doctor of the church, is not readily understood.

The pope's defence would appear to be a way of defending the position of naming the first woman doctor of the church, but with minimal explanation. This is not unlike the case of the pastoral letter to the Carmelites, where as mentioned earlier, phrasing like "the obstacle of being a woman" and "the time was not yet ripe to declare a woman a doctor of the church", offers very little insight into the nature of the obstacle to naming a woman a doctor of the church. It would seem that, rather than offering a new sense of inclusion and openness, the naming of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena as doctors in 1970, left the church with still unresolved questions related to gender. One such question might be whether or not the term *obstat sexus* which one source translates as, "Her sex stands in the way", could be used interchangeably with Paul's precept in I Cor. 14:34. If this is the case then this law for women "to remain quiet in the assemblies" has been much more important to the issue of whether or not a woman could be considered a doctor of the church, than previously thought. Perhaps this is the reason that so few sources have dared even to raise the question.

It is McGinn's account of the proclamation of Catherine of Siena as a doctor of the church that most clearly illustrates this perspective of minimal explanation or openness. He states that on October 4, 1970, a week after proclaiming Teresa of Avila a doctor of the church, Paul VI, "no longer needed to defend making a woman doctor."²¹ "Instead," McGinn continues, "he emphasized the traditional understanding of *doctor ecclesiae* as a recipient of special graces for the good of the church, citing the apostle to the Gentiles at length."²² This "traditional understanding of *doctor ecclesiae*", however, is fraught with another set of problems, as we shall later see.

²¹ McGinn. 18.

²² Ibid.

1.5 Conclusion

It would seem that after 1970, the church was free to name women as doctors of the church but which women and why? We know that the case for Thérèse of Lisieux had already begun in 1932, before it was “interrupted” on orders of the Vatican. When it was taken up again with *obstat sexus* no longer an issue, the new challenge of defining the title of doctor of the church replaced the previous challenge of gender. By 1997 an understanding of what it means to be a doctor of the church need not be concerned with the sex of the candidate, in this case Thérèse of Lisieux. Nevertheless, this doctor of the church will continue to be described as “little” in the apostolic letter of John Paul II proclaiming her as the thirty-third doctor of the church and we will be told that with regard to Thérèse’s writings, “We do not find perhaps, as in other doctors, a scholarly presentation of the things of God, but...”²³ One hopes that in being given the title of doctor of the church through their official declarations, that Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena and Thérèse of Lisieux are considered to be as important to the church as all those who made up the group of doctors of the church before the admission of women. We now continue with the history of the cause for declaring Thérèse of Lisieux a doctor of the church and turn to the period following the 1970 proclamations.

²³ John Paul II. “Apostolic Letter: St. Thérèse. Doctor of the Church.” *Origins* 27 no. 23: (November 20, 1997). 393. Hereafter cited as Apostolic Letter.

Part II (after 1970)

1.6 Introduction

Between 1973 and 1997 the cause for declaring Thérèse of Lisieux a doctor of the church is focused on petitions, proposals and official requests to the Vatican. This chapter presents a list of these proposals and introduces the subject of why this saint is deserving of the distinction. The problems related to emphasizing the theme of “little” in relation to Thérèse as a doctor of the church create the risk that this new status will be diminished if a conscious effort is not made to highlight new ways of describing this saint. The notion of Thérèse’s spiritual genius and her role as an eminent model and guide are highlighted as a way of distinguishing between the status of saint and the status of doctor of the church.

1.7 Petitions and Official Requests

In the pastoral letter to the Carmelite family, we find that in 1973, the centenary of the birth of Thérèse, the question of whether or not Thérèse could be named a doctor was raised again. In 1981, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, officially asked John Paul II to make the declaration. He did this in response to a petition from the Teresian Carmel, as well as a consultation with the permanent council of the French Episcopate. Then other official letters, from the Discalced postulator general and the bishop of Lisieux were written at different times. Petitions were also sent and these included one in 1991 from the general chapter of the Teresian Carmel and another in 1995 from the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance. Besides the petitions of French bishops, Carmelite superiors and others, there were also at least thirty Episcopal conferences, as well as “thousands of Christians, priests, religious, and lay people of 107 countries [who] pronounced

themselves in favour of the doctorate”.²⁴

1.7 Thérèse is Deserving of the Distinction: “Doctor of the Church”

The most obvious question that arises from evidence of such support is why this saint is deserving of the distinction. In a 1992 article, responding to the news that the French Episcopal Conference had recently agreed to ask John Paul II to declare Thérèse a doctor of the church, John Russell writes that Bishop Guy Gauthier who had “laboured patiently to lay the groundwork for the informed position on her qualifications for the title of ‘Doctor’ ”, requested the opinion of French theologian Yves Congar, O.P. A response, apparently dictated from his sickbed, included the following: “For me there is no doubt but that St. Thérèse of the Infant Jesus could be named a doctor of the church... Her thought is certainly orthodox and her specific contribution theologically is her ‘little way’.”²⁵

It must be said that although this phrase “little way” or “little way of spiritual childhood” is central to any discussion of the spirituality of Thérèse, there exists the risk that by associating this sense of “ little” with her status as doctor of the church, a more important notion, that of eminent model and guide may be diminished. For example, Thérèse has been known in English-speaking countries as *The Little Flower*; she uses this name to describe herself in the autobiography, and there is found in all of Thérèse’s works a constant reference to herself as little. If one does not make a conscious effort to find other ways of describing this saint and doctor of the church, which extend far beyond the overused notion of littleness, her status as doctor of the church may be diminished to that of recipient of an honorary title.

²⁴ Maccise, Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite letter. 3.

²⁵ Russell, “St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor of the Church”. 250.

1.8 Eminent Model and Guide and Spiritual Genius

In naming Thérèse a doctor of the church, John Paul II reminded the faithful that she was being held up as an eminent model and guide. It is true that since her official canonization as a saint in 1925, Thérèse has long been considered a model and guide. What becomes important then is the need to distinguish between the status of saint and the status of doctor of the church. One way of doing this is by simply looking to statistics. For example, although there have been thousands of saints in the history of the church, there are to date, only thirty-three doctors. Also important is the fact that during his pontificate, John Paul II has named only one doctor of the church, yet he has canonized almost three hundred saints (two hundred and eighty by 1999)²⁶. Another way of distinguishing between saint and doctor, in the case of Thérèse, is with the help of such references as that of Bishop Guy Gaucher (Auxiliary Bishop of Bayeux-Lisieux) in his foreword to *The Spiritual Genius of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, by Jean Guitton.²⁷ Here he claims that the original work published as an essay in 1954, then as a booklet in 1965, had deeply touched him because: “At that time, it was rare for a philosopher to be interested in the person intellectuals tended to consider ‘a nice little saint with roses.’ ”²⁸ In acknowledging that the re-issue of Guitton’s reflections on Thérèse in 1997 for the centenary of her death would “add to the voices of all those throughout the world who are asking Pope John Paul II to proclaim St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face a Doctor of the Church”, he concludes with the following words, “May the philosopher, the theologian, and the People of God together be heard at the dawn of the third millennium,

²⁶ McGinn. *The Doctors of the Church*. 19.

²⁷ Mgr Guy Gaucher. Foreword to *The Spiritual Genius of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, by Jean Guitton (Ligouri: Triumph Books. 1997).

²⁸ Ibid.. 7.

as the wonders worked by God through Thérèse - that spiritual genius - are still to come.”²⁹

It is important to remember that Gaucher was responsible for developing an informed position on the qualifications of Thérèse as a doctor of the church and also that he is a member of the Carmelite community. In his words we see that it is precisely this sense of an added dimension, in this case her spiritual genius, which distinguishes Thérèse the saint, from Thérèse the doctor. John Paul II expresses this same theme in his 1997 homily on the occasion of naming Thérèse a doctor of the church. He acknowledges that Thérèse is the youngest of all the doctors of the church but emphasizes that, “her ardent spiritual journey shows such maturity and the insights of faith expressed in her writings are so vast and profound that they deserve a place among the great spiritual masters.”³⁰

1.9 Conclusion

By 1997 when Thérèse of Lisieux was officially proclaimed a doctor of the church, the notions of eminent model and guide, and spiritual genius had become important ways of describing the contributions of this saint and latest doctor of the church. But what exactly is a doctor of the church? The following chapter is devoted to understanding both the magnitude of the question and the impossibility of any easy answer.

²⁹ Mgr Guy Gaucher, Foreword to *The Spiritual Genius of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, by Jean Guitton (Ligouri: Triumph Books, 1997): 8.

³⁰ John Paul II, “Saint Thérèse Proclaimed Doctor of The Church”. *Origins* 27, no. 21: (November 6, 1997): 351. Hereafter cited as The Homily.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING THE TITLE “DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH”

2.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the major difficulties associated with the subject of doctor of the church. In an effort to explain the nature of these difficulties it begins with an example of how one explanation of the term is no longer valid due to the naming of women as doctors of the church. The problem of sources is then presented as a means to further accentuating these challenges of definition. The case of Thérèse of Lisieux, is examined from the perspective of a report in *Origins*, which concerns speculation following John Paul II’s proclamation of Thérèse as a doctor of the church, that she does not fit the traditional understanding of the title. In surveying the meaning of the term “doctor of the church” during the twentieth century, excerpts from various encyclopaedic sources are presented as evidence of the problems of definition with emphasis on the three conditions necessary for being declared a doctor of the church. One such condition that is particularly problematic, especially as concerns the case of Thérèse of Lisieux, is what we will call the “other condition” of being named a doctor of the church beyond that of sanctity and proclamation by a pope or a general council.

2.2 One Example of Definition: 1967 New Catholic Encyclopedia

In an article on “doctors of the church” the following statement is found:

No woman has been proclaimed, although St. Teresa of Avila has popularly been given the title because of the influence of her spiritual teaching; it would seem that no woman is likely to be named because of the link between this title and the teaching office which is limited to males.³¹

³¹ B. Forshaw, “Doctor of the Church.” in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1967).

We have seen that the issue of gender was seemingly resolved by way of the proclamations of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena as doctors of the church in 1970. However, there remains the problem of definition. If there is indeed a link between the title and the teaching office, what does the naming of women as doctors of the church mean in terms of their teaching? McGinn offers the best explanation: "...the recent creation of three women doctors – officially laypersons – shows that the teaching ascribed to doctors is independent of any form of ordination to church office."³²

2.3 Sources

The use of encyclopedias and dictionaries had become necessary when no English sources on the subject of doctors of the church could be found. In fact, until the publication in late 1999, of McGinn's highly informative work, *The Doctors of the Church*, only two works were available on the subject, both in French. Only one added new insight.³³ It is a 1964 publication entitled *Les Docteurs de l'Eglise* that includes information on the thirty individuals who made up the group of doctors of the church at that time, but does not, of course, include mention of the three women doctors, since all were named after 1964. However, what this source does provide, is a statement about the writings of the doctors.

In the two- page introduction, we find the claim that the infallible magisterium of the church, in choosing the doctors of the church, proclaims that it has discovered in the writing of a doctor, a teaching that is worthy of being accepted and of being proposed to the universal church: "C'est le magistère infallible de l'Eglise qui a fait ce choix! Il sait ce qu'il fait; s'il proclame un <<Docteur>> c'est qu'il découvre dans ses oeuvres un

³² McGinn. *Doctors of the Church*, 3.

³³ Raphael Sineux, O.P., *Les docteurs de l'Eglise* (Montpelier: Imprimerie Charite. 1964)

enseignement digne d'être retenu et proposé à l'Eglise universelle."³⁴

Here is found an explanation of the term, doctor of the church that resembles in one way, the definition of Paul VI, as cited by McGinn. As noted earlier, the emphasis in a homily, given on the occasion of naming Catherine of Siena a doctor of the church in 1970, was on "the traditional understanding of *doctor ecclesiae* as a recipient of special graces for the good of the church". From these two understandings of the term then, we see that the universal church is thought, in both cases, to benefit from the naming of an individual as a doctor of the church. In one, it is through the graces received by the doctor of the church, and in the other it is through their teachings, as found in the writings. The second French source was helpful as it presents an overview of the doctors of the church.³⁵

In the table of contents of his book, McGinn groups the thirty-three doctors of the church according to the following headings: Patristic Doctors, Medieval Doctors and Modern Doctors. This complete list of the doctors is found within the second part of his work: *Who are the Doctors of the Church?*, and like the French sources, represents the longest part of the work. Since it is obvious that the primary concern of each of these works is to acquaint the reader with the individual doctors of the church, one sees that almost in its entirety, each book is devoted to this task. For example, in McGinn's one hundred and eighty-three page work, no less than one hundred and forty-seven pages make up the section, "Who are the Doctors of the Church?" In comparison, the other

³⁴ Raphael Sineux, O.P., *Les docteurs de l'Eglise* (Montpelier: Imprimerie Charite, 1964) 8.

³⁵ Jean Huscenot, frere, F.E.C., *Les Docteurs de l'Eglise* (Paris: Mediaspaul, 1997). Since McGinn's work became available not long after discovering this source, I used the French source only for the information it provided in the appendix, i.e. names of doctors of the church according to various categories. These included their religious congregation, language, age at the time of death, as well as the individual categories of pope, bishop, cardinal, priest, deacon, nun, and consecrated layperson. This section was particularly helpful since McGinn does not provide this information in such an accessible manner. Rather, one has to read through the text in order to find these categories and his only classification is a historical one.

two sections i.e. “What is a Doctor of the Church?” and “What is the Future of the Doctors of the Church?” are comprised of only twenty-one pages and nine pages respectively.

2.4 Difficulties in Defining “Doctor of the Church”

If we return to one of the questions which has generated my research for this thesis, i.e. what is a doctor of the church, it is important to underscore the difficulty in trying to determine some sense of a general consensus, as concerns a definition of the title itself. One problem, as already noted, is the apparent lack of works devoted to the subject of the doctors of the church. McGinn makes the following statement in his short bibliographical list of “Handbooks for the Study of the Fathers and Doctors”, “This [Jean Huscenot’s book in 1997] is the only other guide to all the doctors of the church known to me. Readers of French can find extensive biographical discussions of each doctor in this work.”³⁶ McGinn’s statement, while confirming this problem of lack of resources, at the same time, raises the issue of how one is to interpret the apostolic letter of John Paul II, the major document outlining the details of the proclamation of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church, without a sufficient understanding of the title itself. On the other hand, given that this document was published in October 1997, and represents the official declaration of the church, one might wonder why this source had not become the primary source for the present paper. Would this not, perhaps, have been a more logical first step towards answering the question of what is a doctor of the church?

In an attempt to explain the reasons for not choosing this alternate approach to defining the title, it is necessary to draw attention to one of the problems encountered at the outset of the inquiry. In reporting the proclamation of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor

of the church, an *Origins* article that included excerpts from another published source, reported that there had been a reaction to the proclamation. This reaction had involved a group of theologians and represented a concern about the understanding of the term: doctor of the church. Taken from this article is the following:

“Pope John Paul II’s decision to name St Thérèse of Lisieux a doctor of the church left some theologians wondering if the academic credentials required for such an honor had changed,” wrote Cindy Wooden in a Nov. 7 Catholic News Service report. Wooden is on the CNS Rome bureau staff. Wooden spoke with Jesuit Father Gerald O’Collins, a professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, who said that declaring a saint a doctor of the church is not the same thing as conferring “a divine Ph.D.” on him or her. Wooden wrote, “The opposition contended that St. Thérèse, who never went to a university and died at the age of 24, did not fit the traditional criteria of eminent scholarship. Jesuit Father Peter Gumpel, a theologian who works closely with the Vatican Congregation for Sainthood Causes, said many theologians felt it would be a breach of the traditional understanding of doctor of the church as someone who advanced theological science or clarified a point of faith in an outstanding way. But, the priest said, the pope had some very pastoral reasons for naming St. Thérèse a doctor. “The pope’s choice confirms that ‘theology is at the service of faith, and St. Thérèse with her ‘little way’ advanced the faith and spirituality of the church’” he said. According to Wooden, “O’Collins described his dissenting colleagues as ‘experts over 50 years of age who have fixed categories.’ But St. Thérèse is only the 33rd doctor of the church, he said. With such a small sample group spread over such a long period of history, one can’t draw hard and fast rules.”³⁷

From this report, we learn that the decision to name Thérèse a doctor of the church was not free of controversy. Earlier I raised the question of possible reactions following the proclamations of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena in 1970, but as reported by McGinn, very little has been written on the specific subject of Paul VI declaring the first two women as doctors of the church.³⁸ On this other occasion, however, that of the proclamation of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church in 1997,

³⁶ McGinn. *The Doctors of the Church*. ix.

³⁷ This report appeared as a commentary to the text of the apostolic letter of John Paul II. “Apostolic Letter: St. Thérèse, Doctor of the Church.” *Origins* 27 no. 23: (November 20, 1997). 390.

³⁸ Since it is beyond the scope of this inquiry to attempt to clarify what information is actually contained in these documents, i.e. the proclamations of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena as doctors of the church, I include here only that information which is provided by McGinn.

it is not the issue of *obstat sexus* that has caused the reaction, but rather a concern on the part of a particular group of theologians, that Thérèse does not “fit the traditional criteria of eminent scholarship”. In citing this *Origins* excerpt, as a means to explaining the choice of sources other than the apostolic letter of John Paul II at the initial stage of the inquiry, I underscore, once again, the problem of defining the title of doctor of the church. In this excerpt is also found the phrase “traditional understanding of doctor of the church” and as already pointed out, this understanding includes various conditions or criteria for being named a doctor of the church.

2.5 Conditions for Being Named a Doctor of the Church

To date, the conditions necessary for being named a doctor of the church would include Congar’s reference to “orthodox thought” and “theological contribution,” Paul VI’s “recipient of special graces for the good of the church”, and Sineux’s claim that when the church proclaims an individual a doctor of the church, it is on account of the teaching, found in their writings, that is considered worthy of being proposed to the universal church. In the *Origins* article, there is mention of a breach of “the traditional understanding of doctor of the church as someone who advanced theological science or clarified a point of faith in an outstanding way.” In addition, of course, is the “traditional criteria of eminent scholarship.”

As mentioned earlier, Theological dictionaries and encyclopedias were consulted in an attempt to define the title of doctor of the church. Beginning with *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, published in 1909, several of these sources reveal that there are conditions or criteria, which must be met, in order to be named a doctor, but not all sources agree on these conditions. In addition, most articles contain information that either affirms what is already known about the title of doctor of the church or raises new difficulties, as has

been seen in the case of gender. A survey of these sources, in chronological order of the date of publication, will now be presented. In 1909, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* states that the doctors of the church:

are certain ecclesiastical writers [who] have received this title on account of the great advantage the whole Church has derived from their doctrine.....The requisite conditions are enumerated as three: *eminens doctrina, insignis vitoe sanctitas, Ecclesioe declaratio* (i.e. eminent learning, a high degree of sanctity, and proclamation by the Church).³⁹

According to *The New Catholic Dictionary*, published in 1929, the doctors of the church:

are writers who received this title from the Church, owing to their eminence in theology and holiness. They are extolled by the Church not primarily as witnesses of her faith (as are the Fathers), but on account of their brilliant exposition and skilful defence of Catholic doctrine.....Owing to their title, the Doctors of the Church enjoy a special authority in the Church, though not all in the same degree nor in the same manner. As a rule, the range and degree of their authority are set forth in the decree by which the title is conferred."⁴⁰

The New Catholic Encyclopedia, published in 1967, defines doctor of the church as:

the title given to certain ecclesiastical writers on account of the great advantage the Church has gained from their doctrine. Three requirements are demanded: great sanctity, eminent learning, and proclamation as a Doctor of the Church by a pope or ecumenical council. Only canonized saints receive this title.⁴¹

The Dictionary of the Middle Ages, published in 1984, states:

the title may be conferred by decision of an ecumenical council or by papal decree, and acknowledges unusual intellectual distinction, orthodoxy, and holiness of life. A doctor's theological pronouncements are accorded an authority that falls short of infallibility but far exceeds that of other saints and church fathers.⁴²

And finally, the one-volume *Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, published in 1994 reports:

Since the time of Boniface VIII this is a title officially conferred by pope or general council to designate someone posthumously (and usually long after death)

³⁹ John Chapman, "Doctors of the Church" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909).

⁴⁰ *The New Catholic Dictionary*, s.v. "Doctors of the Church." (New York: Van Rees Press, 1929).

⁴¹ B. Forshaw, "Doctor of the Church," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1967).

⁴² G. L. Keyes, "Doctors of the Church" in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984).

as wise, holy, and learned and a source, therefore, of sound teaching for the whole Church. In earlier centuries the title arose more spontaneously. Later, specific norms were laid down by Pope Benedict XIV: orthodoxy, personal holiness, learning and explicit commendation by the highest Church authority. In theological discussion, particular respect is paid to the writings and opinions of those designated Doctors of the Church because they are deemed to represent the Tradition in a noteworthy degree.⁴³

From this survey of sources, all published during the twentieth century, it is obvious that the foundational or primary condition that distinguishes all those who make up the group known as the doctors of the church, is holiness. Another condition is the naming or proclamation as a doctor, by a pope or an ecumenical council. However, the additional requirement for a doctor of the church beyond these conditions of sanctity and proclamation by a pope or council, is neither straightforward nor as well defined as one might expect. In fact, there is found within these sources evidence of several ways of stating that condition of being named a doctor of the church that pertains to knowledge. For example, the 1909 source uses the Latin term *eminens doctrina*, which is then translated as “eminent learning”. The 1929 source refers to this same condition as “eminence in theology”. In the 1967 New Catholic Encyclopedia we find this requirement again referred to as “eminent learning” rather than “eminence in theology” and in the 1984 source, it is expressed by two conditions which are said to be acknowledged in the title of doctor of the church. They are “unusual intellectual distinction” and “orthodoxy”. And the last source, the 1994 publication, uses the terms “wise” and “learned” to refer to this condition at one point in history but uses “orthodoxy” and “learning” to refer to the same condition following norms laid down by Pope Benedict XIV in a later historical period.

⁴³ Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig. (editors) “Doctors of the Church” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* (Collegeville Minnesota: The Liturgical Press. 1994).

2.5 Problem of “Other Condition” beyond Sanctity and Proclamation by a Pope or General Council

This condition which we will refer to as the “other” condition of a doctor of the church, beyond sanctity and proclamation by a pope or general council, has been shown to be known by such terms as: eminent learning, eminence in theology, unusual intellectual distinction, orthodoxy, and learning. It is precisely this “other” condition, which has been seen as the cause of a group of theologians claiming that the naming of Thérèse as a doctor of the church in 1997, is a breach of the traditional understanding of the title. The “other” condition, as it appears in the *Origins* excerpt noted previously, is described in such terms as “academic credentials”, “eminent scholarship”, “someone who advanced theological science” or [someone who] “clarified a point of faith in an outstanding way”. Although the Catholic encyclopedias and dictionaries, as we have seen, fail to reveal one standard interpretation of the “other” condition, it is precisely this problem of interpretation, which would appear, in these comments, to be closely linked to the controversy surrounding Thérèse of Lisieux being proclaimed a doctor of the church. It is, in fact, her seeming lack of the “other” condition, at least in the opinion of the dissenting theologians that would appear to be the cause of their opposition.

2.7 Conclusion

The problem of defining a doctor of the church is shown to be related to both a change in the meaning of the term since women have been given the title, and complications associated with the “other condition” of being named a doctor of the church beyond sanctity and proclamation by a pope or general council. With this in mind we will now focus on a short history of the title that will help to shed more light on the nature of such change and complications.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORY OF THE DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

3.1 Introduction

The history of the naming of the doctors of the church is interesting and at the same time challenging because of the difficulties associated with the title as already seen. This chapter presents a history of the development of the practice of proclaiming individuals worthy of this distinction, a practice which since the Reformation is limited to the Roman Catholic tradition. In focusing on the link between Thérèse and the other doctors it is discovered that the problematic “other condition” for being named of a doctor of the church, beyond sanctity and proclamation by a pope or council, becomes less important. A brief history of the early doctors of the church shows that doctors of both the Eastern and Western traditions are represented in this group.

3.2 Thérèse and the Doctors of the Church

It is important to keep in mind that in being named a doctor of the church Thérèse of Lisieux becomes a member of a select group of individuals who share a common title and who enjoy a special place in the church. In the apostolic letter we find evidence of their link to each other:

Thérèse of the Child Jesus is not only the youngest doctor of the church, but is also the closest to us in time, as if to emphasize the continuity with which the Spirit of the Lord sends his messengers to the church, men and women as teachers and witnesses to the faith. In fact, whatever changes can be noted in the course of history and despite the repercussions they usually have on the life and thought of individuals in every age, we must never lose sight of the continuity which links the doctors of the church to each other.⁴⁴

Here there is mention of the doctors as teachers and witnesses, with emphasis on a

sense of continuity. In McGinn's work we find another important dimension to the link between these individuals, and it is his sense of their uniqueness as a group that is pointed out: "What is distinctive about the doctors as a group is the model they present of combining the intense love of God and neighbor that defines sanctity with a commitment to the intellectual work of learning, preaching, teaching, and writing."⁴⁵ Certainly one sees that this distinction is significant, particularly with regard to the intellectual work. In the case of Thérèse of Lisieux, it becomes a way of distinguishing between her status as saint and her status as doctor of the church. One must keep in mind however, that earlier it was pointed out that the theme of "little" in relation to Thérèse as a doctor of the church ran the risk of diminishing her new status. With regard to the other doctors we have seen evidence in the apostolic letter that Thérèse might perhaps be considered as a "lesser" doctor. This possibility arose from the following statement about her writings: "We do not find perhaps, as in other doctors, a scholarly presentation of the things of God, but..."⁴⁶

In the final part of this excerpt we are told "we can discern an enlightened witness of faith which, while accepting with trusting love God's merciful condescension and salvation in Christ, reveals the mystery and holiness of the church."⁴⁷ This notion of Thérèse's "enlightened witness of faith" corresponds to the sense of doctors of the church as messengers as previously noted. "...the Spirit of the Lord sends his messengers to the church, men and women as teachers and witnesses to the faith."⁴⁸ Thérèse shares this role with all the other doctors of the church but one wonders if the same statement that they are messengers could not be said of all saints, not just those known as the doctors.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter*, 395.

⁴⁵ McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 175.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter*, 393.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

3.3 Official Title in the Church

Most sources point to the date 1298 as significant for the official naming of doctors of the church. Boniface VIII decreed that four Latin doctors should be honoured with a “double class” feast day and in the document issued for this occasion “puts them on the same level as the twelve apostles and four evangelists...”⁴⁹ The other significant date as regards the title of doctor of the church is the eighteenth century when between 1734 and 1738 Prospero Lambertini, presented a scholarly study of the history of the canonization process, considered a “massive work”, and in one volume of this study, he specified conditions for an individual to be proclaimed a doctor of the church. McGinn notes that:

he did not try to set down exact rules for the declaration of *doctores ecclesiae*, both because no clear procedures had been established in the past, and (more importantly) the condition that doctors need to be saints, even if not papally canonized, guaranteed that their teaching and example would at least not be harmful.⁵⁰

3.4 Earlier Doctors of the Church

We know that earlier in the history of the church, the title of doctor was unofficial and tended to arise in a more spontaneous manner. From the eighth century for example, the four Western doctors had been acknowledged. They were: Ambrose (c. 339-397), Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Jerome (c. 347-420), and Gregory the Great (540-604). The major teachers of the Byzantine East, also known as the “great ecumenical teachers” were: Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-79), Gregory of Nazianzus (330-90), and John Chrysostom (345-407). McGinn considers that “the enumeration of four Eastern doctors to match the four Western ones by adding Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 300-373), was a

⁴⁸ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 393.

⁴⁹ McGinn. *The Doctors of the Church*. 11.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-15

late medieval Western creation.”⁵¹ Other sources report that “in time” four Eastern doctors were recognized and include Athanasius. All sources agree that the list of doctors of the church remained at eight until the time of Pius V (1566-1572).

3.5 Doctors of the Church and the Reformation

The most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from these details is that the sixteenth century, important for the Reformation, also marked the end of one historical period regarding the doctors. Since we know that there are now thirty-three doctors of the church and that only eight were considered doctors before the Reformation, it is readily seen that all subsequent declarations have been limited to the Roman Catholic tradition. It is important to state that the Eastern Church, like the Protestant tradition, does not name doctors of the church. However, one should keep in mind that the eight doctors of the church, all considered doctors before the time of Pius V, are also known as the Fathers of the Church and hold an important place in the history of Christianity.

McGinn offers two notable claims regarding the Reformation and the naming of the doctors of the church. In the first we find evidence of the prominent place of the early doctors as well as the theology of the post-Reformation period. In the preface to his work, McGinn describes the *cathedra Petri*, of St. Peter’s basilica, built by Gian Lorenzo Bernini between 1657 and 1666. This had been done at the request of Pope Alexander VII. “Bernini’s concept was to enclose the modest wooden chair [the throne venerated since the thirteenth century, as the one where the first bishop of Rome taught] in a huge structure of marble, bronze and stucco under and around a window painted with a dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit, the source of Christian truth.”⁵²

⁵¹ McGinn. *The Doctors of the Church*. 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, xi.

The four doctors of the church, two from the East (Athanasius of Alexandria and John Chrysostom) and two from the West (Augustine and Ambrose) are represented as bronze figures on marble pillars at the bottom of the structure. McGinn claims that “the deeply religious Bernini and his papal patron wished to provide a visual demonstration of the vital link between the doctors of East and West, as well as to emphasize Rome’s doctrinal centrality in the post-Reformation period.”⁵³ McGinn’s second notable claim regarding the naming of doctors from the time of the Reformation is the following historical sketch:

Although the bishops of Rome did not invent the concept of “doctor of the church,” by the end of the sixteenth century they had claimed that there was an unbreakable bond between papal teaching authority and Christendom’s most prestigious doctors...sixteenth century popes added the names of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. After the completion of St. Peter’s in the late seventeenth century, eighteenth-century popes began to augment the list of doctors even further. Their successors have continued the practice down to the present day.⁵⁴

3.6 Conclusion

This history of the doctors of the church has included evidence that the Reformation marked an important point in this history. The practice of naming doctors of the church continues only in the Roman Catholic tradition and these messengers are considered to be teachers and witnesses to the faith.⁵⁵ The thirty-three doctors of the church are linked to each other not only as messengers but through “the model they present of combining the intense love of God and neighbor that defines sanctity with a commitment to the intellectual work of learning, preaching, teaching, and writing.”⁵⁶

⁵³ McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, xi.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ A list of all doctors of the church named subsequent to the Reformation can be found in Appendix I of the present work.

⁵⁶ McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 175.

Thérèse of Lisieux became a member of this select group on October 19, 1997. How this came about is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROCESS PRECEDING THE OFFICIAL PROCLAMATION OF OCTOBER 19, 1997

Part I (McGinn's Interpretation and Related Problems)

4.1 Introduction

The process by which a saint becomes a doctor of the church obviously begins with a cause and we have seen a history of Thérèse's cause prior to the official proclamation. In Part I of this chapter Bernard McGinn's interpretation of the conditions and events that preceded the actual declaration is presented as further evidence of the complexity of the subject of doctors of the church. This interpretation is compared with details contained in a pastoral letter to the Carmelites, and conclusions are drawn regarding the use of both the pastoral letter and John Paul II's apostolic letter as sources. Problems that are created by McGinn's interpretation of the declaration process are highlighted especially the claim that politics is an inescapable aspect of the life of the church.

4.2 McGinn's Interpretation of Events

There can be no question that Pope John Paul was pleased to be able to declare Thérèse a doctor (he had visited her shrine in 1980). Was he, one wonders, the initiator of the cause? Surely the Carmelite order, which had orchestrated Thérèse's rapid canonization with great efficiency in the early twentieth century, must have played a role... The procedure followed in this most recent declaration was not detailed by the pope, though his apostolic letter speaks generally of responding to the wishes of "very many faithful throughout the world" and a "great number" of bishops, as well as consultation with both the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Holy Office). We know that it involved, as usual, getting the advice of the cardinals too. The Little Flower enjoys a large and enthusiastic following in many parts of the Catholic world, so the "grassroots" aspect of the cause must have been quite significant. According to one story making the rounds, an American auxiliary bishop with a lifelong devotion to Thérèse convinced a well-known American cardinal to approach the pope on the question of the possibility of declaring the saint a doctor. With the pope's approval, the American cardinal canvassed the other members of the Sacred College for their

views and then sent on only the replies that were favourable to Rome, where the case was taken from there. As the Romans say of such stories, “Se non e vero, e ben trovato,” which can be roughly translated as, “Even if it isn’t true, it will be often repeated.”⁵⁷

It must first be acknowledged that McGinn’s work is “designed to tell ordinary readers everything they always wanted to know about these important leaders [doctors of the church]...”⁵⁸, and so one might argue that this volume is therefore not intended for an academic audience. Despite this claim however, there remains the problem of a possible lacuna in McGinn’s presentation, specifically as concerns the history of Thérèse of Lisieux. Given that this author is “*the* nationally recognized and foremost authority on historical theology”⁵⁹, and that his work represents, “the only book that provides the perennial wisdom of all thirty-three doctors”⁶⁰, there is confusion regarding what would seem to be a rather casual treatment of historical details. Are we to conclude, for example, that McGinn does not consider it necessary to detail the process by which Thérèse received the title of doctor of the church? Does he consider that the apostolic letter serves this purpose? Certainly, one wonders why he does not refer to specific petitions. Earlier we had seen that in addition to the petitions of French bishops, Carmelite superiors and others, there were also at least thirty Episcopal conferences, as well as “thousands of Christians” which included priests, religious, and lay people of 107 countries who supported the cause of Thérèse of Lisieux as doctor of the church.⁶¹ It is McGinn’s statement, “According to one story making the rounds...” however, which is unusual for a noted historian. In fact, it would indicate that McGinn’s position that “even

⁵⁷ McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 19-20.

⁵⁸ This claim appears on the back cover of McGinn’s book.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Maccise. Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite Letter. 3.

if it isn't true it will often be repeated" is acceptable. We have previously noted that there is no mention in McGinn's work of the 1932 petition and one explanation may be that McGinn does not consider this petition to be any more notable than the others. With regard to what I have called a "rather casual treatment" of the details of the petitions, it is only fair to mention that McGinn is not alone in his interpretation. Bishop Patrick Ahern, whose article on Thérèse as a doctor of the church we will examine in the next chapter, makes the following claim: "All the American cardinals have personally asked the pope for it [proclaiming Thérèse a doctor of the church] as, one by one they have gone on visits to Rome..."⁶² Ahern then names one cardinal, i.e. Cardinal O'Connor, who had presented a formal petition to the pope including a position paper and a dossier containing the request from more than fifty national conferences of bishops. It is interesting that both McGinn and Ahern offer what could be called an American perspective of Thérèse's cause yet there is no mention of this involvement in the apostolic letter. Regarding McGinn's unidentified bishop, one wonders if his reference might possibly be to Bishop Ahern himself. This speculation of course, leads to the question of whether Cardinal O'Connor might then be the unidentified cardinal.

4.3 Problems with McGinn's Interpretation

The possible lacuna in McGinn's work or simply his version of events, in the specific area of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church, is problematic in several ways. Since his work is the only English source on the subject of all thirty-three doctors of the church, readers are left with McGinn's assumption that details surrounding the declaration of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church are extremely vague, when in

⁶²Patrick V. Ahern. "'Thérèse. Doctor of the Church'" *Origins* 27 no. 12 (Sept. 4, 1997): 193-195.

fact they are not as vague as McGinn would have us believe. Further, his “story making the rounds” may also lead readers to speculate themselves, about the possibility that all processes within the church, involving bishops and cardinals, are highly political. There is already evidence of this position on the subject of politics in the following:

If the naming of new doctors has been influenced by the large-scale politics of the papacy’s opposition to Reformation Christianity, we should not be surprised that the list of new doctors has also been shaped by forms of smaller-scale politics, especially the competition between various religious orders of the Catholic Church. Today even believers are ready to admit – and sometimes to be amused by – the politics that is an inescapable aspect of the life of the church. (It’s just that believers do not think that it is all politics.)⁶³

Surrounding the details of the 1932 petition, we know that this request did not receive a favourable response from the Vatican, but McGinn, in presenting his “story making the rounds,” creates the impression that the solicitation from an American bishop and cardinal, whether or not there is any truth to the claim, represented the first time that a pope had been asked to declare Thérèse a doctor of the church. As already mentioned, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, in 1981, officially asked John Paul II to make the declaration. He did this in response to a petition from the Teresian Carmel, as well as a consultation with the permanent council of the French Episcopate. Then other official letters, from the Discalced postulator general and the bishop of Lisieux were written on different occasions. Petitions were also sent and these included one in 1991 from the general chapter of the Teresian Carmel and another in 1995 from the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance.⁶⁴

Although the Carmelite letter, understandably, does not provide details about Cardinal Etchegaray, as such information would be well known within the Carmelite community one assumes, it becomes very important to provide a few significant details

⁶³ McGinn. *The Doctors of the Church*, 13.

⁶⁴ Maccise. Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. *Carmelite Letter*. 3.

here. This cardinal was born in France, became General Secretary of the French Bishops' Conference in 1966, was later elected President of the French Episcopal Conference, and was "elevated to the College of Cardinals by John Paul II during the Consistory of June 30, 1979."⁶⁵ These details which McGinn considers unimportant for his presentation of the subject of doctors of the church, are in my view, highly pertinent; the most obvious detail being the fact that Thérèse of Lisieux is French. Secondly, having seen that Cardinal Etchegaray became a member of the College of Cardinals in 1979, it is reasonable to assume that in 1981, as a member of the French Episcopal Conference, he sent an official letter to John Paul II, asking him to declare Thérèse of Lisieux a doctor of the church.

McGinn's claim, i.e. that the details surrounding the process by which Thérèse became an acceptable candidate for doctor of the church are unclear, would not, in light of this information, be warranted. However, having said this, it is important to acknowledge that there are certain details within the Carmelite letter, that remain the source of some confusion. These would concern the circumstances of the proposal for Thérèse becoming a doctor of the church being "taken up again", following the refusal in 1932 of a similar request. We have already seen that the declarations of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena, as doctors of the church in 1970, "eliminated completely any obstacle to naming a woman doctor"⁶⁶ and "as a result, the proposal for the doctorate of Thérèse of Lisieux was taken up again".⁶⁷ However, the only other information that provides evidence for the process, which can be seen to precipitate the request of Cardinal Etchegaray, is the following:

⁶⁵ "Biography of Cardinal Etchegaray". < <http://www.catholic-pages.com> > (Accessed Feb.2. 2002).

⁶⁶ Maccise, Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite Letter, 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

In 1973, the centenary of her birth, Mgr. Garrone stated the question anew: *“Could St. Thérèse of Lisieux become some day (sic) a Doctor of the Church? I respond affirmatively, without hesitation, encouraged by what has happened to the great St. Teresa and St. Catherine of Siena.”* On subsequent occasions, the Carmelites proposed the possibility of the doctorate.⁶⁸

The information offered here is perhaps less detailed, as we have seen already, due to the fact that the Carmelite community would have no need of further information. What is most important for purposes of the present thesis, however, is the fact that the issue of doctor of the church can be seen to coincide with the centenary of Thérèse’s birth in 1973. We must keep in mind that even though the exact details of certain aspects of the events and initiatives taken by various persons and groups within the church may be unclear, we know that Thérèse of Lisieux was named a doctor of the church in 1997, the centenary of her death. As it has been my intention throughout this study, to highlight those difficulties associated with both the declaration of Thérèse as a doctor of the church, and the definition of the title itself, I have not included here any further detail as concerns the identity of those individuals responsible for continuing the cause, beyond those already presented.

It would seem that McGinn did not consider it necessary to include information from the Carmelite letter, although it is precisely this source, which provides the fact of Cardinal Etchegaray’s 1981 request. It is also possible that the apostolic letter of John Paul II, may have been used as the major if not exclusive source for information regarding Thérèse’s proclamation, given that there is evidence of detail missing from McGinn’s work. I raise this possibility for another reason also. Since the apostolic letter was issued as the official document outlining the details of the proclamation of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church, it appears quite reasonable to assume that such a

⁶⁸ Maccise, Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite Letter, 3.

document should rightly contain all necessary information regarding the declaration. As stated earlier, the problem of defining the term “ doctor of the church,” had been found to be highly problematic and so for purposes of the present paper, an attempt was made to do a sufficient study of the difficulties associated with an understanding of the term, prior to examining the apostolic letter in greater detail. Since McGinn makes an important statement regarding the process involved in the naming of doctors of the church, he reveals quite clearly his interpretation of the process. In addition, it could explain why he was not concerned with details of petitions as noted earlier.

Powerful religious orders have successfully pushed the causes of some of their favorite sons (and more recently daughters). Papal favor for a particular cause doubtless has played a large role, but it is often difficult to know how important this has been in individual cases. The popes have usually adopted a simplified form of the process used in canonization. In this model a document called a *positio* exploring the teaching of the candidate is drawn up and is then given a judicial hearing before a panel appointed by the Congregation of Sacred Rites, which oversees the church’s liturgical life and is empowered to assign the liturgy for a doctor to a particular saint. If the panel judges favourably, the pope then often consults with the cardinals concerning the advisability of the nomination, but final acceptance of the cause is a matter of papal prerogative. In a number of cases, popes seem to have used much simplified forms of consultation in advancing the cause of a doctor. The “paper trails” for a number of cases are quite murky and have not been given detailed historical investigation.⁶⁹

4.4 Conclusion of Part I

McGinn’s interpretation of the events which led to the proclamation of Thérèse as a doctor of the church have included claims that the Carmelite order orchestrated her cause, as well as speculation concerning how John Paul II was asked to make the declaration. The issue of a lacuna in McGinn’s work due to the absence of certain details has been presented. We have seen that the pastoral letter to the Carmelites provides these details and an explanation of why the apostolic letter of John Paul II had not been used as

⁶⁹ McGinn. *The Doctors of the Church*, 175.

the major source in the initial stage of inquiry for the present paper was explained. The final claim of McGinn reported in this chapter, i.e. the contention that the “ ‘paper trails’ for a number of cases [doctors of the church] are quite murky and have not been given detailed historical investigation,” will now be considered. Is the paper trail for Thérèse of Lisieux quite murky or can such a trail be traced through the pastoral letter to the Carmelites? This is the subject of Part II of this chapter.

Part II (The Paper Trail)

4.5 Introduction

The apostolic letter, in the sense of providing information necessary for an understanding of the process by which Thérèse became a doctor of the church is insufficient in some areas. The pastoral letter to the Carmelite family however, is an excellent guide for the purpose of following the “paper trail.” This source offers a detailed description of every aspect of how Thérèse’s case came to be accepted by the Vatican and McGinn’s claim that the Carmelite order played a significant role in the case is considered. In this second part of the chapter, which represents the longest and most extensive part of the present paper, these elements are presented in an effort to give detailed investigation to the case of Thérèse becoming a doctor of the church and to show that for this case at least, the paper trail is not “quite murky” as McGinn claims it is for some of these doctors. The apostolic letter and the pastoral letter to the Carmelites are compared with regard to how the process for Thérèse’s proclamation as doctor is presented in each source, with the pastoral letter obviously providing more detail. The outlines of both these letters are compared and found to be closely related.

4.6 Preparation of the Positio by the Teresian Carmel

The pastoral letter to the Carmelites reports the following:

In the first months of this year 1997, the Teresian Carmel was asked to prepare the “*Positio*,” i.e. the presentation of proof required by the church to demonstrate a person’s suitability to be declared Doctor of the Church. Because the time allowed was limited, collaboration was necessary. At the beginning of May, a 965-page volume was printed. It was divided into 4 parts and 13 chapters that presented the facts of the life and doctrine of St. Thérèse and the prominence, influence, and present-day impact of her message. It contains a brief history of the causes for her beatification and canonization (ch. 1) and the process for the doctorate (ch.2), followed by a small but compact biography of Thérèse of Lisieux (ch. 3), an analysis of her personality (ch. 4), a chronology (ch.5), and a presentation of her writings (ch.6). From the doctrinal point of view, it offers a

general view of Thérèse's doctrine (ch. 7), a synthesis of her theology (ch. 8), and a study of the sources of her teachings (ch. 9). The impact of Thérèse of Lisieux is examined from three different perspectives: the acceptance and presentation of her doctrine by the magisterium of the church (ch. 10), its spread and influence (ch. 11), and finally the importance of her doctrine for the Church and world of today (ch. 12). The final chapter of the *Positio* highlights the "eminence" of the doctrine of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face (ch. 13). It concludes with the transcripts of the letters proposing the doctorate from Episcopal conferences and ecclesiastica; and lay personages. A selected bibliography (130 pages) is also included, as well as the opinions of the five theologians chosen by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the two by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. There is also an iconographic appendix that shows Thérèse as teacher and doctor.

After studying the *Positio*, the Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith and for the Causes of Saints, along with the Consistory of Cardinals, gave their approval that our sister could be declared Doctor of the Church. Pope John Paul II, as we said, agreed to the proposal, announcing it to the Universal Church at the end of the International Gathering of Youth in Paris.⁷⁰

In this highly informative section of the Carmelite letter, we see an outline of the *Positio* as well as the specific steps taken before John Paul II made his announcement that Thérèse of Lisieux would be named a doctor of the church. In light of this information, McGinn's suggestion that the pope was perhaps the initiator of the cause does not seem probable. McGinn's other contention however, that the Carmelite order had "orchestrated her rapid canonization with great efficiency" and therefore must have played a role in the cause of Thérèse becoming a doctor of the church, is more likely.

4.7 Role of the Carmelite Order in the Process

Although the matter of whether or not the Carmelites were responsible for the rapid canonization will not be considered here, the role of the order in the process of Thérèse becoming a doctor, can certainly be seen as significant. Already we have evidence of several factors that point to this conclusion: Guy Gaucher, auxiliary bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, himself a Carmelite, had (by 1992) "labored patiently to lay the

groundwork for an informed position on her [Thérèse's] qualifications for the title of Doctor,"⁷¹ the congregation was asked to prepare the *positio* in 1997, and following 1973 "On subsequent occasions, the Carmelites proposed the possibility of the doctorate".⁷² What is most interesting however, is the fact that although the role of the Carmelite order can be seen to be highly significant, there is in fact, minimal reference to the order in John Paul II's apostolic letter. In this source, we find mention of petitions in the following: "It is not surprising then that the Apostolic See received many petitions to confer on her [Thérèse] the title of *doctor of the universal church*."⁷³ The letter then goes on to say "in recent years these requests became more and more numerous; including on the part of Episcopal conferences."⁷⁴ Then the pope states "in light of these facts," he "decided carefully to study whether the saint of Lisieux had the prerequisites for being awarded the title of doctor of the universal church."⁷⁵ No more is said about this procedure or study on the part of John Paul II, until the final section (12) of the apostolic letter where is found the single reference to the Carmelite order. In mentioning the petitions again and referring to what we are told is the *supplex libellus* or "official petition", we learn that it was addressed to him on March 8, 1997 "by the bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux as well as from the superior general of the Discalced Carmelites of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel and from the postulator general of the same order."⁷⁶ It would appear that the role of the Carmelites as concerns Thérèse's case for doctor, is not the only role that is poorly defined in the apostolic letter.

⁷⁰ Maccise, Camilo and Joseph Chalmers, Carmelite Letter, 3.

⁷¹ John F. Russell, "St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor of the Church?" *America* 167: (October 10, 1992): 250.

⁷² Maccise, Camilo and Joseph Chalmers, Carmelite Letter, 3.

⁷³ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, 391.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 395.

4.8 Request for the *Positio* and Study by the Congregations

We are told that after accepting the official petition, the pope decided to “entrust the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which has competence in this matter, with the special study of the cause for conferring the title of ‘doctor’ on this saint, ‘after hearing the opinion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the eminent doctrine’ (Pastor Bonus, 73)”⁷⁷ From the source previously noted, i.e. the joint pastoral letter to the Carmelite family, we have seen that it was in the first months of 1997 that the Teresian Carmel was asked to prepare the *Positio*. In the apostolic letter, the specific term *positio* is used only once and mention of the Carmelite order in relation to the *positio*, as previously noted, is not found. In continuing with an explanation of the process that preceded the present proclamation, John Paul II goes on to say:

After the necessary documentation had been collected, the two above-mentioned congregations [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Congregation for the Causes of Saints] addressed the question in the meetings of their respective consultors: the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on May 5, 1997, with regard to the “eminent doctrine,” and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on May 29 of the same year, to examine the special *positio*.⁷⁸

In this explanation of events, we see that the pope refers to a meeting of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on May 29, 1997. In the Carmelite letter we are told that a 965-page volume was printed at the beginning of May 1997, and that this document represented the *positio*. What is the extent of the involvement of both the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and the Carmelites, in the actual preparation of this 965-page volume? The apostolic letter does not indicate anything beyond an examination of the *positio*, with no mention of the Carmelites, as already noted. The Carmelite letter speaks of collaboration being necessary because the time allowed to prepare the *positio* was limited, but does not indicate the extent of this collaboration. Also, there is no

mention in the apostolic letter of the specifics of “necessary documentation” that we are told had been collected.

4.9 Comparison of Apostolic Letter and Pastoral Letter to the Carmelites

In a comparison between these letters concerning the last steps before the pope’s announcement on August 24, 1997 that he intended to proclaim Thérèse de Lisieux a doctor of the church, it is the apostolic letter, in this instance, which provides more detail:

On the following June 17, [1997], the cardinals and bishops who are members of these congregations, following a procedure approved by me for this occasion, met in a plenary interdicasterial session and discussed the cause, giving a unanimously favourable opinion on granting the title of “doctor of the universal church” to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. I was personally informed of this opinion by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and by the pro-prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Archbishop Alberto Bovone, titular archbishop of Caesarea in Numidia.⁷⁹

John Paul II then says that “in view of this” he made the August 24 announcement that he intended to proclaim Thérèse a doctor of the church. In the Carmelite letter, however, there is found only the following statement: “After studying the *Positio*, the Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith and for the Causes of Saints, along with the Consistory of Cardinals, gave their approval that our sister could be declared Doctor of the Church.”⁸⁰ Mention of the unanimously favourable response, although important from the point of view of dissent on the part of particular theologians, as introduced earlier in this thesis, is absent from this source. Perhaps the Carmelite community, in anticipation of such a response to the *positio*, had found it unnecessary to include such information in correspondence directed to this same community. What is also interesting is the fact that in the apostolic letter, John Paul II claims it was the cardinals and bishops “following a

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 396.

procedure approved by me for this occasion [who]....discussed the cause, giving a unanimously favourable opinion".⁸¹ There is no indication here, or in the Carmelite letter that provides even less information, as to the nature of this procedure or what it actually entailed.⁸²

4.10 Role of John Paul II

Is it possible that the procedure referred to by the pope in this instance, involved simply deciding, either negatively or positively, among the members of the two congregations [Doctrine for the Faith and Causes of Saints], on the cause of Thérèse of Lisieux? It would seem that in stating, "I was personally informed of this opinion [unanimously favourable on granting the title of doctor of the church to Thérèse] by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] and by Archbishop Alberto Bovone [Congregation for the Causes of Saints]" that John Paul II did not actively participate in the process through which Thérèse received unanimous approval on the part of the congregations. In fact, it seems entirely possible that the pope simply rubber-stamped what had already been approved. I raise this possibility since the

⁸⁰ Maccise. Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite Letter, 4.

⁸¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, 396.

⁸² A special volume of the New Catholic Encyclopedia entitled, "Jubilee Volume, The Wojtyla Years" was published in 2001 and offers some information regarding the general process of canonization especially changes to the congregations by John Paul II. The text is as follows: "The 1918 Code of Canon Law summarized the juridical and administrative procedures in the beatification and canonization of saints (cc. 1999-2141). The 1983 Code says simply, 'The causes of the canonization of the servants of God are regulated by special pontifical law' (c. 1403). Pope Paul VI issued two documents on the subject. *Sancitas clarior* (1969) was a step in implementing Vatican II's constitution *Lumen gentium* (nos. 40, 47, 50). It clarified the competencies and procedures of bishops with regard to the introduction of causes of servants of God for beatification. *Sacra rituum congregatio* divided the Congregation of Rites into two congregations, one for Divine Worship and the other for the Causes of Saints. The new Congregation for the Causes of Saints included an office with historiographic and hagiographic functions. Pope John Paul II's apostolic constitution *Divinus perfectionis magister* (25 January 1983) and the respective *Normae servandae in inquisitionibus ab episcopis faciendis in causis sanctorum* (7 February 1983) reformed the procedures for promoting the cause of a saint and restructured the congregation. The constitution enlarged the role of local ordinaries in saints' causes by giving them the right to initiate investigations into the lives, virtues, martyrdom, veneration, and asserted miracles for the candidate. It also assigned to the congregation a college of relators whose task is to assist with the drafting of the *Positiones super vita et virtutibus (o super martyrio)* of the servant of God." P. 429.

majority of sources concerned with the likelihood of Thérèse becoming a doctor of the church, tend to stress the fact that John Paul II “decided” or “made the decision” to confer on Thérèse the special title. It is important to understand that the role of John Paul II as author of the apostolic letter does not mean that he either initiated the cause or produced the letter. As we have already seen, the actual process for consideration of this saint as a doctor of the church had begun as early as 1932 and involved more than one pope. In fact, Pius XI was the recipient of a request in 1932, and John Paul II received a request in 1981.

4.11 The Official Petition

As there is no evidence of the pope’s response to the 1981 request of Cardinal Roger Etchegaray whom we are told, “following up a petition from the Teresian Carmel and after consulting the permanent council of the French Episcopate, sent an official letter to Pope John Paul II asking him to declare Thérèse of Lisieux Doctor of the Church”⁸³, we do not know why a response to the *supplex libellus* or official petition, in March 1997 is the only one mentioned in the apostolic letter. Since John Paul II refers to his having accepted this official petition, it is possible that only a petition that has been officially accepted by a pope is considered notable. This could explain in part, why the 1932 request to have Thérèse proclaimed a doctor of the church is absent from both McGinn’s work and the apostolic letter. In addition, the Carmelite letter mentions that following Mgr. Garrone’s statement of the question (of the possibility of Thérèse becoming a doctor of the church) “anew” in 1973, the centenary of her birth, “on subsequent occasions, the Carmelites proposed the possibility of the doctorate”. One

⁸³ Maccise, Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite Letter, 3.

cannot be sure of what is meant by “proposed the possibility”, as this could mean a petition, a letter, a proposal etc.

4.12 The Petition in 1932

What would appear to be most significant then, is whether or not there has been a positive response or acceptance of the cause by a pope or the Vatican. The following information surrounding the 1932 request is worth noting:

Already from the time of her canonization, there was no lack of bishops, preachers, theologians, and faithful from different countries who sought to have our sister Thérèse of Lisieux declared a Doctor of the Church. This flow of petitions in favour of the doctorate became official in 1932 on the occasion of the inauguration of the crypt of the Basilica at Lisieux, which was accompanied by a congress at which five cardinals, fifty bishops, and a great number of faithful participated. On June 30, Fr. Gustave Desbuquois, SJ, with clear and precise theological argument, spoke of Thérèse of Lisieux as Doctor of the Church. Surprisingly, his proposal had the support of many of the participants, bishops, and theologians. This positive reaction to the suggestion of Fr. Desbuquois spread universally. Mons. Clouthier, Bishop of Trois Rivières, Canada, wrote to all the bishops of the world in order to prepare a petition to the Holy See. By 1933 he had already received 342 positive replies from bishops who supported the proposal to have Thérèse of Lisieux declared a Doctor of the Church.... The petition of Fr. Desbuquois was presented to Pope Pius XI, along with a letter of Mother Agnes of Jesus, sister of Thérèse and prioress of the Lisieux Carmel. She informed the Pope about the great success of the Theresian Congress. On 31 August 1932, Cardinal Pacelli, Secretary of State, replied to Mother Agnes' letter on behalf of the pope. He was very pleased about the positive results of the congress, but added that it would be better not to speak of Thérèse's doctorate yet, even though, *“Her doctrine never ceased to be for him a sure light for souls searching to know the spirit of the Gospel.”*⁸⁴

Although I have earlier presented several of the facts stated here, i.e. the 1932 petition, the interesting detail of the nationality of Bishop Cloutier, the significance of 1932 being the year of inauguration of the crypt of the Basilica at Lisieux, etc, the most important information to be gleaned from this excerpt, concerns the form of the reply to

⁸⁴ Maccise. Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite Letter. 2.

the 1932 official petition and the history of petitions prior to this one. The response “on behalf of the pope” appears to have been an effort to discourage further petitions for the cause of Thérèse as a doctor of the church. Since we have already seen that *obstat sexus* was an issue and that, “After the Vatican’s negative response, and by its order, the gathering of signatures in favour of Thérèse of Lisieux’s doctorate was interrupted.”, the Vatican was obviously successful in this effort.

4.13 The Significance of Petitions, their Dates, and their Responses

Since there is no evidence of a response to Cardinal Etchegaray’s 1981 request, as already mentioned, one can assume that it was neither a direct refusal nor a negative response. Keeping in mind that only the official petition or *supplex libellus* appears in the apostolic letter in detail, and that this petition was accepted by John Paul II, it seems likely that all other requests were received by the Vatican, but the nature of responses to the initiators of these causes, does not appear to have been made public. However, because we have seen that timing appears to have been an important factor in the forwarding of petitions to the Vatican, it is the significance of particular dates that can be seen to have influenced the likelihood that a petition would become notable. For example, we know that from the time of her canonization in 1925, there had been many petitions to have Thérèse declared a doctor of the church. It was not until 1932, however, on the occasion of the inauguration of the crypt of the basilica at Lisieux, that the official petition from Fr. Desbuquois was made. Then, following the order from the Vatican that resulted in an interruption of Thérèse’s cause until the naming of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena as doctors of the church in 1970, the next significant date would seem to be 1973, the centenary of Thérèse’s birth when the question was stated anew.

Although we do not find evidence of an official petition in that year, we know that the possibility of Thérèse being named a doctor of the church was proposed by the Carmelites on subsequent occasions after 1973. There is also mention in the apostolic letter, that in the centenary year, another significant event occurred:

“Paul VI addressed a letter on Jan. 2, [Thérèse’s birth date] 1973, to the bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, in which he extolled Thérèse’s example in the search for God, offered her as a teacher of prayer and the theological virtue of hope, and a model of communion with the church, calling the attention of teachers, educators, pastors and theologians themselves to the study of her doctrine.”⁸⁵

It would seem reasonable to assume that Mgr. Garrone, who “stated the question anew” in 1973, was not only “encouraged by what[had] happened to the great St. Teresa and St. Catherine of Siena”⁸⁶, but was no doubt, greatly encouraged by Paul VI’s letter. Keeping in mind that it was this same pope who had proclaimed these first women saints as doctors of the church only three years earlier, perhaps there existed the hope that he might possibly do the same for Thérèse of Lisieux. Certainly, his letter on the centenary of her actual day of birth, can be seen to lend support to Thérèse’s cause. Since Paul VI died in 1978, it is a successor who eventually proclaims Thérèse a doctor of the church.

The next important event in a process that eventually culminated in the declaration of Thérèse as a doctor of the church, is the proposal by Cardinal Etchegaray. Although his petition was not presented in a year considered important as concerns the life of Thérèse (1981), previously we have seen that the cardinal may have presented the petition at this time for two reasons. He was a member of the French Episcopate and so was most likely already involved in the cause for Thérèse to be named a doctor of the church, and he had recently been named a cardinal in 1979, by John Paul II.

⁸⁵ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 394-395.

⁸⁶ Maccise, Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite Letter. 3.

What is perhaps most important in terms of interpretation of factors like the dates of petitions, the awareness within the church of these petitions, and the consequences, if any, that followed, is this observation: Until the *supplex libellus* or official petition in 1997, there is no evidence to suggest that the petitions or proposals, which as we have seen, first began to appear immediately after Thérèse's canonization in 1925, have received much of a response from the Vatican beyond an acknowledgement that they exist. One reason why the petitions may have received such little attention is the fact that the subject of doctors of the church in general has generated very little interest either within the church or within the realm of theological literature.

4.14 The Problem of Sources

If we examine sources with a view to surveying articles concerned with the subject of doctor of the church in a particular period, i.e. 1981-1997, the following information is highly significant. The Catholic Periodical Index reveals that articles appearing in Catholic periodicals or journals between 1992 and 1997 that include doctor of the church as subject, have been found in all cases to include the additional subject of Thérèse of Lisieux. Earlier in this thesis, I presented evidence that the subject of doctors of the church in general, appeared to have generated very little interest since no major works could be found prior to McGinn's 1999 publication. For this reason encyclopedias and dictionaries had been consulted in an effort to define the title itself. Certainly, any or all interest in the subject of the doctors of the church, can be seen to have coincided with the likelihood that Thérèse would be declared a doctor, as stated earlier. Continuing with information drawn from the Catholic Periodical Index, it is not surprising that in the fourteen-year period prior to 1992, (1977-1991) the subject of doctor of the church does not appear at all. The most obvious question in light of such information appears to be:

What happened in 1991 to generate interest in the subject of doctor of the church and Thérèse of Lisieux?

4.15 Steps Taken in Early 1990's

As seen previously, the 1981 “official” letter to John Paul II, sent by Cardinal Etchegaray does not appear to have received a response of any significance, since only one source acknowledges this letter.⁸⁷ From this same source however, we are informed that in 1991 the general chapters of the Teresian Carmel had sent a petition and in 1995 the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance had done the same. We should keep in mind that Cardinal Etchegaray’s 1981 petition “followed up” a petition from the Teresian Carmel. Although we do not know the date of this particular petition that was being followed up, we can assume that it was sent sometime after 1973, the centenary year of Thérèse’s birth, when the question of Thérèse becoming a doctor of the church was stated “anew”. Earlier, in the discussion of Yves Congar’s approval of Thérèse as a candidate for this distinction, we have seen that he had been approached by Bishop Guy Gauthier, who was “laying the groundwork for an informed position on her qualifications for the title of doctor”. These details were provided by an article published in 1992, one of the earliest on the subject of Thérèse and doctor of the church.

The question of what happened in 1991 to generate interest in the subject of Thérèse of Lisieux and doctor of the church, can be seen to have been answered in part, by the fact that a petition was made that year. However it is this same 1992 source, which also provides information regarding the sequence of events surrounding the petition. Here it is reported that the French Episcopal Conference had recently responded favourably to the following question: Should the French hierarchy ask Pope John Paul II

to declare St. Thérèse of Lisieux a doctor of the church? This would indicate that the “asking”, in this case on the part of the French Episcopal Conference, might have been the most important step leading to the official petition or *supplex libellus* in March, 1997. Although Episcopal conferences are mentioned on two occasions in the apostolic letter, there is no mention of the identity of these conferences.

4.16 The Events of 1997

Having seen earlier that particular petitions have been shown to coincide with important dates as concerns the life and death of Thérèse of Lisieux, there can be no surprise to the fact that the title of doctor of the church was conferred on this saint in the year of the centenary of her death. She had already been the recipient of many distinctions, i.e. saint, patron saint of France along with Joan of Arc, and co-patron of the missions with Francis Xavier. This additional title was then added to her distinctions to mark the occasion of one hundred years since the death of Thérèse. It would seem then, that the official request in March 1997, which we are told was accepted by the pope, initiated the final stage of a process, which led within five months to the announcement in August 1997, that John Paul II planned to name Thérèse a doctor of the church. In the apostolic letter there is mention of the fact that in recent years, the petitions for Thérèse’s cause had become more and more numerous. In addition, we find the Carmelite superiors referring to the task of being asked to prepare the *positio* in “the first months of 1997”, and that “the time allowed was limited.” Although these steps can be seen to precipitate the October 19, 1997 proclamation, it is important to keep in mind that John Paul II’s decision to name Thérèse a doctor did not, as we have seen, begin with this pontiff. McGinn has raised the question of John Paul II possibly initiating the cause but as we

⁸⁷ Maccise. Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite Letter.

have seen, this does not appear to be the case. As previously noted, a majority of sources refer to John Paul II's decision to confer the title, and so inadvertently, I believe, create the impression that the pope initiated the act himself. For those in the church unfamiliar with the process involved in such a declaration, it would appear that John Paul II, acting within his power of papal infallibility, simply decided that Thérèse of Lisieux warranted the title of doctor of the church and then made the proclamation. Given that there is much confusion surrounding the title itself, even among scholarly sources, a concern that ordinary Christians might misinterpret the role played by the pope, is in my view, a reasonable one.

Since the cause of Thérèse for doctor of the church was obviously a longstanding one by 1997, and therefore, we can assume, also well organized; it is most likely the case that the process of declaring Thérèse a doctor of the church, was simply "taken up again" during the centenary year and did not, as might be thought, represent a new cause. Considering that we have already seen how the naming of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena as doctors in 1970, removed the obstacle of *obstat sexus*, there appears to be no further opposition to Thérèse's cause until the actual proclamation itself. The timing of this event, however, might well be related to another important fact. Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, who we know sent a letter to John Paul II in 1981, requesting that Thérèse be named a doctor of the church, represented as we have seen, the French Episcopate, having become General Secretary of the French Bishops' Conference in 1966, and later having been elected President of the French Episcopal Conference. What is also important about this cardinal as concerns Thérèse, is the fact that in 1994, he was given the position of president of the Central Committee for the Jubilee of the Year 2000. In the apostolic letter, John Paul II mentions in the opening sentence of section twelve,

“This year, when the centenary of the glorious death of Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is being celebrated as we prepare to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.....”⁸⁸ As Cardinal Etchegaray had been president of the Jubilee committee since 1994 and because he was also a member of the French Episcopate, we see that his involvement in the cause of Thérèse as a doctor of the church was not limited to the official letter to John Paul II in 1981.

4.17 Official Positio: Presentation of Proof

Returning to McGinn’s claim that the Carmelite order, having “orchestrated” her rapid canonization process, must therefore have played a role in Thérèse becoming a doctor of the church; it would seem that the *positio*, consisting of nine hundred and sixty-five pages, is the major contribution of the Carmelite order, in addition to the earlier petitions and “official petition” of March 8, 1997. Although we know that the pope accepted this official petition, it is not clear whether it was the bishops of Bayeux and Lisieux or the Carmelite order who played the greater role in the presentation of the petition. We do know however, that Guy Gaucher, auxiliary bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux is himself a Discalced Carmelite.

The *positio* is very important. We know that the opinions of theologians were included in the *positio* before it was approved and that the theologians include five chosen by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and two chosen by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Their opinions appear as part of an appendix to the *positio*, where they are included with a selected bibliography and an iconographic appendix.

⁸⁸ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 395.

4.18 Comparison of Outlines: *Positio* and Apostolic Letter

We are told that the *positio* is divided into four parts and thirteen chapters. The apostolic letter is made up of twelve sections, which contain themes that are closely related to those outlined in the profile of the *positio*. Chapter one of the *positio* contains a brief history of the causes for the beatification and canonization of Thérèse of Lisieux. In the apostolic letter, the first section is an introduction to the theme of the knowledge of divine love, which includes several references to both Scripture and Conciliar documents. This is followed by a direct introduction of Thérèse as, “Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, a professed nun of the order of Discalced Carmelites, the 100th anniversary of whose entry into the heavenly homeland occurs this year.”⁸⁹ A paragraph is then devoted to three citations, one from each of Thérèse’s manuscripts: A, B, and C. This section can therefore be seen as an introduction and need not correspond to the *positio*.

The next section of the apostolic letter refers to the influence of Thérèse in “our century”, and can be seen to correspond to chapter one of the *positio*, i.e. the history of the causes for her canonization and beatification. Section three of the apostolic letter speaks of Thérèse’s doctrine in a general sense, referring to her “spiritual doctrine” especially as it is found in the autobiography, and so is similar to chapter seven of the *positio*. In section four of the apostolic letter, reference is made to the numerous petitions and publications, which prompted John Paul II to study carefully “whether the saint of Lisieux had the prerequisites for being awarded the title of doctor of the universal church.”⁹⁰ This section would appear to correspond to chapter two of the *positio*, which

⁸⁹ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 390.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 391.

is the “process for the doctorate.”⁹¹ A biography of Thérèse is contained in section five of the apostolic letter and chapter three of the *positio*. Section six is a complete presentation of her writings and would therefore compare to chapter six in the *positio*. A general view of Thérèse’s doctrine, which is chapter seven of the *positio* is also found in section seven of John Paul II’s letter. A synthesis of her theology, chapter eight of the *positio* is also section eight of the letter.

In addition to these common elements between the *positio* and the apostolic letter, the next sections are also the same, i.e. a study of the sources of her teachings, which represent section nine and chapter nine of the letter and *positio* respectively. We know that in the *positio*, “the impact of Thérèse of Lisieux is examined from three different perspectives: the acceptance and presentation of her doctrine by the magisterium of the church (ch. 10), its spread and influence (ch. 11), and finally the importance of her doctrine for the Church and world of today (ch. 12).”⁹² In the apostolic letter, however, this information is presented in two sections rather than three. Section ten contains both the acceptance and presentation of her doctrine by the church’s magisterium, and the spread and influence of such doctrine. Section eleven is then devoted to the importance of her doctrine for the Church and world of today. The apostolic letter ends with section twelve which includes a list of steps taken prior to John Paul II announcing his intention to declare Thérèse of Lisieux a doctor of the church. As we have seen, any reference to the Carmelite order in relation to the *positio* is not to be found. Rather, there is mention only of the meetings of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, in order “to examine the special *positio*.”⁹³ The final section of the apostolic letter also cites the pope’s own words from the eucharistic

⁹¹ Maccise. Camilo and Joseph Chalmers. Carmelite Letter. 3.

⁹² Ibid.

celebration of October 19, 1997, during which he proclaimed Thérèse a doctor of the church:

Fulfilling the wishes of many brothers in the episcopate and of a great number of the faithful throughout the world, after consulting the Congregation for Saints' Causes and hearing the opinion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding her eminent doctrine, with certain knowledge and after lengthy reflection, with the fullness of our apostolic authority we declare St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, virgin, to be a doctor of the universal church. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁴

4.19 Reference to Carmelite Order in the Apostolic letter

Here again there is found no specific mention of the Carmelite order and their preparation of the nine hundred and sixty-five page *positio*. One wonders about the reason for such an omission and it is McGinn's claim that the order "orchestrated Thérèse's rapid canonization process" and therefore must have played a role in her declaration as a doctor of the church, that becomes once again, an interesting claim. We have already considered the strong possibility that with evidence of such factors as Bishop Guy Gauthier being both the auxiliary bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux and a member of the Carmelite order, as well as the *positio* representing the major contribution of the Carmelites to Thérèse's cause for doctor, then it is most likely the case that the order played a significant role in the cause. In McGinn's sense that they earlier "orchestrated" Thérèse's cause for sainthood, it could possibly be said that by preparing the *positio* they "orchestrated" her cause for doctor of the church. Might John Paul II have possibly wished to minimize the role of the Carmelites in order that such a claim would not be made in this instance? If we examine that section of the apostolic letter, which details the beatification and canonization of Thérèse, no mention of the Carmelite

⁹³ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 395.

⁹⁴ Ibid.. 396.

order is found. What is found however, is a list of the various official acts as performed by the popes of the early twentieth century:

The reception given to the example of her life and Gospel teaching in our century was quick, universal and constant. As if in imitation of her precocious spiritual maturity, her holiness was recognized by the church in the space of a few years. In fact on June 10, 1914, Pius X signed the decree introducing her cause of beatification; on Aug. 14, 1921, Benedict XV declared the heroic virtues of the servant of God, giving an address for the occasion on the way of spiritual childhood; and Pius XI proclaimed her blessed on April 29, 1923. Shortly afterward, on May 17, 1925, the same pope canonized her before an immense crowd in St. Peter's Basilica, highlighting the splendor of her virtues and the originality of her doctrine. Two years later, on Dec. 14, 1927, in response to the petition of the many missionary bishops, he proclaimed her patron of the missions along with St. Francis Xavier.⁹⁵

Also, we know that neither the pope in his apostolic letter, nor McGinn in his work, present the fact that in 1932, Pius XI, who had already replied negatively to the Carmelites' petition to have Teresa of Avila declared doctor, did not accept a similar request for Thérèse of Lisieux. In fact, as we have seen, the gathering of signatures in favour of the cause of Thérèse of Lisieux, was interrupted "after the Vatican's negative response, and by its order".

John Paul II does not mention the issue of gender, a major impediment in 1932, in his 1997 apostolic letter. Pius XI, we remember, had responded to the petition with, "*Obstat sexus*" ("Her sex stands in the way"). Although it could be argued that with the 1970 naming of the first two women saints as doctors of the church, the issue of gender was forever eliminated, there remains, in my view, the problem of why these former candidates were eventually accepted. As we have seen, the absence or minimal treatment of the subject of the proclamations of the women doctors of the church in major biographies of Paul VI, who made the proclamations, have contributed to the problem. The defence of a woman as a doctor of the church, which would appear to be a defence of

any layperson, at least from the information provided by McGinn, has been the source of further confusion as previously noted. In addition, one is not sure whether *obstat sexus*, which is translated as “her sex stands in the way” is synonymous with concern for violating Paul’s precept in I Cor. 14:34, “Women are to remain quiet in the assemblies”.

The example of the *obstat sexus* is important for another reason also. Having considered that the Carmelite order appears to have played a significant role in the process by which Thérèse of Lisieux eventually came to be declared a doctor of the church, the absence of such information in the apostolic letter is noteworthy. In much the same way that it is difficult to find evidence of detailed information on how the *obstat sexus* was resolved in 1970, the details surrounding the extent to which the Carmelites were involved in the case of Thérèse of Lisieux becoming a doctor of the church in 1997, are absent from the apostolic letter. It does not appear likely, in view of the omission of the exact role played by the Carmelite order, that John Paul II in 1997, wished to include any information regarding the Carmelites’ involvement in the process of Thérèse becoming a doctor of the church, other than their part in forwarding the official petition.

4.20 Conclusion of Part II

We have now examined the official steps that preceded the declaration of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church on October 19, 1997, and we have studied particular sections of John Paul II’s apostolic letter written for this occasion. The paper trail of Thérèse’s cause has consisted of the pastoral letter to the Carmelites, which provides information regarding details of the *positio*, and the apostolic letter which outlines how Thérèse’s case proceeded following the petitions. In addition, the final steps of the process that culminated in the declaration of Thérèse as a doctor of the church, are found

⁹⁵ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 395.

exclusively in the apostolic letter. In terms of John Paul II's involvement in the process, it is most likely the case that he simply rubber-stamped what had already been approved by the Congregations. His public acts in relation to the final steps at the end of 1997, include his announcement at World Youth Day that he intended to name Thérèse a doctor of the church, his homily at the Eucharistic celebration of October 19 when he officially made the proclamation, and the apostolic letter written for this occasion. The apostolic letter has been compared to the outline of the *positio* as provided by the pastoral letter to the Carmelites, and the outlines of these documents are found to be almost identical. The number of sections and the themes contained in the sections are closely related. The apostolic letter could be said to follow the outline of the *positio*. Regarding the contribution or "orchestration" of Thérèse's case by the Carmelite order, their role was certainly a major one as evidenced by the petitions in the immediate years preceding the declaration. Their preparation of the nine hundred and sixty-five page *positio* in early 1997 reveals not only the extent of the contribution of the Carmelites but also the importance of the *positio* itself.

In this chapter the focus has been on details, official documents, i.e. a paper trail. In an effort to trace the steps of the process by which Thérèse became a doctor of the church it has been necessary to examine the details. We turn now to the themes that are emphasized in particular documents. Sources include not only official documents of the Church, but articles devoted to her cause prior to the proclamation, as well as McGinn's work, and of course, Thérèse's own writings.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTEMPORARY THEMES IN THE LIFE AND DOCTRINE OF THÉRÈSE

5.1 Introduction

In the years immediately preceding the declaration of Thérèse as a doctor of the church, numerous articles appeared that clearly supported her cause. In North America, the auxiliary bishop of New York, Patrick Ahern, presented a case for Thérèse that explored those aspects of her life and writings that he considered most significant for our time. Vatican II themes of ecumenism, scripture, and holiness were examined, each in terms of a particular link to Thérèse, with the focus of the paper being the notion of Thérèse as contemporary model.⁹⁶ In this chapter the themes of ecumenism and scripture are presented through Ahern's article; the theme of holiness includes McGinn's work. An additional theme, that of Thérèse's suffering, though not important for the present paper, and generally absent from the apostolic letter, is treated in this chapter because of the link between this theme and Ahern's theme of ecumenism.

5.2 Ahern's Theme of Ecumenism

Ahern discusses the ecumenical movement with reference to Thérèse as doctor of the church. He states that as a doctor of the church, she would "stand in the forefront of the ecumenical movement."⁹⁷ He also considers Thérèse's potential for relationship with the following three groups to be important: Protestant brothers and sisters, non-Christian believers, and atheists. With regard to Protestants, Ahern states that there is common ground between the teachings of Thérèse and those of Martin Luther on the subject of faith and works. Although Ahern insists that they are not identical, he considers them to

⁹⁶ Patrick V. Ahern, "Thérèse, Doctor of the Church" *Origins* 27 no. 12 (Sept. 4, 1997): 193-195.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

be “close enough to make for fruitful dialogue”⁹⁸. With regard to non-Christian believers Ahern makes only one statement: that Thérèse would “surely be a lively participant”⁹⁹ in conversations with them. Regarding atheists, however, he devotes a full paragraph to the subject, relating how she shared their experience through the trial of faith that she endured at the end of her life.

The theme of ecumenism, though easily understood from the perspective of the example of Luther and Thérèse, and also from Ahern’s image of her conversations with non-Christian believers, does not as easily extend, in my view, to the case of the atheist. In this instance, Thérèse hopes for their conversion as we are also told that, “.... she simply prayed for them with all her heart, and in the terrible darkness of her night of faith she offered her anguish to God in their behalf.”¹⁰⁰ It is unclear why Ahern chooses to include atheist or non-believer in this section entitled, “Thérèse and the Ecumenical Movement” since it would appear that evangelization might be a more appropriate term, given that Thérèse chooses to pray for this group of people. What is interesting, however, is the notion of offering her anguish.

5.3 The Theme of Suffering

This theme of suffering for others, highly evident in Thérèse’s writings, is most surprisingly, barely touched upon in the apostolic letter of John Paul II on the occasion of naming Thérèse a doctor of the church. For the “ordinary” Christian though, it is precisely this theme that is often associated with Thérèse the saint, and is the source, therefore, of a misunderstanding of Thérèse as a model. It is in fact, her seemingly excessive preoccupation with suffering, usually her own, that can be seen as not unlike

⁹⁸ Patrick V. Ahern. “Thérèse. Doctor of the Church” *Origins* 27 no. 12 (Sept. 4, 1997): 194.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

her excessive use of the word “little” as mentioned earlier. For this reason, a focus on the theme of suffering without an adequate understanding of other important themes in her life and writings may diminish the significance of Thérèse’s outstanding contribution to the life of the contemporary church.¹⁰¹ In other words, the theme of suffering in her writings can be seen as a possible obstacle to understanding that this individual is a model for post-Vatican II, contemporary Christianity and I have chosen not to focus on a discussion of the theme of suffering in the life and writings of Thérèse of Lisieux. In my view, since there is minimal mention of it in the apostolic letter, and because the subject is beyond the scope of the present inquiry, I have not considered it necessary to include the theme here. Focusing on that model of Thérèse as a doctor of the church eliminates any need to expound on this theme, since as already noted, there is little mention of Thérèse’s interpretation of suffering to be found in the apostolic letter. In fact, the following references are singular remarks and represent the only mention of the theme of suffering in John Paul II’s proclamation of this saint as a doctor of the church.

The first one is found in section five of the letter, a biography of Thérèse: “Her sisters and other religious collect her sayings, while her sufferings and trials, borne with patience intensify to the moment of her death on the afternoon of September 30, 1897.”¹⁰² As is readily seen, there is no mention here of either the purpose of suffering in a general theological sense or what meaning may be attributed to it in terms of Thérèse’s experience. In this same section is also found reference to Thérèse’s experience of “offering herself as a sacrificial victim” but there is no commentary in the apostolic letter regarding the significance of such an offering. This event in Thérèse’s life is simply related in the following:

¹⁰¹ The theme of suffering though highly evident in Thérèse’s writings is not treated in the present paper.

¹⁰² John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 392.

On June 9, 1895, the feast of the most Holy Trinity, she [Thérèse] offers herself as a sacrificial victim to the merciful love of God. On April 3 of the following year on the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, she notices the first symptoms of the illness which will lead to her death. Thérèse welcomes it as a mysterious visitation of the divine spouse. At the same time she undergoes a trial of faith which will last until her death.¹⁰³

In the third instance, from section six devoted to Thérèse's writings, we find further mention of this trial of faith. "She devotes moving pages [in Manuscript C] to her trial of faith¹⁰⁴: a grace and purification that immerses her in a long and painful dark night, illumined by her trust in the merciful, fatherly love of God."¹⁰⁵ Although it could be argued that the use of the term "grace of purification" to describe the trial of faith, points to an interpretation, it is more important in my view, to focus on how in this instance, Thérèse is an eminent model and prominent teacher of the faith. The apostolic letter continues:

Once again and without repeating herself, Thérèse makes the light of the Gospel shine brightly. Here we find the most beautiful pages she devoted to trusting abandonment into God's hands, to unity between love of God and love of neighbour, to her missionary vocation in the church.¹⁰⁶

And finally, found within section eight, on Thérèse's doctrine, we find the words: "She [Thérèse] penetrated the mysteries of his [Christ's] infancy, the words of his Gospel, the passion of the suffering servant engraved on his holy face, in the splendour of his glorious life, in his eucharistic presence."¹⁰⁷ Again there is no evidence of any attempt on the part of the writer of the apostolic letter to provide more insight into the nature of Thérèse's "penetration of the mysteries" concerning the passion of the suffering

¹⁰³ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter, 392.

¹⁰⁴ The trial of faith that Thérèse experienced for the last eighteen months of her life will not be treated here although this subject, like the theme of her suffering in general is central to her spirituality. My reason for the exclusion is the absence of such themes in the apostolic letter.

¹⁰⁵ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter, 392.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

servant.

5.4 Ahern's Theme of Scripture

In the section on Thérèse and the bible, Ahern acknowledges that reading the scriptures was uncommon in her day but that Thérèse read both the Old and the New Testaments, and especially Paul's letters. In the letter to the Romans which she read many times, she saw a confirmation of her understanding of the faith and works relationship and in Second Corinthians, Thérèse discovered her vocation to be love at the centre of the church. Ahern also reminds us that towards the end of her life, it was only the gospels that interested her. This significant use of biblical sources by Thérèse is considered to be in line with what Ahern calls, "The Council's new stress on the importance of God's word in Scripture."¹⁰⁸ This theme will be developed in greater detail in Chapter Seven when we examine a section of the apostolic letter devoted to a presentation of the sources of Thérèse's spiritual experience and teaching.

5.5 The Theme of Holiness and Thérèse's Role in the Church

It is another conciliar theme, however, that of the universal call to holiness, which Ahern considers to best exemplify the notion of Thérèse as a model for the contemporary Christian. Her personal response to the call to love God teaches that ordinary people have the potential to lead lives of holiness. Ahern makes a very important statement regarding why she is worthy of the status of doctor of the church: "We need to hear the church's universal call to holiness not from an institution but from a person, from one who lived God's love to a degree unheard of in our modern world."¹⁰⁹

Earlier we have seen that one of the important factors associated with the naming

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 394.

¹⁰⁸ Ahern, "Thérèse, Doctor of the Church," 195.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

of an individual as a doctor of the church, is consideration of that person as a recipient of special graces for the good of the church. In McGinn's account of the proclamation of Thérèse as a doctor of the church, her influence in the church is revealed: "The crowds that gathered in Rome to participate in this event demonstrated the importance of Thérèse in contemporary Catholicism."¹¹⁰ McGinn also makes a strong statement about the rise of her cult and rapid canonization being based on texts that had been significantly altered.¹¹¹ However, though acknowledging the issue of altered texts, he states, "...this really has made little difference to the impact that she [Thérèse] has had and continues to have on twentieth-century Catholicism."¹¹² McGinn's presentation of Thérèse's role in the church is also seen in the following claim concerning her contributions:

... The deep wisdom found in the Carmelite's writings has been a major resource for Catholicism over the past century, and not just for what is too easily dismissed as 'popular' piety... Thérèse's particular expression of the gospel, though couched in the language and images of a piety that often sounds dated today, in its essence is faithful to the foundational meaning of Christianity at the same time that it is startlingly contemporary in its directness and simplicity.¹¹³

On holiness, he makes the following observation about Thérèse as a doctor of the church:

The paradoxes of holiness have rarely been better illustrated than in the case of the shy but totally confident young nun who dedicated herself to God. Her purity

¹¹⁰ McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, xii.

¹¹¹ The issue of the alteration of texts is noted in the introduction of *Story of a Soul*, Third Edition. Translated from the original manuscripts by John Clarke, O.C.D. The author here states that the September 30, 1898 publication of Thérèse's autobiography which represented the first publication, "read beautifully because of Mother Agnes's [Thérèse's older sister Pauline Martin] masterly work of editing. It also appeared as a composite whole that contained the intimate outpourings of Sister Thérèse's soul to her Mother Prioress, Marie de Gonzague. The subsequent editions retained this format until the Diocesan Process held in 1910. The judges on this tribunal, on hearing about Mother Marie's directive [that before the first publication of *The Story of a Soul* she agreed to give permission for the publication on the condition that all three manuscripts must be rearranged in such a way as to seem to be addressed to herself], insisted that all future editions of *Histoire d'une Âme* indicate clearly the individual direction of each of the manuscripts, namely, to Mother Agnes of Jesus, to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart [Thérèse's older sister Marie Martin], and finally to Mother Marie de Gonzague. This was done with the 1914 editions. As the fame of St. Thérèse of Lisieux grew and special studies of her works were undertaken, it was only natural that theologians would be satisfied only with her original, unedited manuscripts. Requests were made for their publication. Permission was finally granted by the Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux in August 1947."

P., xix

¹¹² Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 170.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 171.

of intention seems to prove that the modern era, with all its fractions and distractions, is not inferior to ancient or medieval Christianity in being able to provide models of a self-effacement that is as total as it is inspirational. Thérèse the enclosed contemplative became Thérèse the patroness of missions. Thérèse the “Little Flower”, whose writings were altered by her own sister, Mother Agnes, to conform to the standards of nineteenth-century bourgeois piety, is revealed in her unexpurgated texts as a far deeper and stronger figure...And now Thérèse the simple young girl who had never had formal theological training becomes Thérèse the doctor of the church.¹¹⁴

5.6 Conclusion

Thérèse is a role model for the contemporary Christian. Through the Conciliar themes of ecumenism, scripture and holiness, this saint, now doctor, offers an example of how to develop such themes in one’s own life. Through her exceptional witness, by simply living her life in ways that reflect themes of the Second Vatican Council, her mission in the church is obvious. As Ahern says, “We need to hear the church’s universal call to holiness not from an institution but from a person, from one who lived God’s love to a degree unheard of in our modern world.”¹¹⁵ Thérèse is precisely this person and in the next chapter we will continue the theme of her exceptional witness and focus on the “new” model of doctor of the church.

¹¹⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 170.

CHAPTER SIX

THE “NEW” MODEL OF THÉRÈSE AS A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the idea that Thérèse represents a new model of the office of doctor of the church is presented. The official statements on Thérèse’s contributions to the church are highlighted with a focus on the implications of emphasizing the notion of “little.” The examples of Thérèse’s wisdom as cited by the apostolic letter are raised as evidence of the deep wisdom found in this doctor’s writings and are offered as important aspects of why Thérèse has received the title of doctor of the church. The special charism of wisdom and of teaching that is common to the doctors of the church is explained.

6.2 Traditional Understanding versus New Model of “Doctor of the Church”

Keeping in mind that Thérèse is the only doctor of the church to have been named during the pontificate of John Paul II, and that she represents only the third woman to have received such a distinction, this notion of a new model of doctor of the church is certainly relevant. In Chapter Two we saw that the issue of opposition to John Paul II’s 1997 declaration, resulted from an interpretation of doctor of the church that insisted on fixed categories. At the time, theologians contended that the traditional understanding of a doctor of the church was “someone who advanced theological science or clarified a point of faith in an outstanding way.”¹¹⁵ It was pointed out however, that “the pope had some very pastoral reasons for naming St. Thérèse a doctor...the pope’s choice confirms

¹¹⁵ Ahern. “Thérèse: Doctor of the Church”, 195.

¹¹⁶ This report appeared as a commentary to the text of the apostolic letter of John Paul II. “Apostolic Letter: St. Thérèse. Doctor of the Church.” *Origins* 27 no. 23: (November 20, 1997). 390.

that theology is at the service of faith, and St. Thérèse with her “little way” advanced the faith and spirituality of the church.”¹¹⁷

McGinn also, makes several observations regarding the choice of Thérèse as the latest doctor and emphasizes the implications of such a choice. The fact that there is a novel quality to Thérèse as doctor, is expressed by McGinn in the following:

Thérèse of Lisieux, even more than the two female doctors declared in 1970, represents a new model of the ancient and still-developing office of *doctor ecclesiae*. It is not so much that Thérèse is a woman, but rather that her form of teaching explodes the traditional categories of “doctoral” status even more than Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena. The Little Flower’s “Little Way”, even when shorn of the accretions foisted on it by her managers in life and in death, deliberately eschews traditional theological categories and the usual forms of theological analysis.¹¹⁸

Regarding the accretions, it is important to point out that in 1947 permission was given by the bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux to publish original, unedited manuscripts, as there was a demand for these from theologians.¹¹⁹ They were not published however, until 1957. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, noted Swiss theologian and deceased cardinal, is quoted by McGinn as saying of Thérèse, “She penetrates straight through all triviality and counterfeit to the simple, naked truth of the gospel.”¹²⁰ What is interesting with respect to Von Balthasar, is that this theologian published at least two works on Thérèse before the publication of the original, unedited texts. In a later edition of one of these works, reference is made to the subject of texts in a footnote at the end of the introduction. In it, the author acknowledges having had to utilize, in 1950, the earlier editions of *Story of a Soul*. He then refers to the 1956 critical edition which he says, “brought an end to the

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 171.

¹¹⁹ John Clarke O.C.D. writes in the introduction to his translation of Thérèse’s autobiography that “As the fame of St. Thérèse of Lisieux grew and special studies of her works were undertaken, it was only natural that theologians would be satisfied only with her original, unedited manuscripts.

painful uncertainty about the main texts... In this new edition of my book, all quotations from the autobiographical texts, insofar as they appeared there, were rewritten to correspond to the authentic original text.”¹²¹

A second statement by McGinn on the uniqueness of Thérèse of Lisieux in comparison to other doctors of the church concerns her teaching:

... we can note one other characteristic of Thérèse’s teaching that makes it unusual among the doctors of the church: its lack of polemics. The doctors of the church have always been concerned with correct, or orthodox, teaching, and Thérèse is no exception. However, unlike almost all of the previous doctors, controversy and attacks on error and heterodoxy have no place in her writings. Thérèse of Lisieux operates outside this framework.¹²²

Finally, it is McGinn’s claim that “When John Paul II recognized her [Thérèse] as *doctor ecclesiae* a new chapter began in the long history of the *doctores ecclesiae*,”¹²³ that we find further evidence of the fact that the proclamation in 1997, represented what appears to have been a change, or at least a new understanding of what it means to be a doctor of the church. This last statement of McGinn is perhaps the most significant of these observations, since the “long history of the *doctores ecclesiae*”, is indeed a history that has been shown, at least from the perspective of trying to define the title itself, as the source of much confusion. The area of what we have called the “other” condition of being named a doctor of the church, beyond sanctity and proclamation by a pope or general council, has been known by several terms and has often appeared to be open to interpretation. Such terms as eminent learning, eminence in theology, unusual intellectual distinction, orthodoxy, learning, eminent scholarship, someone who advanced theological science, or someone who clarified a point of faith in an outstanding way, have

¹²⁰ Cited by McGinn. *The Doctors of the Church*. 171.

¹²¹ Hans Urs Von Balthasar. *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux & Elizabeth of the Trinity* (Nsan Francisco: Ignatius Press. 1992). 40.

¹²² McGinn. *The Doctors of the Church*, 172.

all been used by various sources to refer to the “other” condition for being named a doctor of the church. In addition, although the 1932 recommendation that Thérèse be declared a doctor of the church was refused because of *obstat sexus*, in 1997 the controversy concerned this “other” condition rather than her gender. Thérèse was deemed to be lacking in the area of the “other” condition according to “some theologians.”

McGinn’s sense of a new chapter in a long history is enlightening. Thérèse does not have to fit a traditional understanding of doctor of the church, in whatever way one may choose to interpret this understanding, because something new is beginning. For McGinn, it is not only a new chapter but also a “new model of the ancient and still-developing office.”

6.3 Thérèse’s Particular Contribution to the Church

Having previously examined the process by which Thérèse became a doctor of the church and considered some of the reasons why this particular saint is deemed worthy of such a distinction, we must now examine more closely Thérèse’s particular contribution in addition to the Conciliar themes. Certainly there is evidence of Thérèse’s “little way” being synonymous with her spirituality and important to her cause, but to this point the doctrinal value of her teaching has not been presented in detail. We know that McGinn praises Thérèse for her example as a model of total self-effacement, and he considers the deep wisdom found in her writings to have been a major resource for Catholicism during the twentieth century. However, one must ask: What is most important about Thérèse that allows this saint to be one of only thirty-three select individuals who have surpassed the category of saint and become doctors of the church?

¹²³ Ibid., 170.

It would seem that the “little way” is the most obvious answer, but one must be cautious about reducing Thérèse to any explanation that may inhibit further exploration. It seems possible to state that there is no definitive answer to “what is most important about Thérèse” that can be articulated. In spite of Thérèse’s own image of “little”, it is more likely the case that she is big, in fact, too big or too multifaceted, to be reduced to a simple explanation. If the *positio*, which is a presentation of her suitability to be declared a doctor of the church consists of nine hundred and sixty-five pages, and if to date, more than nine hundred books have been written about this individual, then any attempt to define Thérèse’s unique contribution to the life of the church, in a succinct fashion, is in my view, an impossibility. Is the “little way” the only example of Thérèse’s contribution that is notable? It would seem that the declaration of Thérèse as a doctor of the church is an opportunity to discover or rediscover, what designates this saint as worthy of the distinction.

6.4 Thérèse’s Contribution as seen through the Official Statements of 1997

We turn now to those sources which represent the official statements on Thérèse as a doctor of the church. These include the announcement on August 24, 1997 that John Paul II intended to proclaim Thérèse a doctor, the homily of October 1, 1997 when she was officially given the title, and the apostolic letter written for that occasion. The announcement in August took place during World Youth Day in Paris, where thousands had gathered. After the concluding Mass, the pope stated that he intended to declare Thérèse a doctor of the church. As reported in *Origins*:

‘Thérèse’s teaching, a true science of love, is the luminous expression of her knowledge of the mystery of Christ and of her personal experience of grace’, the pope said. He announced that he would make the formal proclamation at the

Vatican Oct. 19, World Mission Sunday.¹²⁴

These words of John Paul II can be seen as almost identical to those used in the opening section of the apostolic letter:

During her life Thérèse discovered ‘new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings’ (Ms. A. 83v^o) and received from the divine teacher that ‘knowledge of love’ which she then expressed with particular originality in her writings (cf. Ms. B, 1r^o). *This knowledge is the luminous expression of her understanding of the mystery of the kingdom and of her personal experience of grace.* It can be considered a special charism of Gospel wisdom which Thérèse, like other saints and teachers of faith, attained in prayer (cf. Ms C, 36r^o).¹²⁵

Mystery of Christ in the August announcement and *mystery of the kingdom*

in the apostolic letter appear to be the only difference between the two claims about Thérèse’s teaching. In the homily of October 1st, there is not found a similar statement. The homily does mention certain aspects of the apostolic letter however, and these are related specifically to Thérèse’s doctrine. The pope acknowledges that in the apostolic letter he “stressed several salient aspects of her doctrine”¹²⁶ and then goes on to relate what he calls her “account of the moving discovery of her special vocation in the church”¹²⁷. He quotes directly from Thérèse’s writing:

“Charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the church had a heart and that this heart was burning with love. I understood that it was love alone that made the church’s members act, that if love were ever extinguished apostles would not proclaim the Gospel and martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I understood that love includes all vocations... Then in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: ‘O Jesus, my love...at last I have found my vocation, my vocation is love!’¹²⁸

Following this quotation John Paul II notes that “This is a wonderful passage

¹²⁴ John Paul II/World Youth Day. “Do You Know What Baptism Does to You?” *Origins* 27 no. 2 (September 4, 1997): 188.

¹²⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter. 390-391.

¹²⁶ John Paul II, The Homily. 351.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

which suffices itself to show that one can apply to St. Thérèse the Gospel passage we heard in the Liturgy of the Word: ‘I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes’ (Mt. 11:25).”¹²⁹ This passage is also included in the opening words of the Apostolic Letter:

The knowledge of divine love, which the Father of mercies pours out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, is a gift granted to the little and the humble so that they may know and proclaim the secrets of the kingdom hidden from the learned and the wise; for this reason Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, praising the Father who graciously willed it so (cf. Lk. 10:21-22, Mt. 11:25-26).¹³⁰

6.5 Theme of “little” in Official Statements and in Thérèse’s Writings The Use of Matthew 11:25

Although the theme of “little” is prevalent throughout Thérèse’s writings, it is important to keep in mind that for an understanding of Thérèse as a model for contemporary Christians, this theme is detrimental to an understanding of Thérèse as a doctor of the church. In the same way that “a nice little saint with roses” as seen earlier, does not allow for the depth of her wisdom, as found in her writings, so too one must understand that an association of little with regard to Thérèse as doctor of the church may diminish her authority as an eminent model for the contemporary church. Having acknowledged this risk however, there remains the fact that the scriptural passage used by John Paul II on two occasions in the homily, was also used by Thérèse herself, on three occasions in her autobiography. Her own use of the citation offers the reader some insight into her spirituality, which does not appear in the words of John Paul II when citing the same quotation. Keeping in mind that according to the apostolic letter, “Her writings contain over 1,000 biblical quotations: more than 400 from the Old Testament

¹²⁹ Ibid.

and over 600 from the New”,¹³¹ Thérèse cites the passage from Matthew in the following ways:

In Manuscript A which is directed to the Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus, who is also Thérèse’s older sister Pauline Martin, the quotation appears within a discussion of Jesus as her spiritual director:

The way I was walking was so straight, so clear, I needed no other guide but Jesus. I compared directors to faithful mirrors, reflecting Jesus in souls, and I said that for me God was using no intermediary, He was acting directly!
When a gardener carefully tends a fruit he wants to ripen before its time, it’s not to leave it hanging on a tree but to set it on his table. It was with such an intention that Jesus showered His graces so lavishly upon His little flower, He, who cried out in His mortal life: *“I thank thee, Father, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and the prudent and revealed them to babes”*, willed to have His mercy shine out in me. Because I was little and weak He lowered Himself to me, and He instructed me secretly in the *things* of His love. Ah! Had the learned who spent their life in study come to me, undoubtedly they would have been astonished to see a child of fourteen understand perfection’s secrets, secrets all their knowledge cannot reveal because to possess them one has to be poor in spirit!¹³²

Thérèse, in these words reveals not her “littleness” it would seem, but rather her profound trust that Jesus was acting directly in her life. It is also evidence of a humility, that while acknowledging that she is weak, Thérèse does not hesitate to assert that the “child of fourteen” understands the secrets because she is poor in spirit. She then goes on to quote John of the Cross, a Carmelite and doctor of the church, who, though he lived in the sixteenth century, was not named a doctor of the church until 1926. It is also worth mentioning that this saint and doctor was the subject of John Paul II’s own doctoral dissertation in 1948, entitled, “Questions of Faith in St. John of the Cross”. This fact is particularly important, in my view, because there can be found themes common to both Thérèse and John of the Cross, as seen through a brief

¹³⁰ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 390.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 394.

¹³² John Clarke, O.C.D., *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux* (Washington: ICS Publications. 1975. Third edition 1996) 105.

commentary of the pope's conclusions in the dissertation. In a biography of the pope, the following details appear:

"He [John Paul II] concludes that John of the Cross, "has shown that contemplation and prayer, as 'a mystical experience,' lead to true faith and 'inner union with God'. But Wojtyla [John Paul II] remarks that faith alone is not sufficient to achieve 'a psychological union of the intellect with God.' Because it must be faith nourished by love and illuminated by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially of wisdom and reason."¹³³

The gift of wisdom is a central theme in the apostolic letter, and will be taken up in the next chapter. As we now continue a survey of the use of Matthew 11:25 in Thérèse's autobiography, we find that in the next example, also found in Manuscript A, Thérèse again is speaking of Jesus as her spiritual director. This time however, she appears to be noting the loss of a director previously assigned to her who had been sent to Canada to preach. She remarks:

I have said that Jesus was "my Director." Upon entering Carmel, I met one who was to serve me in this capacity, but hardly had I been numbered among his children when he left for exile. Thus I came to know him only to be deprived of him. Reduced to receiving one letter a year from him to my twelve, my heart quickly turned to the Director of directors, and it was He who taught me that science hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to *little ones*.¹³⁴

In this instance Thérèse has found comfort in turning to Jesus as the "Director of directors", out of her disappointment with the spiritual director who has not reciprocated her generous gesture of writing twelve letters a year. We see too that the "science hidden from the wise and prudent", although mentioned in two other places in the autobiography, would appear in this case to represent both the content of what she was taught and the insight of turning to the "Director of directors". Thérèse describes this insight as, "My heart quickly turned."

Finally, in the last citation of Matthew 11:25, found in Manuscript C and

addressed to Mother Marie de Gonzague the Prioress, Thérèse is writing about her helping the Prioress with the training of novices. It is important to keep in mind that this last manuscript was written between June 3, 1897 when the Prioress ordered Thérèse to continue her autobiography and July 8, of the same year, when she was taken to the infirmary of the convent, unable to complete the manuscript because of her weakness; She would die on September 30. In this excerpt, referring to the training of the novices, Thérèse has just commented that, “Your desire, I know, is that I carry out at your side a very sweet and easy mission, but shall I not be able to finish it from the heights of heaven?”¹³⁵ Obviously, Thérèse is aware as she is writing that her health is very poor and that she most likely will not recover from the tuberculosis. She says of her task:

You didn’t fear, dear Mother, that I would lead your little lambs astray. My lack of experience and my youthfulness did not frighten you in the least. Perhaps you remembered that often the Lord is pleased to grant wisdom to the little ones, and that one day, in a transport of joy, He blessed His *Father* for having hidden His secrets from the wise and prudent and for revealing them to the *little ones*.¹³⁶

Following these words Thérèse refers to the prioress telling her that “God was enlightening my soul and that he was giving me even the experience of years.”¹³⁷ About this comment by the prioress, Thérèse then offers a response, which can perhaps be seen as the result in part, of a natural physical weakness due to her illness. She says:

O Mother! I am *too little* to have any vanity now, I am *too little* to compose beautiful sentences in order to have you believe that I have a lot of humility. 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 her *littleness*, her impotence. [italics included in original text]¹³⁸

The above excerpt from Thérèse’s autobiography offers a very good example of

¹³³ Tad Szulc. *Pope John Paul II: The Biography* (New York: Pocket Books. 1995) . 161.

¹³⁴ John Clarke. *The Story of a Soul*, 151.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 209.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

her use of “little”. It is not difficult to see here how frequent this theme appears even within a short text. The use of Matthew 11:25 in the autobiography and the use of this same passage in the apostolic letter differs however. Having seen that the passage is used within the opening sentence of John Paul II’s apostolic letter, it is obvious that the notion of Thérèse as one of “the little and the humble”, is a major theme in the declaration of Thérèse as a doctor of the church. But there is evidence of a more authentic kind of humility in Thérèse’s own words. In the example of her response to the prioress, we hear her say, “...I am *too little* to compose beautiful sentences in order to have you believe that I have a lot of humility.”¹³⁹ Is this not an example of the purest type of humility? The combinations of “the little and the humble” and “the learned and the wise” as found in the passage from Matthew, must now be examined from another perspective, that of the place of wisdom with respect to the latest doctor of the church.

In a previous chapter when the problem of defining a doctor of the church was raised, the conditions necessary for designation as a doctor included one that pertained to learning. Having seen that a multiplicity of terms could be used to describe this condition or third requirement of a doctor of the church, beyond that of sanctity and proclamation by a pope or ecumenical council, it is interesting to note that in the opening sentence, John Paul II uses Matthew 11:25 as we have seen, to introduce the newest member of the select group of saints known as the doctors. Rather than an introduction of particular aspects of the wisdom of Thérèse, as found in later parts of the letter, we see no evidence of this theme at the outset. In addition, the pope soon goes on to say in this first section:

Shining brightly among the little ones to whom the secrets of the kingdom were revealed in a most special way is Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, a

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ John Clarke. *The Story of a Soul*. 210.

professed nun of the order of Discalced Carmelites, the 100th anniversary of whose entry into the heavenly homeland occurs this year.¹⁴⁰

This designation of Thérèse as “shining brightly among the little ones” is another example of the use of “little” which diminishes the integrity of Thérèse the doctor of the church. It can be seen to reduce the authority of the title, in much the same way that “a nice little saint with roses” reduced her status as saint.

6.6 The Wisdom of Thérèse

In the apostolic letter, it is not until the end of section three, that a more appropriate reference to Thérèse, one more in keeping with the importance of being proclaimed a doctor of the church appears. “A century after her death, Thérèse of the Child Jesus continues to be recognized as one of the great masters of the spiritual life in our time.”¹⁴¹ Following this statement, the apostolic letter states, “It is not surprising then that the Apostolic See received many petitions to confer on her the title of *doctor of the universal church*.”¹⁴²

Later in section six of the letter, devoted to a presentation of Thérèse’s writings, her works are introduced with the following: “Thérèse of the Child Jesus left us writings that deservedly qualify her as a teacher of the spiritual life”.¹⁴³ And within this same section, when referring to Manuscript C, which as we have already seen, was written during the final months of her life, the apostolic letter claims, “These pages reveal the author’s supernatural wisdom”.¹⁴⁴ The last part of this same section on the writings also includes another reference to Thérèse’s wisdom; this time it is the wisdom found in the collection of her letters. “Thérèse shares her wisdom, developing a teaching that is

¹⁴⁰ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 390.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 391.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 392.

actually a profound exercise in the spiritual direction of souls.”¹⁴⁵ In section seven which deals with her doctrine, especially with regard to her being named a doctor of the church, the issue of “eminent doctrine” appears and the letter states that “...salient aspects can be noted of her ‘eminent doctrine,’ which is the fundamental element for conferring the title of doctor of the church.”¹⁴⁶ This statement is immediately followed by the words, “First of all, we find a special charism of wisdom.”¹⁴⁷

Another important reference to wisdom is the statement that “...the church’s magisterium has not only recognized Thérèse’s holiness but has also highlighted the wisdom of her doctrine.”¹⁴⁸ This follows the claim that it is unnecessary to “dwell at length” on certain facts related to doctrine and the reception of it, since this had all been done and was documented in studies related to Thérèse becoming a doctor of the church. So Thérèse, we are told in the apostolic letter, is wise; her wisdom is supernatural. And John Paul II quotes Paul VI’s words on Catherine of Siena, to describe Thérèse’s wisdom. Referring to this other doctor of the church, named in 1970, we find an explanation of the place of “charism of wisdom”:

What strikes us most about the saint (Catherine of Siena) is her infused wisdom, that is to say, her lucid, profound and inebriating absorption of the divine truths and mysteries of faith... That assimilation was certainly favoured by the most singular natural gifts, but it was also evidently something prodigious, due to a charism of wisdom from the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁹

Earlier in the letter we have seen that the charism of wisdom in Thérèse’s writings has also been acknowledged. Many times we have seen reference to the charism of wisdom that is found in the doctors of the church. McGinn considers that the wide variety in

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 390.

¹⁴⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter. 393.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 394.

which the doctors realize the unity between love and knowledge is evidence of the fact that the charism of teaching from the Holy Spirit is diverse. There is not a single model that defines it. McGinn also points out that this charism of teaching is not the same as that of the teaching role of the bishops. And by the naming of women as doctors of the church, it is shown that the teaching of the doctors is independent of ordination. This is particularly important since as McGinn points out, these women are officially laypersons. The teaching is recognized not as coming from ecclesiastical authority but from within, as the gift of the Holy Spirit. When Paul VI proclaimed Teresa of Avila a doctor of the church in 1970, he referred in his homily to having “recognized the title doctor of the church for Saint Teresa of Jesus.”¹⁵⁰ With regard to the particular charisms of the Holy Spirit, McGinn acknowledges that all doctors of the church “share in charismatic graces that exceed ordinary human gifts”¹⁵¹ It has been important to cite the words “wisdom” and “wise” in the apostolic letter as a means to showing that sufficient reference to Thérèse’s wisdom is found in this document despite the emphasis on littleness as reported.

6.7 Conclusion

Thérèse is wise, humble, and recognized as a new model of doctor of the church. Like all doctors she shares in the charism of wisdom. We have noted ample description of Thérèse’s wisdom that permits us to understand that she is truly a doctor in the sense of a prominent teacher of the faith. We turn now to an exploration of how this notion of teacher and her teaching is presented in the document proclaiming Thérèse a doctor of the church.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 393.

¹⁵⁰ McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 3.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 10.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THÉRÈSE'S DOCTRINE

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the manner in which Thérèse's doctrine is presented in the apostolic letter as both a teaching and a way of life. Thérèse the teacher cannot easily be separated from her doctrine. In this presentation the emphasis is on the language of the apostolic letter, i.e. what words and descriptions are used to present both Thérèse the teacher and her spiritual doctrine. The "little way" is examined by way of the attempts to define it.

7.2 Descriptions of "little"

The apostolic letter contains four sections devoted to the doctrine of this saint. In section seven Pius XI is quoted for the words he used in his homily on the occasion of Thérèse's canonization. "The Spirit of truth opened and made known to her what he usually hides from the wise and prudent and reveals to little ones, thus she enjoyed such knowledge of the things above..."¹⁵² Again it is the theme of "the little ones" as seen in the opening lines of this document. This section also contains mention of Thérèse's feeling that the words of Scripture are being fulfilled in her and once again the theme is the same; this time it is represented by Luke 10:21-22 as well as Proverbs 9:4 and Wisdom 6:6 as quoted by Thérèse herself. "Whoever is a little one, let him come to me... For to him that is little, mercy shall be shown".¹⁵³ Following these citations however, one finds no further references to "little" in this section.

¹⁵² John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 393.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

7.3 Themes of Strength and Authority

Later in this section there is found a description of Thérèse's doctrine with the use of such terms as "depth and wise synthesis", "mature synthesis", "strength and authority", "great ability to persuade and communicate." It is described as "a confession of the church's faith, an experience of the Christian mystery and a way to holiness."¹⁵⁴ And finally, Thérèse's teaching is said to express "with coherence and harmonious unity the dogmas of the Christian faith as a doctrine of truth and an experience of life".¹⁵⁵ Important in the presentation of the details of her doctrine, is the acknowledgement that Thérèse "offers a mature synthesis of Christian spirituality: She combines theology and the spiritual life..."¹⁵⁶ With these examples of features of Thérèse's teaching that accentuate her strength and authority rather than her littleness, the contributions of this saint are more readily seen. One is then able to appreciate that being named a doctor of the church has resulted from the recognition that this individual is exceptional even among the saints. In an earlier part of the apostolic letter where mention is made of recent petitions, the claims of numerous publications are also included. These works "have pointed out how Thérèse of the Child Jesus possesses an extraordinary wisdom and with her doctrine helps so many men and women of every state in life to know and love Jesus Christ and his Gospel".¹⁵⁷

7.4 Authoritative Witness

The notion that Thérèse's teaching can best be explained in terms of the gospel message is a common theme and one that offers a better understanding, in my view, of this essential quality inherent in the writings of all the doctors of the church. On the role

¹⁵⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, 393.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

of the doctors, we find the following description noted earlier in the present paper: “In every historical context they remain witnesses to the unchanging Gospel and, with the light and strength that come from the Holy Spirit, they become its messengers, returning to proclaim it in its purity to their contemporaries.”¹⁵⁸

Thérèse is considered worthy of being included “among the authoritative witnesses of Catholic doctrine”¹⁵⁹ and so her doctrine is found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Although the apostolic letter includes only reference numbers of particular sections, it is important to state that Thérèse’s words on prayer introduce Part IV of the catechism. Under the heading, “What Is Prayer?” we find Thérèse’s response: “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”¹⁶⁰ Although these words are not included in the apostolic letter, they represent an excellent example of how Thérèse articulates her teaching in a way that is easily communicated. On this subject the apostolic letter states:

If considered in its literary genre, corresponding to her education and culture, and if evaluated according to the particular circumstances of her era, the doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux appears in providential harmony with the church’s most authentic tradition, both for its confession of the Catholic faith, and for its promotion of the most genuine spiritual life, presented to all the faithful in a living, accessible language... She has made the Gospel shine appealingly in our time...¹⁶¹

Later in this same section, the core of Thérèse’s message is explained as

“the mystery itself of God-love, of the triune God infinitely perfect in himself.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 391.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 395.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Section 2558 of *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Mahwah: New Jersey: Paulist Press. 1994) 613.

¹⁶¹ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 393.

¹⁶² John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 393.

The document goes on to say:

If genuine Christian spiritual experience should conform to the revealed truths in which God communicates himself and the mystery of his will (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 2), it must be said that Thérèse experienced divine revelation, going so far as to contemplate the fundamental truths of our faith united in the mystery of Trinitarian life.”¹⁶³

Certainly the emphasis on Thérèse’s experience of divine revelation is not surprising. That she contemplated the truths of faith is also obvious from what she writes in her autobiography. In the examples cited earlier of Thérèse’s own use of Matthew 11:25, for example, we have seen that she constantly refers to Jesus directing her soul, acting in her etc. As a contemplative nun, Thérèse was living her mission, and specific reference to this aspect of her life is developed in section eleven of the apostolic letter. We find Thérèse described here as living her Christian experience “to the point of knowing the breadth, length, height and depth of Christ’s love. (cf. Eph. 3:18-19) If we examine this passage from Ephesians in its entirety we have a fuller understanding of Thérèse’s experience. “I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”¹⁶⁴

7.5 The Little Way

That Thérèse knew the love of Christ is intrinsic to her “little way.” In section eight of the letter, Thérèse’s experience is shown to be that of all saints. We are told that for these saints in all ages and for Thérèse also, “in her spiritual experience Christ is the

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ *Holy Bible: The New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition* (Toronto: Canadian Bible Society, 1993)

center and fullness of revelation”.¹⁶⁵ Since Thérèse developed the “little way” as a means to encountering Jesus, it is important to highlight some of the ways in which this aspect of her spirituality is emphasized in the apostolic letter. In this document we find reference to “the little way” in several places, and it is interesting to note that most often these references appear to be attempts to define what is meant by the term “little way of spiritual childhood”.

The first reference is found in section two where the subject is the reception of Thérèse’s example in the church, i.e. her life and teaching. After her cause for beatification was introduced by Pius X in 1914, it was Benedict XV who in 1921 “declared the heroic virtues of the servant of God, giving an address for the occasion on the way of spiritual childhood”¹⁶⁶. No explanation of the term is given here however. Immediately following these statements, as the actions of popes in the first part of the twentieth century are stated and the theme of reception or recognition of Thérèse is continued, specific reference to “little way” is not included. Rather the terms “originality of her doctrine” and “spiritual doctrine” are used. Introduced as her message, we are then told that: “Her message, often summarized in the so-called “little way”, which is nothing other than the Gospel way of holiness for all...”¹⁶⁷. This would represent, it seems, a definitive introduction to the theme of Thérèse’s little way in the apostolic letter.

Specific mention of “little way” appears next in section five, the biography of Thérèse. In this instance it appears in relation to two factors. The illness of her father who dies in 1894, which is said to have “particularly tried her,” and her experience of being “illuminated by the word of God.” We are told that Thérèse then embarked on the

¹⁶⁵ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 394.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 391.

¹⁶⁷ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter, 391.

way of holiness with insistence on “the centrality of love.”¹⁶⁸ She does this in the following manner:

She discovers and imparts to the novices entrusted to her care the little way of spiritual childhood by which she enters more and more deeply into the mystery of the church and, drawn by the love of Christ, feels growing within her the apostolic and missionary vocation which spurs her to bring everyone with her to meet the divine spouse.¹⁶⁹

Section six contains reference to Thérèse’s writings, which include the three manuscripts that make up the autobiography. Describing them as converging in a thematic unity and representing “a progressive description of her life and spiritual way” the specific term “little way” is again referred to as a message, this time “a precise message”. It [the autobiography] shows how in her life God has offered the world a precise message, indicating an evangelical way, the “little way,” which everyone can take because everyone is called to holiness.¹⁷⁰ We have already seen how this theme of the universal call to holiness is one of the contemporary themes associated with the importance of Thérèse being named a doctor of the church. In Ahern’s work we have heard the claim that “we need to hear the church’s universal call to holiness not from an institution but from a person, from one who lived God’s love to a degree unheard of in our modern world.”¹⁷¹

Section eight on Thérèse’s doctrine explains the “little way” in terms of the trinity. Having recognized that Thérèse experienced divine revelation, the letter goes on to say that the summit is the merciful love of the three divine Persons and:

at the root on the subject’s part is the experience of being the Father’s adoptive children in Jesus; this is the most authentic meaning of spiritual childhood, that is, the experience of divine filiation, under the movement of the Holy Spirit. At the root again, and standing before us, is our neighbour, others for whose salvation

¹⁶⁸ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 392.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ahern. “*Thérèse, Doctor of the Church*”. 195.

we must collaborate with and in Jesus, with the same merciful love as his.”¹⁷²

The use here of the words “most authentic meaning of spiritual childhood” is confusing. One wonders why there is need of such an explanation. Does it mean that there are perhaps inauthentic meanings of Thérèse’s spiritual childhood or less authentic as the word “most” seems to imply? And more importantly, what does it mean in terms of the other explanations of “little way of spiritual childhood” in this same document, i.e. the apostolic letter? Having previously stated that in my view, Thérèse is most likely too big and too multifaceted to be reduced to simple explanations, there is perhaps evidence in this example of “most authentic”, of an attempt to reduce or simplify what Thérèse teaches others.

As a doctor of the church she is now a prominent teacher of the faith, an exceptional witness, and an eminent model and guide on the path of contemporary Christians. For these reasons Thérèse has much to offer twenty-first century Christians seeking an understanding of the spiritual life and so it is important to remain focused on another claim in the apostolic letter, i.e. “A century after her death, Thérèse of the Child Jesus continues to be recognized as one of the great masters of the spiritual life in our time”.¹⁷³

We find in the next example of the terms “little way” or “spiritual childhood” found in the letter, a continuation of the theme of merciful love and salvation. Having offered the “most authentic meaning of spiritual childhood” as “the experience of divine filiation, under the movement of the Holy Spirit,” the letter continues: “Through spiritual childhood one experiences that everything comes from God, returns to him and abides in

¹⁷² John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 393.

¹⁷³ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 391.

him for the salvation of all in a mystery of merciful love. Such is the doctrinal message taught and lived by this saint.¹⁷⁴ Once again there appears to be an attempt to capture a definition, or a “once and for all” explanation of the doctrine, message, or teaching of Thérèse of Lisieux.

In section ten, we find the last specific references to “little way”. Within a list of the accounts by the popes of this century on the subject of Thérèse’s holiness and wisdom, “the little way” in the words of John Paul II are quoted from those he used during his visit to Lisieux in 1980:

One can say with conviction about Thérèse of Lisieux that the Spirit of God allowed her heart to reveal directly to the people of our time the fundamental mystery, the reality of the Gospel... Her ‘little way’ is the way of ‘holy childhood’ There is something unique in this way, the genius of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. At the same time there is the confirmation and renewal of the most basic and most universal truth. What truth of the Gospel message is really more basic and more universal than this: God is our Father, and we are his children?¹⁷⁵

In this instance, the term “holy childhood” is used and represents the only such description of the “little way” in the apostolic letter. We see here the same theme that is found in the section previously mentioned, i.e. the experience of being the Father’s children. John Paul II refers to the genius of St. Thérèse in the “little way,” emphasis is on her revelation of the gospel message to “the people of our time”.

Finally, in the last example of the term “ little way” in the apostolic letter, we are reminded of the universal quality of Thérèse’s teaching. In the following excerpt it is also the sense of her life as well as her doctrine that is seen to have enjoyed such a wide reception. “Thérèse possesses an exceptional universality. Her person, the Gospel message of the “little way” of trust and spiritual childhood have received and continue to

¹⁷⁴ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 394.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 395.

receive a remarkable welcome, which has transcended every border.”¹⁷⁶

7.6 Thérèse and the Bible

We are told in the apostolic letter that there are more than one thousand biblical quotations in Thérèse’s writings. One wonders why this nineteenth century nun was reading the Bible. Was this practice not reserved for Protestants or restricted to those Catholics who by their office were entitled to interpret the Scriptures?

We have already seen that Ahern considers Thérèse’s interest in the Bible to be in line with the Council’s new stress on the importance of God’s word in Scripture. The apostolic letter provides information about the significance of this theme of Scripture in several ways. In the opening statement of section nine, on the sources used by Thérèse, we find what could be considered the most important claim about the subject of Thérèse’s use of the bible. We are told, “the primary source of her [Thérèse’s] spiritual experience and her teaching is the word of God in the Old and New Testaments.”¹⁷⁷

In section six where the writings of Thérèse are presented, the subject of her poetry is discussed. We learn that the fifty-four poems, of which two receive special mention in the letter, include some “which have great theological and spiritual depth inspired by sacred Scripture”.¹⁷⁸ This reference is in line with the theme of Thérèse’s wisdom. Although there is no specific reference here to the theme of “little” which as seen previously, is often combined with wisdom, this may be because the “little way” has just been explained in the section immediately preceding this statement. In section nine on the sources of her experience and teaching, we find the next notable statement on the source of Scripture:

¹⁷⁶ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 395.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 394.

Despite her inadequate training and lack of resources for studying and interpreting the sacred books, Thérèse immersed herself in meditation on the word of God with exceptional faith and spontaneity. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit she attained a profound knowledge of revelation for herself and for others. By her loving concentration on Scripture-she even wanted to learn Hebrew and Greek to understand better the spirit and letter of the sacred books-she showed the importance of the biblical sources in the spiritual life, she emphasized the originality and freshness of the Gospel, she cultivated with moderation the spiritual exegesis of the word of God in both the Old and New Testaments.¹⁷⁹

7.7 Conclusion

Thérèse the exceptional witness and prominent teacher of the faith possesses a doctrine that cannot be reduced to a simple explanation. Although there are contained in the apostolic letter attempts to define the doctrine of the “little way” in a precise manner, it has not been possible. The extensive use of Scripture in Thérèse’s writings shows that it was the primary source of her spiritual experience and teaching. Central to her doctrine is the gospel message and like all the doctors of the church she is the messenger. In the next chapter we will discuss the implications of Thérèse having been named a doctor of the church.

¹⁷⁸ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 392.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FUTURE CONCERNS REGARDING THE PROCLAMATION

8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter the implications of Thérèse of Lisieux being named a doctor of the church are raised. The ways in which the apostolic letter and homily explain Thérèse's new title, are presented as evidence of a possible diminishment of her status with regard to other doctors of the church. In the last section the issue of gender is revisited and examined from the point of view of the 1997 declaration.

8.2 Thérèse's Status as Doctor of the Church

We have seen in Chapter One that the problem of gender in the case of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena becoming doctors of the church, was overcome through Paul VI's statement that declaring a woman as doctor did not violate Paul's precept that women are to remain quiet in the assemblies. However, as noted previously, we have seen little explanation of the details of these proclamations. In fact, scant information is provided beyond the obvious claim that the naming of women as doctors of the church in 1970 removed for Thérèse's case the *obstat sexus*.

For Thérèse of Lisieux, it is not the problem of gender that causes controversy but rather the suitability of Thérèse as a doctor of the church because she was not "learned", or in possession of what we have termed the "other" condition of being named a doctor of the church beyond sanctity and proclamation by a pope or council. It is precisely in this area that one might anticipate a continuation of this controversy in the future. In the same way that McGinn presents the homily of Paul VI on the occasion of naming

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 394.

Catherine of Siena a doctor of the church, as evidence that “he (Paul VI) no longer needed to defend the naming of a woman as a doctor of the church” there exists the danger, in my view, that elements of the apostolic letter of John Paul II may be used to support the notion that Thérèse’s status as a doctor of the church is not equal to that of other “learned” doctors. In the letter we find the following statement taken from section seven:

In the writings of Thérèse of Lisieux we do not find perhaps, as in other doctors, a scholarly presentation of the things of God, but we can discern an enlightened witness of faith which, while accepting with trusting love God’s merciful condescension and salvation in Christ, reveals the mystery and holiness of the church.¹⁸⁰

In section eight we find another reference to Thérèse’s status and in this one we notice the words “true and proper.”:

Even though Thérèse does not have a true and proper doctrinal corpus, nevertheless a particular radiance of doctrine shines forth from her writings which, as if by a charism of the Holy Spirit, grasp the very heart of the message of revelation in a fresh and original vision, presenting a teaching of eminent quality.¹⁸¹

Such claims could be interpreted as evidence that Thérèse has been declared an inferior kind of doctor of the church. If we combine this sense that Thérèse is lacking, even though she is now a doctor of the church, with a sense of her littleness, as mentioned many times previously, we risk losing sight of her greatness and exceptional contribution to the life of the contemporary church. For this reason such terms as great master of the spiritual life, prominent teacher of the faith, and eminent model and guide are much more appropriate as designations of Thérèse as a doctor of the church, given that all have been used in official statements, i.e. the apostolic letter and the homily. This is particularly important if her new status is to be understood for future generations of Christians.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid..393.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

In the homily we find only one reference to the issue of learning and its significance for Thérèse being named a doctor of the church. In section three of the seven - part homily John Paul II says:

Everyone thus realizes that today something surprising is happening. St. Thérèse of Lisieux was unable to attend a university or engage in systematic study. She died young. Nevertheless, from this day forward she will be honoured as a doctor of the church, an outstanding recognition which raises her in the esteem of the entire Christian community far beyond any academic title.¹⁸²

One wonders what “far beyond any academic title” really means in terms of Thérèse’s status, in comparison to the other doctors. The use of “far beyond” might possibly indicate a need to explain how being proclaimed a doctor of the church sets Thérèse apart from all other saints not sharing this distinction. However, it could also be evidence of an attempt to overcompensate for her lack of formal study. In that case, it would indicate what might be considered a rather patronizing statement. In other words, Thérèse is presented as a somewhat inferior kind of doctor in the statement that she doesn’t have a “true and doctrinal corpus” as noted previously, and then she is said to “be honoured as a doctor of the church, an outstanding recognition which raises her in the esteem of the entire Christian community far beyond any academic title.”

Having raised these issues of concern regarding how Thérèse’s status as a doctor of the church might possibly be treated in the future, there is found within the same section of the homily, an explanation of the purpose behind the proclamations of saints as doctors:

... When the magisterium proclaims someone a doctor of the church, it intends to point out to all the faithful, particularly to those who perform in the church the fundamental service of preaching or who undertake the delicate task of theological teaching and research, that the doctrine professed and proclaimed by a certain person can be a reference point, not only because it conforms to revealed truth but also because it sheds new light on the mysteries of the faith.¹⁸³

¹⁸² John Paul II. The Homily. 351.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

This statement is important for two reasons. First, it offers an understanding of the place of the doctors of the church in the life of the church, from the precise point of view of their doctrine. Having seen in the last chapter that Thérèse's life and doctrine are not easily separated, one notices here that the doctrine is at once "professed and proclaimed" indicating this same theme. Second, those for whom the declaration is directed, i.e. "all the faithful" includes mention of two groups in particular. Most interesting in terms of the present paper of course, is mention of "...[those] who undertake the delicate task of theological teaching and research." What remains unclear from this statement however, is how wide an interpretation of "those" is intended. Is the magisterium pointing out this fact of a reference point primarily to the ordinary magisterium? If so, then the preachers and the teachers may, despite the fact that Thérèse has been hailed as a great master of the spiritual life, prominent teacher of the faith, and eminent model and guide, continue in their homilies and theological works, to refer to this saint and doctor in the same way that she is introduced in the apostolic letter: as "little."

8.3 The Issue of Gender in the Declaration

One source that raises the issue of possible intentions on the part of the magisterium in naming Thérèse a doctor of the church, point to the issue of gender. In 1997, prior to the actual proclamation, Constance Fitzgerald states:

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 has also made her canonization very convenient. One can only hope that those who proclaim her a Doctor of the Church 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.¹⁸⁴

This concern that the intellectual life and scholarship of contemporary woman theologians may be trivialized is justified. In the apostolic letter, published subsequent to Fitzgerald's article, the following statements introduce the second to last section of the letter, which follows an exposition of Thérèse's doctrine and its reception in the church:

All these reasons are clear evidence of how timely is the saint of Lisieux's doctrine and of the particular impact her message has had on the men and women of our century. Moreover, some circumstances contribute to making her designation as a teacher for the church of our time even more significant.

First of all, Thérèse is a woman who in approaching the Gospel knew how to grasp its hidden wealth with that practicality and deep resonance of life and wisdom which belong to the feminine genius. Because of her universality, she stands out among the multitude of holy women who are resplendent for their Gospel wisdom.¹⁸⁵

One is struck by the familiar tone of this claim especially with regards to "...wisdom which belong[s] to the female genius." Is it not reminiscent of Paul VI's claim that "... many women have arrived at great heights, even to the point where their words and their writings have become lights and guides for their brethren"?¹⁸⁶ In neither instance is there an indication of the identity of these women. Who are the "lights and guides," and who exactly belongs to the group known here as "the multitude of holy women"?

Although Paul VI's words in the above-mentioned citation refer to the proclamation of Teresa of Avila, it is his statement for the proclamation of Catherine of Siena that we find quoted in the apostolic letter, as noted in Chapter Seven. Because there is found in that citation a reference to "infused wisdom" and a "charism of wisdom from the Holy Spirit," it is important to cite this excerpt again in its entirety:

¹⁸⁴ Constance Fitzgerald. "The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux," *The Way Supplement* 89 (1997): 94.

¹⁸⁵ John Paul II, *Apostolic letter*. 395.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

We can apply to Thérèse of Lisieux what my predecessor Paul VI said of another young saint and doctor of the church, Catherine of Siena: 'What strikes us most about the saint is her infused wisdom, that is to say, her lucid, profound and inebriating absorption of the divine truths and mysteries of faith... That assimilation was certainly favored by the most singular natural gifts, but it was also evidently something prodigious, due to a charism of wisdom from the Holy Spirit.'¹⁸⁷

It is very important to point out the fine line between "natural gifts" and those of the Holy Spirit as pertains to wisdom. It is evidence in my view, of the reason Fitzgerald hoped that the act of naming Thérèse as a doctor of the church, would not be done to trivialize the intellectual life and scholarship of contemporary women theologians. The question now becomes whether "that practicality and deep resonance of life and wisdom which belong to the feminine genius" is considered to be in the realm of "natural" or "supernatural." And this question gives rise to the final question of this paper. Is it possible for women doctors of the church to be as "learned and wise" as the men or is it more important that they remain "little and humble"? Thérèse's words on the first page of her autobiography offer a glimpse of her intellectual life:

I wondered for a long time why God has preferences, why all souls don't receive an equal amount of graces. I was surprised when I saw Him shower His extraordinary favors on saints who had offended Him, for instance, St. Paul and St. Augustine, and whom He forced, so to speak, to accept His graces. When reading the lives of the saints, I was puzzled at seeing how Our Lord was pleased to caress certain ones from the cradle to the grave, allowing no obstacle in their way when coming to Him, helping them with such favors that they were unable to soil the immaculate beauty of their baptismal robe. I wondered why poor savages died in great numbers without even having heard the name of God pronounced.¹⁸⁸

8.4 Conclusion

It is important that the title "doctor of the church" not be seen as diminished in the case of Thérèse of Lisieux having been declared a doctor. There is a risk that particular

¹⁸⁷ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 395.

¹⁸⁸ John Clarke. *Story of a Soul*, 13-14.

parts of the apostolic letter could be used in the future to support the notion that this doctor of the church is not a “true and proper doctor” since she does not have a “true and proper doctrinal corpus.” The issue of gender, though thought to be eliminated from the debate of who can be considered a candidate for the title of doctor of the church, is seen as relevant to Thérèse’s proclamation. And finally, it is the question of women’s wisdom that leads us back once again to the theme of “little.” Thérèse is given the final word in this chapter as a glimpse of her intellectual life is presented. “Little” Thérèse is engaged in profound theological reflection.

CONCLUSIONS

Thérèse of Lisieux is anything but “little.” Yet this notion persists in the way in which the institutional Church views our latest doctor of the church. She is introduced in the apostolic letter as one of the “little ones” and then hailed as the new doctor. We know that she is one of only thirty-three saints to have been given the title, and the first one to be proclaimed by John Paul II, but we are told that Thérèse does not have a “true and doctrinal corpus” thus raising doubts about her status in comparison with the other doctors of the church. Then we hear that this new title raises her in the esteem of the entire Christian community far beyond any academic title. There would seem to be elements of contradiction in the message from the hierarchy to the faithful, in the act of proclaiming Thérèse of Lisieux a doctor of the church.

Maybe Thérèse would have liked an academic title. Perhaps she would even have wanted to be a theologian; there is mention in the apostolic letter of her desire to learn Hebrew and Greek in order to better understand “the spirit and letter of the Sacred books.”¹⁸⁹ Scripture, as we have seen, represents the primary source of Thérèse’s spiritual experience and teaching. A heightened awareness of this source may possibly be her greatest contribution to the contemporary church. In an age where many Catholics are still trying to make sense of the difference in emphasis between a pre and post Vatican II understanding of their tradition, Thérèse becomes the eminent model and guide first and foremost in the area of Scripture.

One theme that has not been treated in this paper but which could be of interest for future inquiry is that of Thérèse’s alleged “boldness” as it appears in the apostolic letter. In several parts of the letter there is reference to her being bold. On one occasion

it is Thérèse's "supernatural boldness" when she discovers her vocation to be love at the centre of the church while reading I Cor: 12-13. In another it is "boldly" calling herself the apostle of the apostles. And in the account of her trip to Rome on a pilgrimage, we learn that she asks the pope "with filial boldness" to be able to enter Carmel. I suggest a consideration of this theme in relation to the notion of littleness, as an interesting possibility for further studies of Thérèse as a doctor of the church.

Several important issues have emerged as a result of the present inquiry. One is the need for witnesses like Thérèse, who attest to their own experience of faith and in doing so, awaken the faith of others. The words of John Paul II as quoted in the Carmelite letter offer an understanding of this role for today. "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories."¹⁹⁰ The official documents, though seen as presenting Thérèse in ways that diminish her status of doctor of the church and bring into question such issues as gender and equality, serve nonetheless to tell a story of Thérèse that adds positive elements to her own telling of the story in the autobiography. The complete *positio*, which as we have seen is summarized in the apostolic letter, would add even more. At the beginning of this paper I stated that I had read the autobiography before this inquiry but had found themes like her notion of suffering and insistence on being little to be obstacles to my comprehension of what Thérèse had to offer. I did not understand how this saint could have generated so much interest that the number of works devoted to her life and "little way" seemed disproportionate to what I knew of her.

¹⁸⁹ John Paul II. Apostolic Letter. 394.

¹⁹⁰ From *Redemptoris Missio* as cited by Father Camilo Maccise, OCD, and Father Joseph Chalmers, OCarm. in "Thérèse a Doctor for the Third Millennium". Circular Letter to the Carmelite Family, <<http://www.netins.net/showcase/solitude/Thérèsedoc.html>> (Accessed Nov 6 1999). 5.

I would now say that reading *The Story of a Soul* is only the beginning of coming to understand something of the life and doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux and that one must be ever mindful of the fact that neither can ever be understood completely. Like the mystery of God itself, we cannot ever hope to totally comprehend.

In the future, the ways that are chosen to present Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the church, will continue to be determined by the perspective of those interested in pointing to her life and doctrine. We have seen one perspective, i.e. that of the institutional Church. It will be interesting to see others. Since research for the present paper began following the official proclamation in 1997, and because this study has been concerned with Thérèse's cause and the process of the proclamation, I have not included sources published later than 1999. McGinn's work of course, published in late 1999, has provided major insight into both the history of the doctors of the church and the future of the title, although the latter subject has not been treated here.

We have seen through the apostolic letter that when a saint is declared a doctor of the church, the doctrine professed and proclaimed by this person is a reference point for others, especially those in the church who preach or do theological teaching and research. It has been pointed out by McGinn that the charism of teaching specific to the doctors, is not the same as that of the teaching role of the bishops. In addition, the naming of women as doctors of the church, is evidence that the teaching of the doctors is independent of ordination. So what does this mean in regard to teachers within the church? Thérèse of Lisieux offers both her teaching and her life as an example for others. In this way she becomes the exceptional witness, so important to the contemporary Church, more important in fact, than teachers. But how will Thérèse the doctor of the church and exceptional witness be introduced to future generations?

A special volume of the New Catholic Encyclopedia¹⁹¹ has recently been published. It is entitled, “Jubilee Volume: The Wojtyla Years.” Unfortunately there is no mention of the 1997 proclamation of Thérèse as a doctor of the church included in “the Wojtyla years.” McGinn’s words of surprise that major biographies of Paul VI do not mention the declarations of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena as doctors of the church in 1970, or treat them in a few lines, come to mind. I point out this omission as another possibility for future inquiry.

I had many questions at the beginning of this study. My challenges as stated, were those that Monika Hellwig had considered the greatest ones facing U.S. Catholics. Finding my Catholic identity by looking along a historical axis for continuity and consistency in the midst of change, as Hellwig had done was important. Hellwig’s worry that ordinary Catholics were likely to lose a sense of direction because they had not been provided resources that could help them discover a sense of continuity was also my challenge. I had hoped to provide a resource through my becoming specialized in theology or church history in one particular area. Regarding my identity, this study has helped provide significant historical background regarding both the title: doctor of the church and the history of the cause and proclamation of Thérèse of Lisieux. In this way I have seen continuity and consistency in the midst of change.

In 2001 I designed a workshop on Thérèse of Lisieux that could be used as a resource for adult religious educators. It is entitled “Rediscovering the Little Flower, Thérèse of Lisieux: Our Guide for the Spiritual Journey.”¹⁹² I have included this workshop as Appendix II of the present paper. This endeavour allowed me to develop

¹⁹¹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia, Jubilee Volume: The Wojtyla Years* (2001). (Washington D.C.: Gale Group in association with The Catholic University of America).

¹⁹² Mary-Ellen Malolepszy. “Rediscovering the Little Flower, Thérèse of Lisieux: Our Guide for the Spiritual Journey” *Caravan* 15 no 59 (Summer 2001): 1-4.

those themes in Thérèse's life and doctrine that I had found to be central to any discussion of her. Having done this, I was then able to concentrate on a detailed historical investigation of the cause and process of the proclamation, a subject in which I had much interest. I am happy to have been able to do both.

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APPENDIX I

THE DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

The following list represents all doctors of the church who received this title between 1568 and 1970 (last date that a doctor was named before Thérèse of Lisieux). The *doctores ecclessiae* appear in chronological order according to the date of their declaration as doctors.

- 1568 Thomas Aquinas (1224-74)
- 1588 Bonaventure of Bagnorea (1217-74)
- 1720 Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)
- 1722 Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636)
- 1729 Peter Chrysologus (380-450)
- 1754 Leo the Great (c. 390-461)
- 1828 Peter Damian (1007-1072)
- 1830 Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)
- 1851 Hilary of Poitiers (c. 312-67)
- 1871 Alphonsus de Ligouri (1696-1787)
- 1877 Francis de Sales (1567-1622)
- 1883 Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313-86)
- Cyril of Alexandria (378-444)
- John of Damascus (c. 675-749)
- 1899 Bede the Venerable (c. 673-735)
- 1920 Ephrem the Syrian (c. 309-73)
- 1925 Peter Canisius (1521-97)

- 1926 John of the Cross (1542-91)
- 1931 Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621)
- Albert the Great (c. 1200-1280)
- 1946 Anthony of Padua (1191-1231)
- 1959 Lawrence of Brindisi (1559-1619)
- 1970 Teresa of Avila (1515-82)
- Catherine of Siena (1347-80)

APPENDIX II**Workshop Model for Adult Religious Educators****Rediscovering the Little Flower, Thérèse of Lisieux: Our Guide for the Spiritual Journey**

CARAVAN

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Workshop Model

REDISCOVERING THE LITTLE FLOWER

Thérèse of Lisieux

Our Guide for the Spiritual Journey



Mary-Ellen Malolepszy

This workshop is designed as an aid to rediscovering the spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux in light of her being named a doctor of the Church in 1997. In addition to the titles of saint (1925) and co-patron of the missions (1927), Thérèse is best known in English-speaking countries as *The Little Flower*. As a doctor of the Church she joins a select group of only 33 men and women in the history of Christianity to have been given the title. In proclaiming Thérèse of Lisieux the latest doctor, Pope John Paul II reminded us that "her ardent spiritual journey shows such maturity and the insights of faith expressed in her writings are so vast and profound that they deserve a place among the great spiritual masters."

Objectives for workshop:

- To reflect on the life and spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux, saint and doctor of the Church
- To understand how the insights of faith expressed in her writings provide us with inspiration
- To reflect on our own spiritual journeys with the help of Thérèse as our guide

Time: 2 hours

Setting: A quiet area conducive to prayer and reflection. Working materials displayed on table.

Materials needed:

- Bible open to 1 Corinthians 13.1-8
- votive candle
- a rose
- copy of *Story of a Soul* (spiritual autobiography of Thérèse of Lisieux)

- copies of closing prayer for all participants
- refreshments for break

Welcome and introduction (15 min.)

The facilitator begins by welcoming the group to what is hoped will be a refreshing rediscovery of the spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux: *The Little Flower*.

Inside

- Mysticism in Ordinary Time 7
- Images of God 8
- Moving Toward a Year-Round Process of Adult Initiation 11
- New Releases on the General Directory for Catechesis 13 and more ...



For those who may be meeting her for the first time, an invitation is extended to open their hearts to encountering this individual who holds a special place in the universal Church. The subject of spirituality is introduced by commenting briefly on how popular the word has become in recent years. An example is the section in some bookstores that now displays SPIRITUALITY as a subject heading replacing that of RELIGION. But before understanding the meaning of the word in our Christian tradition we can take a look at the broad description of the term spirituality. It is described as "that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions 'the spirit'; this spiritual core is the deepest center of the person...." And Christian spirituality? The most basic definition is that it is the lived encounter with Jesus Christ in the Spirit and sacraments. It is therefore a way of life and for the early Christians it was called "The Way." Thérèse called her encounter "the little way."

The facilitator draws attention to two items on the table, explaining that it was through *Story of a Soul* (Thérèse's spiritual autobiography) first published in 1898, a year after her death, that we first became aware of her extraordinary influence on the faith life of ordinary Christians and scholars alike. The second item is the rose, which has come to be her "trademark." Participants are invited to reflect for a few minutes on images or experiences that they associate with "the greatest saint of modern times." Those wishing to share their reflections are asked to do so, and after about 5-10 minutes the facilitator lights the candle and tells the group that they will now be reintroduced to Thérèse of Lisieux through her words and her life. Facilitator reads the following: (slowly)

Some time ago I was watching the flicker of a tiny night light. One of the sisters having lit her own candle in the dying flame passed it round to light the other candles. And the thought came to me: It needs but one faint spark to set the world on fire...

Thérèse has certainly helped to set Christianity on fire and she would be happy thinking of herself as the faint spark. Her life was short, only 24 years, but her influence has been far-reaching

and she is still providing us with the light of her presence in the Church. As a saint and now as the latest doctor of the Church she joins that special group of saints which includes names like Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, John of the Cross, Anthony, Francis de Sales, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena to name a few. She has moved beyond what some intellectuals once considered "a nice little saint with roses." In fact, she is "in the company of saints of that rare and special degree of insight that can only be called genius." (from *The Spiritual Genius of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, by Jean Guitton.)



Thérèse at age 15

Marie Françoise Thérèse Martin was born on January 2, 1873, in Alençon, France. She was the ninth and last child of Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin, and although she was quite ill during the early months of her life, she was one of only five Martin children to survive beyond infancy or early childhood. On the day she was born, a child delivered the following poem to Thérèse's family to welcome the new baby:

*Smile and grow quickly
Everything promises you happiness.
Tender care, tender Love
Yes, smile at the Dawn,
Bud that just blossomed,
One day you will be a Rose.*

The five sisters would eventually all take up the religious life and four of them would be Carmelite nuns.

Thérèse entered the Lisieux Carmel at the age of 15 to begin the austere life of an enclosed religious, and of this experience she would later write, "My desires were at last accomplished: my soul experienced a peace so sweet, so deep, it would be impossible to express it. For seven years and a half that inner peace has remained my lot, and has not abandoned me in the midst of the greatest trials." Much has been written about the theme of suffering in Thérèse's writings, and in his apostolic letter proclaiming her a doctor of the Church, Pope John Paul II acknowledges "her sufferings and trials borne with patience." Thérèse experienced both physical and spiritual anguish, having tuberculosis that ravaged her body, while undergoing the pain of her "trial of faith" which lasted for 18 months at the end of her life. Of her spiritual pain 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 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. This trial was to last not a few days or a few weeks, it was not to be extinguished until the hour set by God Himself and this hour has not yet come. I would like to be able to express what I feel, but alas! I believe this is impossible. One would have to travel through this dark tunnel to understand its darkness."

Reflection (30 min.)

Participants are asked to spend 5 minutes reflecting on what they have heard of Thérèse's life so far and then to share on the following:

- What is your reaction to the experiences described by Thérèse? What feelings are evoked?
- Have you experienced an "inner peace" in the midst of difficult times in your life? Try to describe this experience.
- To whom do you turn when you feel your faith is not adequate or you experience a "trial of faith"? What happens at these times?

Refreshment break (20 min.)

Little Flower, Little Way

The facilitator begins this segment by explaining that in Thérèse's life the theme of "littleness" must be understood from the perspective of her family, culture and the French language of her day. She was the baby of her family and remained "la petite Thérèse" throughout her life. Her autobiography and also her letters, of which two complete volumes exist, are filled with this image of "littleness." For example, in a letter to her aunt she writes, "Dear little aunt," and she signs a letter to a missionary priest, "Your unworthy little Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face." When she first confided to her father that she wanted to become a Carmelite, he handed her a flower and told her that she was a *little flower* who was being cared for by God. The title she gave her manuscript (first part of *Story of a Soul*) was "Springtime story of a little white flower written by herself and dedicated to the Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus."

The Reverend Mother was also her older sister Pauline Martin, the prioress who had asked Thérèse to write down her recollections of their family life. Since her family included two sisters already in the convent and one more who would enter within a few months, the request to write these memories was seen by Thérèse as an opportunity to offer a gift to her sisters. More than anything, though, at least for the "little flower," it was an act of obedience as a Carmelite sister to her superior, and therefore to God.

No one was prepared for the depth of spiritual insight that her manuscript would reveal! In the introduction to a recent edition of *Story of a Soul* we find the following statement: "When we consider the seemingly accidental way in which this book was written, and when we further consider the spiritual impact it has had on all types of people in all nations, we are literally forced to say, 'The hand of God is here.'"

Now we will reflect on Thérèse's doctrine called "The Little Way of Spiritual Childhood." Not long before her death, she made this famous prediction: "I feel that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making others love God as I love Him, my mission of teaching my little way to souls." Thérèse had spoken about this way and had described it in her autobiography. In it she says, "I can... in spite of my little-

ness, aspire to holiness. It is impossible for me to grow up, and so I must bear with myself such as I am with all my imperfections. But I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new." And so Thérèse chose the image of an elevator, a new invention for her time, to represent her relationship with Jesus. She became the child who would be carried in his arms and she had only to trust in his love and mercy. Her little way is the way of trust and absolute surrender to God and she says, "All is grace."



Thérèse in July 1896

In her community of Carmelites she found that, naturally, some sisters were easier to get along with than others. She was aware of her difficulty in trying to love as Jesus loved, but realized that with his help anything was possible. She says, "Ah! Lord, I know you don't command the impossible. You know better than I do my weakness and imperfection; you know very well that never would I be able to love my Sisters as you love them, unless you, O my Jesus, loved them in me.... Yes, I feel it, when I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more united I am to him, the more also do I love my Sisters."

In this way Thérèse allowed herself to be used as an instrument of God, ever conscious of the fact that she had known God's love in a very personal and profound way and wanted to return that love. By abandoning herself to the will of God and wanting to do only his will, she lived what we understand today in the popular expression "Let go and let God." At the centre of her way is the gospel message to love God and neighbour, and to live our spiritual journey in the everyday world of ordinary events with the people of God: our families, friends and communities. Like Thérèse, it is here that we will live out our personal call to holiness. We thank her for teaching us through her own life what it means to be holy.

Reflection (40 min.)

- Have you thought about your own personal call to holiness? Who is your neighbour or community that you are being called to love?
- What are the areas in your own life where you find it difficult to let yourself be carried "in the arms of Jesus"? Are you perhaps trying too hard to direct your own spiritual journey?
- Think about the guides who have accompanied you this far in your life. What are you most thankful for?

After the personal reflection time (5 minutes), participants are asked to form groups of three or four and are encouraged to share insights that they have gained from reflection. After about 20 minutes of sharing, the larger group is called back together.

Scripture reading (15 min.)

The facilitator explains that, as a doctor of the Church, Thérèse is now an official teacher. Pope John Paul II has said that she "showed the importance of the biblical sources in the spiritual life," and so we will now listen to one of Thérèse's favourite passages of Scripture. The facilitator or a participant then reads 1 Corinthians 13.1-8: Paul's words on love. After a few minutes of silence the reader then reveals Thérèse's own reflection on the words they have just heard: "... and so I understood that the Church had a heart and that this heart was burning with love. I understood it was love alone that made the Church's members act, that if love ➤

ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the gospel and martyrs would not share their blood. I understood that love comprised all vocations, that love was everything, that it embraced all times and places...in a word, that it was eternal."

Participants are then asked to spend a few minutes reflecting on the words of Thérèse and on the following questions:

- How do I know from my experience that love is at the centre of the Church?
- How can I be more loving as a member of the Church?

After a period of reflection (5 minutes) the facilitator reminds participants that everyone has come (tonight, today, etc.) to discover or rediscover Thérèse of Lisieux. We have heard about her "little way" of living the gospel in our everyday lives and in our communities. As we leave this gathering to return to our communities of love, let us begin now to pray in the spirit of our saint and doctor who says,

"For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy."

The facilitator invites participants to state any intentions they may have and all respond, "Loving and merciful God, hear our prayer." Then all join in the closing prayer.


Yes, O Father, we bless you, together with Jesus, because you have "hidden your secrets from the wise and understanding" and have revealed them to this "little one" whom today you hold up again for our attention and imitation.

Thank you for the wisdom you gave her, making her an exceptional witness and teacher of life for the whole Church!

Thank you for the love you poured out upon her and which continues to illumine and warm hearts, spurring them to holiness.

The desire Thérèse expressed to "spend her heaven doing good on earth" continues to be fulfilled in a marvelous way.

Thank you, Father, for making her close to us today with a new title, to the praise and glory of your name for ever and ever. Amen!

(Pope John Paul II, homily of October 19, 1997, proclamation of Thérèse of Lisieux as a doctor of the Church) 

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Spirituality for the Catechist (and others)

I Believe; Help My Unbelief

Doreen Kostyniuk

Recently, I was listening to a man as he unburdened his heart and the grief he carried there. He said to me: "I love God deeply; I see God's glory all around me in creation. And I have no faith. I have no trust that God is for me." As a therapist and spiritual director, once again I found myself sitting with someone in the presence of their soul, facing a wall of darkness that seemed to have no door, praying for the Healer to come. Many of us have known wounded trust to varying degrees. It is that inner point in us of knowing deep abandonment, or an absence of love. It is that hole in our heart that no amount of effort can seal. We can only wait upon a poignant seizure of grace, only watch for the coming of God, the Eternal Beloved.

Jesus knew this reality well. He had gathered his friends in the garden to keep watch as he prayed, yet they slept. In his anguish he came and called them to wakefulness, but they remained unaware, abandoning him to his own sorrow and grief in the face of his impending death. It is this moment of being near death that calls out for women like Sister Prejean, who walks with those condemned to the death penalty, and men like Jean Vanier, who embraces the abandoned in our culture and society, those with mental and physical disabilities. We all need someone at some point who will give witness to the risen Christ, our Jesus, who broke the power of death by



following the process to the end. At some point, in some form, we each need someone who can be a gaze of love, of seeping sacred presence like soft gentle rain – someone who can create the space for the coming of