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THERESE OF LISIEUX
by [Hans Urs von Balthasar](#)
Edited for the Internet
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THE LITTLE WAY

This chapter may open up the depth of the teaching of Saint Therese on the "little way" in a whole new and exciting way! Hans Urs von Balthasar shows just how radical, innovative this little saint is, and yet how traditional and how rooted in the Catholic vision. It is my own opinion that this book on Therese, just one chapter of which is reproduced here, may have contributed greatly to the ultimate decision made by the late Pope John Paul II to declare Saint Therese of Lisieux a "Doctor and Teacher of the Universal Church." Her doctrine goes to the heart of the Gospel, and perhaps not all have really discovered its riches yet.... and it is my joy to make this available -- Dr D'Ambrosio.



Every Christian -- and, much more, every saint -- lives theological truths; his life is an expression of the Gospel teaching whose kernel is found in the unity of truth and life. Therese's mission goes beyond this; it is, in the Pope's words, an explicitly doctrinal mission. It was God's purpose for Therese to light up certain aspects of revelation afresh for the benefit of contemporary Christendom, to make certain accepted but neglected truths astonishingly clear. She herself was aware of this doctrinal mission and she does not hesitate to underline its significance.

When she was still a child at the Abbey School the Abbe called her "my little Church doctor", because she was always ready with a good answer. Her intensely conscious mind inevitably led her to it. Yet it was not on her own initiative that she formulated her own teaching in the convent. This teaching took form later, and almost by chance; its dominant themes do not appear before 1893, five years after her entry. But then she quickly realizes that she has a mission to teach.

Marie had expressed a desire to get to know Therese's "little doctrine ", and Therese adopts the expression and seeks to satisfy her desire. But the eleventh chapter of the autobiography, which she addresses to Marie, is not the first one

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containing her teaching; there are the elements of it in the childhood reminiscences written for Pauline, where she is not only describing and entertaining, but above all instructing. And when Pius XI acknowledges that she had received the gift of wisdom in a rare degree, he is simply repeating what Therese said of herself: "How is it, Mother, that my youth and my inexperience did not scare you? How was it that you did not fear that I might let your lambs stray? In acting as you did, perhaps you remembered that the Lord often likes to give wisdom to the little ones . . . Everyone is ready to admit of exceptions here below; only the good God is not allowed this right! "

And Therese then applies to herself the Psalmist's statement: "*I have understanding above old men.*" "You did not even deem it imprudent, Mother, to tell me one day that the divine Master was enlightening my soul and granting me the experience of years. I am too little now to fall into vanity, I am too little still to start coining beautiful phrases to give the impression that I have a great deal of humility. I would rather acknowledge simply that '*He that is mighty hath done great things to me*.'"

Therefore Marie de Gonzague, to whom these lines are addressed, has played a part in quickening Therese's appreciation of this point. She has no cause for surprise when she finds Therese giving her lessons as well. "What I am saying to you now, Mother, is very important." Indeed we even find her writing a long and very understanding letter to her own Prioress, instructing her as to how she may achieve indifference of heart. She deliberately undertakes spiritual direction, advises her relatives, and clarifies the vocations of Leonie and Marie Guerin; she smooths the path for Celine, step by step, and refers to *her petite direction*.

Even her letters to her priest-brothers make it clear that with all her respect for the pre-eminent dignity of the priesthood Therese assumes the office of teacher and director in both their cases. It is she who consoles and warns, encourages and praises, answers their questions, confirms their opinions and lays down her little way. "When I am come into harbor, I shall instruct you, dear little Brother of my soul, how you must navigate on the tempestuous sea of the world; with the love and utter trustfulness of a child." When she reads over her manuscript she becomes more convinced of its importance than when she was actually composing it: "What I find written in this notebook, Mother, that is really my soul. Mother, these lines will do much good... I know that everyone will love me." "After my death you should not discuss my manuscript with anyone until it is published, if our Mother is in agreement. If you do anything else the Devil will set a trap for you to hinder and destroy the work of the good God, and a most important work." She is sure of herself. Her "little way" is derived straight from the Gospels as God had interpreted them for her.

Even before reading Surin and John of the Cross all the elements of her doctrine are there and only need to be brought into the brighter light of consciousness. P. Alexis, by confirming that her views were fundamentally sound, had given her the Church's official approval. Anne of Jesus, in her eyes the authentic

representative of Carmelite tradition, said she was "most content" with her. That is enough. She does not need to know that her doctrine also stands firmly in the lines of the best theological and spiritual traditions.

If one takes her sentences materially one can say that "in itself the doctrine of our saint is neither new nor original"; but frequently one has to go back centuries before finding teachers who have been so bold, and have laid such emphasis on certain elementary truths of Christ's teaching. Therese is by no means inclined, therefore, to see her teaching minimized. Just as she herself placed the doctrine of the Mystical Body at the center of her doctrine, similarly she treats her doctrine as the heart of theology. The way she is pointing is not one way amongst others. It is the only way: "I know no other means of arriving at perfection save love..." "The science of love. Oh... I desire that science alone... love is the sole treasure that I covet. Jesus condescends to show me the only way that leads to this divine furnace. It is the way of a small child abandoning itself without fear in its father's arms. *'Whosoever is a little one, let him come unto me'*, was what the Holy Spirit said through the mouth of Solomon."

The only way -- not because it is Therese's way, as opposed to the ways of other theologians and ascetics, but because it is the way of love which surpasses and includes all others. "That is everything which Jesus asks of us." In this sense her teaching is just as new and unique as her mission. She feels herself to be the bearer of something quite new. And a privileged position is given to this new teaching: "Our Lord once answered the mother of the sons of Zebedee, *'To sit on my right or left hand, is not mine to give to you, but to them for whom it is prepared by my Father'*. I imagine that these privileged places which were denied to the great saints and martyrs will be granted to the little children. Did not David prophesy it when he said, *'The little Benjamin shall preside amidst the assemblies [of the saints].'*"

There is even a sense in which Therese uses her little way as her measure of the saints. "Theophane Venard is *a little saint*, his life is quite ordinary." "As soon as God sees us convinced of our own nothingness -- He stretches out His hand to us; but if we wish to attempt great things, even under the pretext of zeal, He leaves us alone. It is sufficient therefore to humble oneself and to bear our imperfections meekly: that is true sanctity."

The correctness of her doctrine is self-evident for Therese. "Not a single book, and no theology guided me, and yet I know in the depths of my heart that I am within the truth." And her conviction urges her, towards the end of her life, to communicate these truths to everyone; continually we hear her: "You must tell souls..." And she leads those whom God has sent to her along *her* way; to the hesitant Belliere she writes: "I feel that we must go to Heaven by the same road." "I see, even more clearly than in your other letters, that you are *barred* from going to Heaven by any other way than your poor little sister's."

Her teaching is not a theological system of propositions held together by inferences; it is an immediate, total vision, and on that account requires many

different forms for its exposition. And however important it may be to understand the exposition it is even more vital to grasp the original power of the vision. It is a primitive Christian power following the primitive Christian system of dying and rebirth, of death and resurrection, of pulling down and building up. It is the power of God who has command over the living and the dead. We find it in the Sermon on the Mount, which in a series of lightning flashes annihilates every tenet that contradicts divine truth -- the Pharisee with his religion of good works brushed aside in favor of the poor and the abandoned.

And again in Paul's Gospel, the life that flowed from the death of Damascus. It is the power of the Augustinian either/or: *caritas* or *cupiditas*. It is the power of unconditional surrender in Carmel. And this is the rhythm that must be at the back of our minds as we listen to Therese's teaching.

DEMOLITION

By going directly to the Gospel sources Therese joins with all her force in Our Lord's initial movement: the demolition of religious facades. The blazing passion with which John the Baptist, in the spirit of Elias, clears the ground to give the approaching Messiah room and air is itself only a preparation for the absolute passion with which the Son flattens every obstacle to the Father's glory. "*Whoever draws near me draws near to fire,*" runs one of Christ's apocryphal sayings, and each of his words, his actions and his miracles is fire -- a fire all the more consuming since it is not the fire of justice but of love. And once God has cast this fire upon earth he sends his saints to fan it into flame so that it cannot be damped down in the hearths of a "bourgeois" Christianity.



Therese of Lisieux also cleanses the Temple with a whip. She is fearless and aggressive. She loves *war*. She is a fighter by nature. "*God wanted to make me conquer the fortress of Carmel at the sword's point.*" "*Our Lord has granted me the grace of being totally unafraid of war; I must do my duty, whatever the cost.*" "*Let us always grasp the sword of the spirit... let us never simply allow matters to take their course for the sake of our own peace; let us fight without ceasing, even without hope of winning the battle. What does success matter! Let us keep going, however exhausting the struggle may be... One must do one's duty to the end.*" "*This morning I read a passage in the Gospel where it is said, 'I come not to bring peace but a sword'. All that remains for us then is to fight. When we have not the strength, it is then that Jesus fights for us. Together let us put the axe to the root of the tree...*" "*Sanctity! It has to be won at the point of the sword.*"

She speaks of "*the way to force Jesus to come to your help*"; and asserts that Victory will not come cheaply: "*It does not come in a day.*" But for all her failings there is one quality she never lacks: "*I am not always faithful, but I am never discouraged.*" "*During meditation I fell asleep for a moment. I dreamed that soldiers were needed for a war. They said, we must send Therese of the Child Jesus. I replied, I would prefer a holy war. But I went all the same. O Mother, how*

gladly I would have fought in the Crusades or later against the heretics. Certainly I should not have feared the fire. Is it possible that I shall have to die in bed?" "I am not a warrior who has fought with earthly weapons but *'with the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God'*. Consequently not even my sickness has laid me low, and only yesterday evening I used my sword on a novice. I said, I shall die weapon in hand."

And she teaches the novices to do likewise. "I always want to see you behaving like a brave soldier who does not complain about his own suffering but takes his comrades' wounds seriously and treats his own as nothing but scratches." And that is how she herself behaves, on her death-bed, when she is burdened with visitors. "I thought that I ought not to want more rest than Our Lord. When He fled into the desert after preaching, the people came and disturbed His solitude. Come to me, as often as you like. I must die with my weapons *in my hand, in my mouth the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God.*"

Therese is convinced of the connection between holiness and energy. "In order to be holy the most essential virtue is energy. With energy one can easily reach the height of perfection." "Jesus said that *'the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by storm'*." "You cannot be half a saint, you must be a whole saint or no saint at all. I felt that you must have a soul of great energy, and I was happy to become your Sister." This feature of Therese's make-up explains her admiration for Judith. "I have always been struck by the praise addressed to Judith, *'Thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened'*. At the beginning we must act courageously; then one's heart becomes bolder, and one marches to victory after victory."

Above all, it explains the love and friendship for Joan of Arc which permeates all her writing. In her early days she used to read chivalrous stories with great enthusiasm, "...and through admiring the patriotic deeds of French heroines, those of Joan of Arc in particular, I felt a great longing to imitate them". And her attitude to Joan of Arc remains absolutely unchanged even later, when she had come to realize that her glory would not lie in external deeds. "When I began to learn the history of France, the story of Joan of Arc's exploits entranced me; I felt in my heart the desire and the courage to imitate her; it seemed to me that Our Lord meant me for great things too. I was not mistaken, but in place of voices from Heaven calling me to War, I heard in the depths of my soul a voice sweeter, more powerful still, the voice of the Spouse of Virgins calling me to other exploits, conquest more glorious, and in the solitude of Carmel I realized that my mission was not to get a mortal king crowned but to get the King of Heaven loved, to bring the realm of **hearts** under His sway."

Her numerous poems and hymns in honor of Joan always celebrate her sanctity, which forms the heart of her mission on the battlefield. In the "Shepherdess of Domremy " the vocation to burning love and suffering is the theme, in the "Victory Hymn for Joan of Arc" it is her firm will to fight for Jesus in saving souls; in "Joan of Arc's Prayer in Gaol " it is her memory of her free life in the world and her

longing for martyrdom. In "Joan's Voices during Martyrdom" she describes the promised salvation of France through her vicarious suffering; in the "Triumphant Song" she pictures her storming heaven. At every turn Joan walks beside Therese. She wishes, "like Joan of Arc, to murmur the name of Jesus at the burning stake".

She compares her mission to Joan's -- on seeing a picture of her in prison she exclaims: "Your saints also encourage me in my prison. They say to me, 'As long as you are in chains you cannot fulfill your mission; later, after your death, your hour of victory will strike... My mission will be accomplished according to God's will, like Joan of Arc's, in spite of the envy of men.'" "People pester me with questions; it reminds me of Joan of Arc before the Inquisitors. I believe I am answering with the same uprightness." Her "Prayer Inspired by a Picture of Joan of Arc" draws their two missions together in the bonds of sisterly love:

"O Lord God of Hosts, You have said in Your Gospel, *'I am not come to bring peace but a sword'*; arm me for the battle. I long to fight for Your glory; but I beg You to uphold my courage -- O my Beloved. I know what struggles You have prepared for me; it is not on the battlefield that I shall fight... I am the prisoner of Your love, I have freely riveted the fetters which bind me to You and cut me off for ever from the world. My sword is LOVE! With it *I shall drive strangers from the land, and shall have You proclaimed King over souls*. It is true, Lord, that You do not need such a weak instrument as myself; but Joan, Your virginal and valiant Spouse, has said, 'We must do battle before God gives the victory'. O my Jesus, I shall fight for love of You until the evening of my life."

Therese is a warrior even though her battles are fought for love by means of love, for peace by means of peace. Her war-like qualities simply bring out new aspects of her action in the midst of contemplation. And just as no action can be more effective than that contemplation by which she inspires all forms of action in the Church, similarly no battle can be fiercer and more final than the battle of love which she conducts with the Sword of the Spirit.

Her battle is to wipe out the hard core of Pharisaism which persists in the midst of Christianity; that will-to-power disguised in the mantle of religion, that drives one to assert one's own greatness instead of acknowledging that God alone is great. "With the utmost severity and unsparing clarity Therese directs her attack against every ascetical practice which aims not at God but at one's own 'perfection', and which is nothing more than spiritual beauty treatment." "Jesus does not demand great deeds, but only gratitude and self-surrender. *'I will not,'* he says, *'take the he-goats from out of Thy flocks, for all the beasts of the forest are Mine... Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks, or shall I drink the blood of goats? Offer to God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.'* That is all Jesus asks of us! He has no need of our works, but only of our love."

It is generally recognized that "cosmetics for the soul" constitute a special danger for those living the monastic life, and particularly for contemplatives; but this perilous turning away from God towards self under the guise of a tender conscience, this measuring and contemplation of one's own "perfection", constitutes the universal "temptation to perfection". This danger of Pharisaism would not have been depicted in such detail by Our Lord if its significance had

only been restricted to one small caste. The enemy towards whom Our Lord shows himself so relentless is the one who remains the enemy for all time.

Whenever Therese meets this enemy she is as hard and cutting as the Gospel itself. "One feast day, as a special treat, dessert was served, but one of the novices was accidentally passed over; her neighbor having failed to notice it, this novice pointed out to her the 'mortification' which she had borne in silence. Therese ordered her to go immediately to the kitchen Sister and ask for the portion she had missed. Covered with confusion, the novice defended herself; but Therese was immovable. 'Let that be your penance. You are not worthy of the little sacrifices God asks of you.' " "The same novice tells of how she once boasted during direction of an 'act of virtue' she had performed. 'What a pity,' the saint answered, 'that you behave like that. Considering all the graces and illuminations which Jesus grants you, you would have been most blameworthy to have done anything else. What is that in comparison with what He has a right to expect of you on account of your vows! Humble yourself, rather, at the thought of the many opportunities of exercising virtue which you have let slip.'"

It is the everlasting misunderstanding which was to cling to her throughout all her years in the cloister, and which she never managed to destroy; it is ever more firmly fastened upon her the nearer death approaches. Pauline says to her: "How you must have striven in order to have reached the degree of perfection at which we see you now!" Therese's comment is: "Oh, that's nothing." Or again, later: "Sanctity does not consist in performing such and such acts; it means being ready at heart to become small and humble in the arms of God, acknowledging our own weaknesses and trusting in His fatherly goodness to the point of audacity." It is a hopeless struggle, for the more Therese defends herself and tries to prevent herself from being regarded as a saint, the more the others wonder at her "humility" and her "perfection".

There is only a hair's breadth between falsity and the truth, but that is why God's infinite light is necessary to reveal the difference. There are two ways in which a Christian can regard "virtue "; either he can treat it as a quality inherent in himself, a *habitus* which he has some justification for attributing to himself (after all, he sees that he has initiated these "acts of virtue", rejected temptation, and acquired skill in doing good); or else he can realize that it depends entirely upon the grace of God working within him -- and in spite of him!

If he chooses the first way then he can collect "merit" and store it up, in which case he can stand back and survey his treasure. If he chooses the second then the matter is no longer in his hands; it all remains in the hands of God, his possession. As a child Therese was trained to "collect" merit; Marie taught her to do so: "I can still hear you saying to me, 'Look at the shopkeepers, how much trouble they give themselves to make money, whereas we can amass treasure for Heaven without giving ourselves so much trouble; all we have to do is to gather diamonds with a RAKE'. And off I went, my heart filled with joy, overflowing with good resolutions."

And in her early letters we see the child busy at this work of collecting: "Every day I try to do all the 'practices' I can, and I do my best not to let any opportunity pass. From the bottom of my heart, and as often as possible, I say the little prayers: they are sweet-scented like roses . . . my thanks to Sister Therese of St. Augustine for her dear little rosary of practices... "But gradually, without its being noticed, the meaning of the word changes and surrenders its kernel of Christian truth the treasure is love, but love is the prodigality which knows neither to count nor reckon. "It's very simple. Hold nothing back; distribute your goods as soon as you get them. As for myself, if I live to be eighty years old I shall still be as poor. I do not know how to make economics; everything I have I give away immediately to buy souls."

And so she devises a joyous new version of the old fable: "I have been almost *nine years* in the house of the Lord. So I ought by now to be far advanced in the ways of perfection, but I am still only at the foot of the ladder; it does not discourage me, and I am as merry as a grasshopper; singing away all day, and hoping at the end of my life to share in the riches of my Sisters, who are much more generous than the ant." And even during her last few days: "I know that my Sisters have told you of my cheerfulness, and it is true that I am like a finch, except when I have a temperature, luckily it usually comes only at night, at the hour when finches sleep, their heads beneath their wings."

Because love "*seeks not its own*" she always thinks first of others, and the more she loves the less it occurs to her to think of herself. "If I had been rich I could not have seen a poor person hungry without giving him something to eat. That is what I do in my spiritual life: as soon as I acquire something, knowing that there are souls on the point of falling into Hell, I give them my treasures and I have not yet had a minute to say, 'Now I am going to work for myself..... I do not know whether I shall go to Purgatory. Nor am I worried. If I have to go there, then I shall not regret having done nothing to avoid it. I am happy to know that our holy Mother Teresa did not think differently.'" "If I do go to Purgatory, then I shall be very content to do so; I shall do like the three young men, sing the song of love as I am being transformed in the furnace. How happy I should be if by these means I could save other souls, and suffer in their place..." "I would not have picked up a single straw in order to avoid Purgatory. Everything I have done was in order to give joy to the good God and to save souls."

Progress does not come through acquisitions but through losing everything; it does not mean climbing, it means descending. A novice sighs: "When I think of everything I still have to acquire!" "You mean, to lose! Jesus takes it upon Himself to fill your soul, in the measure that you rid it of its imperfections. I see that you have taken the wrong road; you will never arrive at the end of your journey. You are wanting to climb a great mountain, and the good God is trying to make you descend it; He is waiting for you at the bottom in the fertile valley of humility."

As we have seen from her teaching about time and eternity, one does not achieve sanctity by piling up "acts ": Aloysius could have learnt no more if he had lived to Noe's age. We have also seen how Therese as a child was trained to make her particular examen; and no one had been more eager to finger the pearls of sacrifice and acts of virtue on the thread of her life. Pauline even gave her a little notebook in which she might enter her daily progress. The mature Therese grew out of these habits. "I know that certain spiritual directors advise us to count our virtuous acts in order to advance in perfection. But my spiritual director, Jesus, does not teach me to count my acts. He teaches me to do it all for love."

If a person can no longer reckon, then that person approaches God in a condition of complete poverty, the poverty spoken of by the Gospels, without which the vision of grace is impossible. "I cannot rely upon anything, not on one single work of mine, for security... but this poverty is a real grace for me. I thought of how I could not pay God for even one of the faults I had committed in the whole of my life, and that precisely this could be my richness and strength if I wished. And so I prayed, O my God, I beg You Yourself to free me from the guilt I have contracted towards the souls in Purgatory, but do it as God, so that it will be infinitely more successful than if I had paid my debts in person. And I took great comfort in the thought expressed by St. John of the Cross in his canticle: 'Wipe out all guilt'. I have always related this to love. I feel that one can never repay this grace... it is a source of such peace to be utterly poor, to count on nothing but the love of God."

Because she attaches such tremendous importance to poverty Therese mistrusts every form of penance and asceticism which is easily liable to become an occasion for showing-off. In regard to works of penance, she says: "One has to be very prudent in such practices, for they quickly become the work of nature rather than of virtue. A passage from the life of Bl. Henry Suso about penitential practices has stuck in my mind. He had performed the most terrible penitential practices, which had ruined his health, when an angel appeared and told him to stop it. And the angel added, 'So far you have fought as a simple soldier. Now I will dub you a knight'; his meaning was to show the saint how spiritual combat is superior to corporal mortifications. Now, little Mother, the good God no longer wishes me to remain a simple soldier; He has just dubbed me a knight... In this hidden combat, which lies beyond the reach of nature, I have found peace and humility."

Admittedly Therese, like all the saints who have spoken similarly, had already gone through a great deal of penance. At the start of her religious life she experienced "a strong inclination to works of penance". "I had taken too much pleasure in them" she confesses, "and so the good God let me realize that the strictest penances can be mingled with natural satisfaction." She once tried wearing a little iron Crucifix with a sharp point upon it on her breast, but the point pressed into her flesh and caused a slight inflammation. "I would not have abandoned it for such a trifling reason if the good God had not wished me to

realize that the mortifications of the saints are not meant for me, nor for the little souls who will also walk in the way of childhood."

Nor was it only a question of bodily harm. She tells Pauline that her previous mortifications at meal-times had been the occasion of disagreeable thoughts: "Later I found it simpler to offer whatever pleased my taste to the good God." "It was well that Our Lord warned us, '*In My Father's house there are many mansions, if not I would have told you*'. Yes, if every soul called to perfection were obliged to perform these mortifications in order to enter Heaven, He would have told us, and we should have undertaken them with willing hearts. But He explains to us that '*there are many mansions in His house*'. If some are for great souls, those of the desert Fathers and penitential martyrs, there must also be some for the little children."

Nevertheless. Therese's whole life is one long hymn of penance. And not only in the general sense that to live under vows means having a penitential status, but in minute application to the details of penance. Yet the aim of this penance is not to perform great feats or achieve personal perfection, but to exploit every single opportunity for gratitude which God offers. Therese never refuses, but neither does she snatch.

She realizes that everything in the religious life, down to its least accidentals, is providential. The rattling of rosary beads in choir nearly drives her to distraction; but she does not turn round and fix the guilty Sister with a withering glance. Nor does she try to shut the noise out of her mind; instead she transforms it into part of her prayer. At the wash-tub an energetic novice splashes the dirty water over her face; she does not turn her face away; and when wash-day comes round again she takes up the same position. According to her own testimony she suffered terribly from the cold, especially since her cell was never heated. One word and she could have had more blankets; but she remains silent. "One should not betray the fact that one is cold", she says, "by hunching oneself up or shivering or rubbing one's hands," In the refectory it is impossible to work out which dishes she likes or dislikes. The result is that she is invariably served with what has been left over; not until her last illness was she made to say, under obedience, which dishes disagreed with her.

There is something Franciscan -- and yet typical of Therese -- in the story of the flies which plagued her during her last months, but which she was glad to have there. "They are my only enemies, and since the good God has urged us to love our enemies I am glad to have this opportunity. Let them be." She scolds a novice who was warming her slippers at the stove: "If I had done that, except under obedience, I should have accused myself of a great lack of mortification." It is quite in keeping that she endured the inhuman tortures of the last weeks without morphia at the request of the Prioress. Accepting anything, never flinching, and exploiting every opportunity: with this attitude Therese performs much harder and more persistent penance than by making sporadic "heroic" acts, where there always lurks self-glorification.

On the other hand Therese never comes near to Quietism, which is the danger when penance is neglected. Her will to penance is an active one, driving her to accept every opportunity and to note the least failure. And here she does not cut out the notion of merits. "So you want to acquire merits?" "Yes, but not for myself. For souls, and for the needs of the whole Church..." And she robs the notion of its sting. "Merit does not arise from performing great deeds or giving much, but in receiving and loving." She keeps her eye on the intention and the results, not on the act of self-conquest.

In the matter of loving her neighbor she is almost excruciatingly sensitive; yet no one could tell what it cost her to conquer her emotions. In fact she not only hides her self-conquest from others; she conceals it from God, and whenever possible, from herself. She lays the emphasis entirely on the love which has to be achieved, not on the achievement itself -- even, going one step further, on the objective sacrifice, in which she herself remains as if anonymous. She fulfils the command not to let the left hand know what the right is doing, even when left and right signify part of the same soul. This is the point at which God intervenes to ensure that her achievement should be unconscious, and he does so by allowing all feeling to be withdrawn. Her achievement remains, and is infinitely greater, but separate from her, as if it had gone dead in her hands. "Ah! that is indeed a great love, to love Jesus without feeling the sweetness of that love, there you have martyrdom . . . All right! *let us die martyrs!* Oh! my Celine... sweet echo of my soul, do you understand?... Martyrdom unrealized by men, known to God alone, undiscoverable by the eye of any creature, martyrdom without honor, without triumph..."

But even in this martyrdom the point is not the record of suffering but the intensity of love. Every penance which increases true love is good; any penance which narrows and preoccupies the soul is harmful. "Certainly every penance is laudable and meritorious if one is convinced that the good God requires it of one. Even if one errs in doing it He is touched by the intention. But I could never bind myself to anything if it became a constant preoccupation . . . as our Mother St. Teresa says: God is not concerned with a heap of trifles, as we too easily believe; and we should never let anything, narrow our souls." "Love is the one thing at which we should aim, consequently we should always prefer that deed into which we can crush most love, whether it is 'harder' or 'easier'; it is better to do something which is in itself indifferent than something 'worthwhile' in itself if we can do the first more lovingly than the second." She is very fond of fingering fruit, such as the peach, and admiring its velvety skin, or distinguishing the scents of individual flowers. For her it would have been an offence against simplicity not to derive enjoyment when it was an occasion of love and thankfulness towards God for the beauty of nature and music. "Out of love I will suffer and out of love rejoice."

Not penance, but the reckoning of it, is demolished with her. By eliminating all human reckoning Therese makes room for grace. In the religion of the Old Law

one deed was set against another, God's deeds and human deeds. And on account of human weakness it was almost inevitable that this religion should terminate in Pharisaism. The grace of the New Law eliminates every reckoning. It is not only that God takes the initiative by the totally unmerited gift of grace, but that subsequently the relations between God and the soul are not governed by any law of reckoning within human grasp. As far as Therese is concerned the real purpose in demolishing the whole ethic of works is to allow the shining miracle of divine grace to light up the life of every Christian.

Here the best known of all Therese's metaphors and images begin to crowd in; they are images of the incomprehensibility of divine grace. If men ought not to reckon, that is because God does not reckon, indeed cannot reckon because it would be contrary to his innermost essence, which is overflowing love. "There is one science which He does not know -- arithmetic." (Even at school Therese had shown a distaste for arithmetic.) Whereas the very quickest calculation proceeds on the assumption of a continuous gradation of numbers, grace is in no way limited to such gradations.

The image which occurs to Therese to express this vision is that of a lift. "Alas, I have always noticed, in comparing myself with the great saints, the same difference between them and myself as we see in nature between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and an obscure little grain of sand trampled underfoot by passersby... it is impossible for me to grow great... But we live in an age of inventions: nowadays there is no need to go to the trouble of climbing a stairway step by step; this is now done amongst rich people by means of a lift. I also wished to discover a *lift* to take me up to Jesus; because I am too little to climb the steep stairway of perfection." In this enchanting picture the lift is nothing else but the love that desroys all distances and eliminates all calculable continuity.

She writes to Abbe Belliere: "More than ever I realized the degree to which your love is sister to mine, since it is called to go up to God by the lift of love, not to climb the rough *stairway* of fear." And if the picture simply seems to replace the slow methodical climb by a sudden jerk, which remains equally bound to the imagery of ascending, it can be supplemented by a picture of grace descending in power. She pictures a mother standing at the stair-head, who sees her child vainly trying to mount the stairs; the mother comes down to lift the child up into her arms. She pictures the divine eagle swooping down to the little bird helplessly fluttering on the ground, and then soaring with it on its pinions into the abyss of light. The pattern is always the same: the human beginning, faltering, scarcely perceptible, and then the completion of the work by a lightning-flash of divine intervention. When the Father Superior visits her to encourage her he exclaims: "What? You wish to go to Heaven soon? But your crown is not yet perfect. You have scarcely begun!" Therese replies: "Oh, Father, how right you are! I have not made my crown, but the good God has made it."

At this point grace seems to be something magical; more precisely, it is something creative. God calls that which is not into existence. Powers are bestowed upon the creature which are far beyond its own reach, beyond its dreams even. Vistas are opened up which it could never attain of itself, and aims that it could never have set itself. Yet nature is not eliminated by the magic of grace. Nature is there, not even neglected or concealed, but multiplied, intensified, and broken into a richer existence.

Therese tells us of a kaleidoscope which she possessed in her childhood. "A sort of little telescope at the far end of which one could see pretty patterns of different colors; if one turns the instrument it produces infinite variations on these patterns." She takes the magical tube to pieces to see how the miracle happens; she discovers "some little bits of paper and cloth scattered inside, and three mirrors on the inside of the tube". And this becomes an image for her of a great mystery. "So long as our actions, no matter how trivial, remain within the focus of love, the Blessed Trinity . . . gives them a wonderful brilliance and beauty. When Jesus looks at us through the little lens, which is to say Himself, He finds all our doings beautiful. But if we abandon the ineffable center of love, what does He see? A few straws . . . besmirched and worthless deeds."

Rarely has anyone hit upon such a striking and theologically exact image of grace, provided that God's vision through the lens is taken as the true and creative vision, and the natural materials as no more than the presupposition on which the truth works. The magic of grace is not something subjective, a form of mystification. In fact, the vision of the three-personed God, the loving vision, is the one objective, truth-revealing vision. Therese realizes this, and that is why she begs the three-personed God "to look at me only with the Face of Jesus between, and in His Heart burning with Love". For God sees us as we really are, in our eternal reality and not in time's deceptive mirror.

To the same end she invokes "imagination" (i.e. hypnotism) as an illustration: "Oh, how I should like to be hypnotized by Our Lord!... with what meekness I have surrendered my will to Him! Yes, I want Him to take over all my faculties so that I no longer perform human and personal actions but utterly divine ones, inspired and directed by the spirit of love!" In this instance a spiritual nature is treated as the stuff which has to be taken over, controlled and re-formed -- though the image is obviously incomplete since hypnotism eliminates the subject's personal freedom whereas grace preserves and intensifies it.

The point is that man cannot be hypnotized by grace apart from his own will and self-surrender, but that once he is in the power of this higher will then he carries it out without knowing its laws and purposes. One final picture, in which she expresses our inability to penetrate into God's schemes: "At this moment Your Therese does not find herself on the heights, but Jesus is teaching her... He is teaching her to play at love's bank, or rather, He plays for her, not telling her just how He goes about it for that is His business and not Therese's; her part is to abandon herself, to give herself over, keeping nothing for herself, not even the joy of knowing how His bank is paying."

She depicts the "magic" of grace so perfectly that it appears to act without laws. Winnings come out of it which no one, with all the science in the world, could have predicted. There is only one condition for winning: to stake all, and in the same act stake all one's winnings as well as the knowledge of them. Just as the lover does not belong to himself, so also his winnings are not his to keep. God will use them as he wishes, sharing them, or keeping them or investing them where he thinks best. The lover's stake in God's play is himself; he throws himself into it for God's sake. He does not care to know whether he will be multiplied a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold, for the sum of his winnings no more belongs to him than the ear of wheat belongs to the seed that died. The original sum no longer exists; it has vanished into the sum of the winnings. Therefore love, in a sense, is magic: it produces what was not there and spirits away what was there. *"The principal plenary indulgence, and one which everyone may obtain without the customary conditions, is the indulgence of charity which covers a multitude of sins."*

By eliminating all reckoning she at the same time demolishes the structure of "merit" or "reward" in the human sense. Reckonings and rewards are both Old Testament metaphors for New Testament realities. But we may also plunge directly into the interior law of love, and then we discover the limits of the Old Testament concepts, which are all based upon one-to-one reckoning. But not only is there no comparison between the sufferings of the present time and the glory of eternity (Rom. 8: 18); even the blessed enjoying eternal happiness will see it -- lovers that they are -- as pure unmerited grace, not a reward for services rendered.

Perhaps they will appreciate God's joy in rewarding good service; they may even discern some proportion between the rewards and merits of others; in their own case these notions simply do not apply. And so heaven is a "stolen heaven": *"My protectors in Heaven, my favorites, are those who stole it, such as the Holy Innocents and the Good Thief. The great saints have won it by their works: for myself, I wish to imitate the thieves, to take it by a trick, a trick of love which will give me entry, me and other poor sinners. I am encouraged to do so by the Holy Spirit, who says in Proverbs, 'Come to me, little one, to learn subtlety'."*

In one's dealings with God one should never allow grace to be twisted into a matter of obligation, for that is to treat a child as an adult, subject to reward and punishment. *"To be little means recognizing one's nothingness, expecting everything from the good God, as a little child expects everything from its Father... Even amongst the poor a little child is given everything it needs so long as it is little; but as soon as it grows up its father will no longer feed it and says, 'Work now, you can look after yourself'. Well now, it is because I did not want to hear those words that I have not wanted to grow up, because I feel incapable of earning my living, the eternal living of Heaven."*

There was nothing Therese feared more than to find herself settling debts with God. And since it is only grown-ups who settle debts she intends at all costs to preserve that relationship which one finds amongst children when they are dealing with each other. She simply will not grow old, and so will not be obliged to earn heaven. She wants no reward: "At Sext a verse occurs in the Divine Office which I recite each day with reluctance; it is this: *'I have inclined my heart to do Thy justifications for ever, because of the reward'*. I hasten to add in my heart, 'O my Jesus, You know well that I do not serve You for reward, but solely because I love You and in order to save souls'."

Therefore at the end of her life she desires to appear empty-handed before God, and rejoices at the thought. When Pauline says, "Oh, when I die I shall have nothing to show to the good God, I shall arrive empty-handed, and that makes me very sad", Therese answers: "You are not like me, then, though we are both in the same position. Even if I had performed all the deeds of St. Paul I would still consider myself an unprofitable servant; I would notice that my hands were empty. But that is precisely the cause of my joy; since I have nothing, I shall expect everything from the good God."

It is easily seen that Therese does not sit in judgment on anyone's works or labors, but the one thing she cannot abide is that human beings should boast of their works in the face of God. To do so would be to insult grace, since "Jesus wants to grant us the same graces, wants to give us His Heaven as a free gift". The fact that there is no relation between earthly labor and heavenly reward was already her greatest incentive for throwing all her energies into the love and service of God when she was no more than fourteen: "I already had a presentiment of what God has prepared for those who love Him; and realizing the lack of proportion between these eternal rewards and the petty sacrifices of this life, I desired to love, to love Jesus passionately, to offer Him countless tokens of my affection whilst I could still do so."

This lack of proportion cannot be identified with the empty dialectic between sin and grace characteristic of Protestantism; it is the Catholic truth that the relation between grace received and grace to be received is infinitely increasing. It is this which touches Therese so deeply in Our Lord's words to St. Mechtild: "I am telling you the truth, that it gives me great joy when men expect mighty things of me. However great their faith and boldness may be, I shall bestow on them far more than their merits." And so Therese entrusts herself to this "far-more" promised by God's grace. "I know well that I shall never be worthy of what I am hoping for; but I put my hand out like a begging child, and I know that You will grant me so much more than I ask, because You are so good."

And we are now shown the reverse side of Therese the thief of heaven. Previously it was Therese who stole heaven; now it is God, the great eagle, who steals her and carries his booty off to heaven. "I see Him from afar and take care not to shout, *'There goes the thief!'* On the contrary. I call to Him, *'This way! This*

way!" "In the Gospels we are told that God will come like a thief. Soon He will come to steal me. And how gladly I shall help the Thief."

We have been led unawares into the very heart of Therese's mission. What Therese goes on to say, as she acknowledges, is the secret source of her doctrinal message. By demolishing the religion of works for the sake of pure love (which in itself is more effective than all justification by works) she places herself at the very center of the Gospel, at the very point where the joyous message of redemption marks the decisive step from the Old Testament to the New.

The mentality which confronts Therese so frequently in the Catholic asceticism of her day, and which she feels more and more obliged to reject, is the Old Testament mentality of justification by works expressed in its most extreme form in Pharisaism. Since this attitude assumes that man's relations with God are based entirely upon justice, and this limited conception of justice is the limit of these relations, it can imagine only one ideal -- to step up one's own achievements so as to produce a corresponding increase in God's favors.

But this ideal overlooks what Paul showed to be the very basis and *raison d'etre* of God's testament with the chosen people: Abraham's faith, which implicitly includes hope and love as well. The people forgot that the law and its works are prophetic in character, pointing towards the Messiah; they are meant to express faith in the promised Christ who would fulfill the law and its works. The people attributed a significance to the law in itself which obscured and sometimes even destroyed its true significance. Yet how easy it was under the Old Law to fall into a religion of justification by works! God first revealed himself as the God of justice, not as the God of love. And besides wishing to prepare humanity for love by means of the law God also wished the failure of the law and its works to demonstrate what happens when men rely upon their own achievements apart from the Cross of Christ. "*Now the law entered in, that sin might abound*" (Romans 5: 20)

Therese inserts her New Testament theology and asceticism at the exact point where the transition takes place. Her "little way" to "little sanctity" at first appears quite innocently as one way amongst many others, and she contrasts it particularly with the "great ways" of the "great saints" (to start with these include her big sisters Pauline and Marie, both of whom she describes as "eagles" in comparison with herself, the "little bird"). These great saints have done mighty deeds for God, but they are so superior as to discourage Therese, who does not dare to set out on their highway.

But the more she gets to know the little way the more she realizes, to her genuine surprise, that it is the only way. So we need not ourselves be impressed when we notice an ironical, scolding twinkle in her eye as she gazes reverently towards the "great saints". The twinkle becomes more obvious as time goes on and she assumes the role of David, armed with a sling, and venturing into the open to attack the Goliath of "great sanctity." "The great saints have gained

Heaven by their works; myself, I wish to imitate the thieves, I wish to take it by a trick, a trick of love which will give me entry, me and other poor sinners."

And what is this trick? "It is quite simple. Hold nothing back. Distribute your goods as soon as you get them ... if at the moment of death I were to present my little coins to have them estimated at their true worth Our Lord would not fail to discover dross in them which I should certainly go and deposit in Purgatory. Are we not told that although the great saints appear before God's judgment seat with their hands full of merits, yet they sometimes go to that place of expiation because no justice is without blemish in the eyes of the Lord." And now she transfers her amused gaze away from men towards God, as it were teasing the God of justice: "When I think of the good God's statement: *'I shall come soon and bring my reward with me, repaying everyone according to his works'*, then I say to myself that He will find Himself wonderfully embarrassed with me, because I have no works! So He will not be able to repay me according to my works. Very well, then, I trust that He will repay me according to His works."

Therese here is preaching a lesson straight from the gospel of Paul: *"Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned according to grace, but according to debt. But to him that worketh not, yet believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reputed to justice, according to the purpose of the grace of God"* (Rom. 4: 4-5). Therese is well aware of her kinship with Paul, since she heads her "Song of the Innocent Children" with this very text, joined to Romans 3: 24 -- *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" -- for the reward will not be reckoned as grace for those who perform works, but as a debt. Therefore those who do not perform works will be justified freely through grace by the redemption worked by Jesus Christ."*

Just as fundamentally Pauline is the thought that those stripped of justice (which means everyone) will by God's grace be clothed in his justice. Therese follows her master exactly: *"In the evening of this life I shall appear before You empty-handed, for I do not ask You, Lord, to count my works. All our justices have stains in Your sight. So I want to be clad in Your own Justice, and receive from Your Love the possession of Yourself. I want no other Throne or other Crown than You, O my Beloved."*

Therese does not reject works out of hand; there is nothing even remotely Protestant about her interpretation of St. Paul. But she knows that everything good and virtuous in man is grace, the gift of God's justice. *"To be little means not attributing the virtues we practice to ourselves in the belief that we are capable of them; but recognizing that the good God places this treasure in the hands of His little child for him to use when necessary; but the treasure remains God's always."*

Once more the need to remain a child is clear. The child cannot do as he pleases with the treasure entrusted to him; he can only hold it in his hand. A grown-up, however, is faced with the temptation to use the treasure on his own initiative.

His maturity obviously throws a responsibility upon his shoulders which the child does not have to bear. And so Therese is impelled along her little way into another of Paul's secrets: "Therese is weak, very weak; every day she experiences it afresh, but Jesus delights to teach her as He taught St. Paul, the science of glorying in one's infirmities... Seeing yourself so worthless you wish no longer to look at yourself, you look only at the sole Beloved Therese stands therefore in the true Augustinian tradition of "*non parum, sed nihil*"; "**Maybe, if Peter had caught a few *small fish*, Jesus would not have worked a miracle, but he had *nothing*, so Jesus soon filled his net, so that it almost broke.**"

From all this it is clear that for Therese the idea of a perfection resulting from one's own efforts was an Old Testament concept; that is where she relegates the "**great achievements**" of the "**great saints**" whenever they are really the results of personal effort rather than of God's grace. She herself allots the "**great**" asceticism of perfection to the Old Testament and the "**little**" asceticism of love to the New: "**I am but a weak and helpless child; yet it is my very weakness that makes me dare to offer myself as a victim of Your love, O Jesus! In earlier times only pure and spotless holocausts were acceptable to the strong and mighty God: perfect victims were needed to satisfy divine justice; but the law of love has replaced the law of fear, and love has chosen me for a holocaust, weak and imperfect creature as I am! Is this choice not worthy of love?**"

The change in the holocaust is not carried out in an arbitrary fashion but in response to a change in God's demands. Previously God himself demanded complete justice; now he asks for love. God himself has transformed the justice of the Old Testament into the mercy of the New. Whereas in the Old Testament justice ranks first amongst God's attributes, in a way restricting and limiting love and mercy, in the New Testament it is so outshone by love that justice ranks as one quality of God's love. Love is the revelation of God's innermost being: "*God is love*" (I John 4: 8) we are told -- never "God is justice". Consequently justice can only be eternal and infinite in so far as it is one with the boundless love of God; if it ever seems to impose limits on love (as in the economy of the Old Law), then it can only be a temporal and finite revelation of God's being.

By demolishing the limits which the old conception of justice imposes on love Therese reaches the peak of her theological audacity. She refuses to acknowledge that there is the same tension in God between justice and love as there is between the Old and New Testament, or between fear and love. She refuses to relegate God's justice to the Old Testament and, therefore, to the law of fear. "**Fear brings us only to Justice... to *strict Justice as it is shown to sinners*, but that is not the *Justice Jesus will have for those who love Him*.**" She insists that we should take the Pauline gospel of the *Dikaiosyne Theou* seriously; it is a gift of God's grace, and has to be treasured as an essential part of the New Testament.

At the end of the first draft of her manuscript she lets us in to the inner chamber of her theology:

"It seems to me that if all creatures received the same favors God would be feared by no one, and loved even unto folly; no longer would any soul commit the least voluntary fault, refraining out of love, and not out of fear. At the same time I realize that all souls cannot be alike; there must be different families of them, so that each may specially honor some divine perfection. To me He has allotted His INFINITE MERCY and this is the incomparable mirror in which I contemplate the other attributes. There they all appear to be radiant with love -- *justice*, in fact, perhaps more than any other, seems to be bathed in love. What a sweet joy it is to think that the Lord is just, which means that He takes our weaknesses into account and is perfectly aware of the frailty of our nature! What, then, need I fear? The good God who is infinitely just and deigns in His great mercy to pardon the faults of the prodigal son, must He not *be just* to me also, *who am always with Him?*"

Thus Therese sees it as her special mission to view all God's attributes in the light of his merciful love; his love is not simply connected with the other attributes, it embraces them. Even his justice is manifested and comprehensible through love. And Therese attaches the greatest importance to having her teaching on this point properly understood. Not many months before her death, on the 16th July 1897, she says to Pauline: "In my manuscript I have only said a word or two on the good God's justice. But if you wish you can discover my whole mind on this matter in a letter to Father Roulland, where I have explained it at length." This letter, however, though very valuable, does not really take us beyond the point in the *History of a Soul* which I have quoted above: Therese writes to her missionary-brother P. Roulland as follows: "I know one must be most pure to appear before the God of all holiness, but I know too that the Lord is infinitely just; and it is this justice, which terrifies so many souls, that is the basis of my joy and trust. To be just means not only to exercise severity in punishing the guilty, but also to recognize right intentions and to reward virtue. I hope as much from the good God's justice as from His mercy -- because He is '*compassionate and merciful, long-suffering and plenteous in mercy*'."

Once again she rejects the parallel between fear and hope on one side and justice and mercy on the other. The New Testament hope is equally directed towards each of these attributes. The novelty in this text is that here Therese is pointing towards God's justice as the source of his mercy, whereas in the other text she describes justice more as a quality immanent in God's love. However one may interpret the mutual inherence of justice and mercy one thing is certain: the regards of virtue on which she sets her heart in this letter should not be seen, in the Old Testament sense, as repayment for good deeds. This would mean that Therese was now questioning everything she had said earlier, and casting doubt on the whole of her mission. What she is saying, in fact, is that in the New Testament God distributes rewards in virtue of his grace; the reward is one factor within his uncovenanted mercy. God is so merciful that he *even* rewards virtue.

Therese has now arrived at the classical formula of Catholic teaching on merit: St. Thomas Aquinas on the one hand bases the correspondence between merit

and reward upon the free disposition of divine love, and on the other hand takes supernatural love in man as the principle of all merit (S. Th. I-11, q. I 14, a- 4, C).

Therese takes one final step further when she quotes Psalm 35: 5 as her justification for confining God's primitive justice to the temporal, finite economy of salvation whereas she regards the realm of merciful love (in which God's justice is immanent) as eternal and ultimate. "If Your justice desires to work itself out, even though this world is its only field, how much more Your merciful love desires to inflame souls, since *'Thy mercy reaches even to the Heavens'.*"

Consequently Therese does not offer herself as a victim of divine mercy. She has struggled out beyond the limits of fear to the place from which she can say, with St. John *"He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him. In this is the charity of God perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as he is, we also are in this world. Fear is not in charity: but perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain. And he that feareth is not perfected in charity "* (I John 4: 16-18). From now on, true to the spirit of St. John, Therese is beyond fear, making room within herself for the fullness of love to dwell. From now on she places her life beneath the law of complete love and considers that the fire of love is more effective in purifying her than the fear of purgatory.

Once the complete surrender to merciful love has been made, "...love surrounds and penetrates me; at every moment this *merciful love* renews and purifies me, leaving no trace of sin in my heart. No, I cannot fear Purgatory: I know that I should not deserve to enter that place of expiation along with the holy souls; but I also know that the fire of love is more sanctifying than that of Purgatory. I know that Jesus cannot desire useless suffering for us, and that He would not inspire me with the desires I feel if He did not wish to fulfill them..." "How can He possibly let Himself be outdone in generosity? How can He purify in the flames of Purgatory souls consumed in the fires of divine love?"

Whoever places himself beneath the law of divine love for good and all is in truth beyond judgment and no longer needs to fear it. One novice was "extraordinarily frightened of God's judgment; and in spite of everything she [i.e. Therese] said to me nothing could drive away my fear ". Therese shows her the only way to escape the judgment, which is *"to appear before God empty-handed"*, and so deprive him of any matter for judgment. We should not hold on to any good that we do, but pass it on immediately." 'But', I broke in, 'if God does not judge our good actions He will judge our bad ones, and then?' *'What is that you are saying? Our Lord is justice itself. If He does not judge our good deeds, neither will He judge our bad ones. It seems to me that there will be no judgment for the victims of love; rather the good God will hasten to bestow eternal bliss upon them, rewarding His own love which He sees burning in their hearts'.*"

Once more it is not merely in virtue of his mercy, restraining his justice, that God does not pronounce judgment, but in virtue of his very justice, in so far as it is one with his love. Within love, divine justice discerns a certain correspondence

and proportion between love as it is in God and love as it is in the believer who has accepted and preserved the love of God, through grace. The property of perceiving this proportion is the justice of God's love and automatically dispenses eternal rewards.

Consequently the person in whom grace dwells must order all his thoughts according to the law of love, and must abandon all judgments: "Yes, it is the Lord, it is Jesus who judges me! And in order to secure a favorable judgment, or rather so as not to be judged at all, I wish my thoughts to be charitable always, since He says, '*Judge not, and ye shall not be judged*.'" And with the judgment almost in sight: "If you only knew how mild my judgment will be! For even if the good God scolds me a little, I shall still find it mild. '*For to him that is little, mercy is granted*' (Wisd 6: 7). And it is possible to stay little even when one is entrusted with responsible positions and lives a long life...It is written that '*in the end the Lord will rise up to save the lowly and meek of the earth*'. It does not say, to judge, but to save."

This whole process of demolishing the "great way", the way of justification by works, has shown the little way of love to be the only way. It is the way of grace, and of the New Dispensation, but it is not on that account the easier way. Although Therese depicts the great way as involving extraordinary penances and heroic deeds -- the vocation of the few -- and contrasts it with the little way, along which all little souls have to follow her, she herself knew from hard experience how much determination it requires. Isolated acts are not enough; it demands one's whole being. What matters is not the act but the condition of the soul from which it proceeds. It stands in the same relation to the other way as does the knight to the soldier in Suso's vision. Nor does Therese hesitate to describe the "way of weakness" as the more meritorious: "What merit would you earn if you had to feel full of courage before you would fight? What does it matter if you feel like it or not so long as you behave as if you did? If you find yourself too tired to pick up a bit of thread, but do so nevertheless for the love of Jesus, you gain more merit than if you were to perform a much more remarkable deed in a moment of fervor."

It requires more spiritual courage to make light of one's sufferings, or to say nothing about them, than to attract other people's admiration and pity. On one occasion when a novice deemed herself to have performed an "heroic act of virtue" Therese, not without a certain sarcasm, relegates her to the ranks of the beginners: "What is that little act of virtue in comparison with what the Lord might legitimately demand of you? You ought rather to feel humble at having neglected so many opportunities of proving your love." Celine regrets that the enthusiasm she felt on first entering the convent has evaporated. "That was simply youthfulness. Real courage does not consist of that momentary flush in which one longs to go out and capture souls in the face of every danger, which only lends a delicious attraction to this beautiful dream. To be really brave means asking for the Cross when one's heart is full of fear, and withstanding this fear like Our Lord in the Garden of Olives."

This is the most difficult of all, to go on suffering when one is weak, and it is precisely because she can manage it that Therese seems hard, almost Nietzschean. A Sister had remarked: "I do not like to see people suffering, especially holy people." Therese took her up straight away: "Oh! I am not a bit like you! Holy people suffering never rouse my pity. I know that they have the strength to bear their sufferings, and that it enables them to give God great glory; but those who are not holy, who do not know how to profit from their sufferings, oh, how sorry I am for them! How much pity I feel for *them!* I would move Heaven and earth to console and relieve them!"

She sugars the bitter pill with humor sometimes, as in the anecdote from her childhood, when a horse was blocking the garden-gate and the grown-ups did not know how to get past; in a twinkling Therese scrambled through between its legs. "Why do you always try to fly above temptations? just *pass underneath*. It is all very well for the great saints to fly over the clouds when the storm is raging; we simply have to put up with the showers. So much the worse if we get a little damp! We can dry ourselves afterwards in the sun of love."

There is something military about the way she makes light of difficulties and suppresses her complaints. Serving with the colors we take many troubles in our stride which would have made us grumble for hours in civilian life! That is the ethos of the little way. There is much sound, Gallic irony in Therese of Lisieux's make-up. Typical of her attitude is the image in which she manages to combine motifs from the first Psalm and St. Paul, Pascal's famous "*roseau pensant*" and La Fontaine's fable of the oak and the reed. "What does it matter to the *little reed* if it bends? It is in no fear of breaking, for it has been planted on the edge of the waters. Instead of touching the earth when it bends, it meets only a pleasant wave which gives it new strength and makes it long for another storm to break over its frail head. It is its weakness that gives it all its confidence. It could not possibly break since, whatever happens to it, it sees only the gentle hand of Jesus."

To demolish the ethic of good works produces the very opposite of Quietism. In fact, it empties the soul of all its own perfections, which are always "full of blemish before God", in order to free it for the service of Christ which far exceeds its own strength: to be perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect. Therese well knows what this command with its tremendous promise demands of her. "Celine, do you think that St. Teresa received more graces than you?... for my part I do not tell you to aim at *seraphic* sanctity, but simply '*to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*'... Ah! Celine, our *infinite desires* are after all not dreams or fantasies, since Jesus Himself gave us this *commandment*."

By-passing the fruitless discussions as to whether the Sermon on the Mount is "practicable" -- a discussion only indulged in by the faint-hearted and the theorists -- Therese simply takes Our Lord's statement as a command. And she sets about putting it into practice at the very point which Christ indicates -- "*Be*

you therefore perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect . . . who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and the bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not also the heathen this? " (Matt. 5: 48, 45-7). Therese strives to make love of her neighbor and her enemy an all-embracing law reaching to the smallest details of life. By doing so she allows the will of the heavenly Father, as manifest in the Son, to do its work in her.

"Judge not, then you yourselves will not be judged." **"To try to convince our Sisters that they are in the wrong is not fair play even if it is true -- because we are not responsible for their conduct. We must not be *judges of peace* but only *angels of peace*."** In her chapters on loving our neighbor (i.e. chs. ix. and x.) Therese herself took good care to illustrate her every theoretical observation with some practical anecdote. And the more one studies the picture which emerges the more its supernatural pattern stands out.

Therese's masterpiece is not the result of strenuous human application -- if it were nothing but that it would belong to the Old Law which Therese had rejected. It is so light and transparent, so sunny and smiling, so seemingly ordinary, that it can be regarded as the clearest sign of the grace welling up within her. It is a miracle of divine grace for which Therese had prepared the way, clearing aside every obstacle to God's perfect love. Humanly speaking, the whole drama seems to be one great "as if", a straining and perversion of human nature. One must behave like everyone else, not leaving the ranks either for weal or for woe, not pushing oneself forward or becoming the center of attention; one must behave as if there were nothing lacking... No! One should not behave *as if* one were of no importance; one must know that it is, in fact, true, and that what ever one does, thinks or feels is really not worth talking about or calling attention to.

One of her Sisters later testified that Therese was certainly good and conscientious, but nothing outstanding. She had nothing to suffer, and was rather insignificant... virtuous, certainly -- but that is no tremendous feat when one is blessed with a happy disposition and has no need to struggle through suffering to virtue, as "we others" have to... Another Sister, during recreation, remarks: "I cannot understand why people speak of Sister Therese of the Child Jesus as if she were a saint. She never does anything notable. One never sees her practicing virtue, and so one cannot even maintain that she is a good nun." Or according to another version: "She did indeed practice virtue, but her virtue was not acquired through humiliations and suffering."

Therese is as light as a feather -- **"By the grace of God I try hard not to burden others with the trials which God deems good for me."** She had demolished herself so completely that she personally weighs nothing; her only weight is the weight of love.

CONSTRUCTION

In its negative aspect the little way means demolishing the structure of "great deeds ". If this were its only result it might just as well be described as the way of

mediocrity or fecklessness. But in fact it is the way of New Testament love, a way therefore which leads *"unto the end"* (John 13: 1). Yet Therese does insist that it is a quite ordinary way and is for everyone: *"In my little way there are only very ordinary things; it is essential that little souls should be able to do everthing I do."*

Therese had emptied her soul of all her own perfections and deeds to create room for the love of God within her. She did not even clear aside the "moral virtues " so as to leave more room for the "infused virtues". She does not make room for virtue, but for God: all that matters now is that God wishes to be loved and must be loved. Not until her last years does the whole depth of this mystery open up before her.

She explains this herself in the concluding pages of her original manuscript: *"During the year 1895 I received the grace of understanding better than ever how much Jesus desires to be loved."* In her earlier writings, her poems and letters, we find scarcely a trace of this insight. Until now her vision had stretched no further than the need to love God. Her love was an urge and a longing to surrender herself utterly. Now she sees further: God wishes to be loved. God urgently needs the creature to demonstrate his love and pour upon him the free stream of his love. God wishes to redeem; he wishes to show mercy. But he can only do so when his love is free to overflow into the world, into the **hearts** of men. But that is just what is prevented everywhere; everywhere his love is misunderstood and rejected. *"...The hearts on whom You wish to lavish it turn towards creatures, seeking happiness from them in the miserable satisfaction of the moment instead of throwing themselves into Your arms and embracing the blissful furnace of Your infinite love... O my God, must Your despised love remain shut in Your heart for ever? It seems to me that if You were to find souls offering themselves as SACRIFICIAL VICTIMS OF YOUR LOVE, You would consume them rapidly and be glad not to restrain the flames of tenderness shut up within You."*

In the same year Therese composes two little mystery-plays dealing with the same thought. In "The Divine Child begging at Christmas ", the Christ Child is depicted as subject to all human needs, all of which are equally love's needs, and may be satisfied by love in its different forms. This same thought constantly recurs as the *leitmotif* of "Jesus in Bethany " : *"Yes, it is your heart that I desire,"* says Jesus, *"I came down to it from Heaven, leaving infinite glory for the sake of it. You have understood the mystery which brought Me down to earth: the interior soul is much more precious to Me, much more precious than the Glory of Heaven."* God is the beggar of love. It means that love of man is transformed into the *pure service* of God's love, and this service extinguishes the last remnants of self-seeking in human love, in Christian love even. Faith, hope and charity become what Christ wills them to be: a living re-presentation of the Father, which means the pure service of the Father's will.

The *"little way"* that Therese now constructs comes from renouncing everything in Christian love which seems to lend it greatness, power and glory. Love is

brought to a state of weakness in which it learns the power of divine love, of littleness and darkness in which the greatness and glory of divine love are displayed. The basis of the little way, therefore, is one series of renunciations after another.

The first renunciation is of the pleasure and joy that accompany love. At a very early date we find her writing: "I need to forget the earth; here below everything wearies me, everything is an effort, I find only one joy, to suffer for Jesus... But this *unfelt joy* is above every joy... I hit upon the secret of suffering in peace. The word peace does not mean joy, at least not felt joy; to suffer in peace it is enough to will whatever Jesus wills." Unfelt joy; peace, not joy; a first formula in which to express the mysterious transcendence of Christian love. For that is the purpose of it all: to transfer the impulse towards acts of faith, hope and charity, away from the subject into God himself.

One year later: "If you knew how great is my joy at having no joy, to give pleasure to Jesus! . . . It is the essence of joy (but wholly unfelt)." Once more we perceive the subtlety of her psychological reflections, the joy of *unfelt* joy; but the purpose is plain enough: "To give pleasure to Jesus." In this way faith itself is drawn out of its own center: "If you are willing to bear serenely the trial of being displeasing to yourself, you will be to Jesus a pleasant place of shelter; you will suffer, of course, for you will be outside the door of your own home; but have no fear, the poorer you are the more Jesus will love you."

And since faith seizes upon the whole of a person, the whole person is drawn out from himself into the transcendence of the act of faith. Certainly he still commits acts and feels their stress, but now they are centered outside his own experience. For instance he suffers, and is at the same time beyond suffering. "*He is not here, for he is risen.... Come, and see the place where the Lord was laid*": commenting on this text, Therese says: "That is, I am no longer susceptible, as I was in my childhood, to every sorrow. I am, so to speak, risen. I am no longer in the place people believe. Mother, do not worry about me; I cannot suffer any more, because all suffering has become sweet to me."

To be placed outside the door of one's own home is a great grace, for it gently compels us to stop living unto ourselves. "When we are brought to misery we have no desire to gaze at ourselves, and we turn our gaze towards the One beloved. The good God does not compel us to remain in our own society; he arranges that we should find it so intolerable as to have to leave it. And I see no other way of becoming free from oneself than to visit Jesus and Mary." "How wearisome is company when Jesus is not there!" Therese is taken at her word when she renounces all desire for feelings or visions in her faith. The more she offers the more God takes, until all her feelings are hidden in God, and she is left in the darkness of naked faith. "I have no wish to see the good God whilst I am on earth. And yet I love Him! I also love the Mother of God and the saints very dearly, but I do not wish to see them either. I would rather live in faith"

Naked faith for her is not, as with St. John of the Cross, a transition-stage towards a condition in which the soul can gaze upon itself without danger. They quoted to her a sentence from St. John of the Cross, and applied it to her: "The souls which have arrived at perfect love can contemplate their own supernatural beauty without danger." Therese answered: "What sort of beauty? I cannot see my beauty at all. I see only the graces which I have received from God."

Renunciation of one's feelings in love and faith includes renouncing the sight of their fruit; and the specific fruitfulness of the supernatural virtues is derived from the latter renunciation. During her retreat before Profession, during which her Spouse seeks to detach her from all but himself, he does indeed "lead her by fertile and magnificent country-sides, but the *night* prevents her from admiring anything, and, what is worse, from enjoying all these marvels ". "Nor must you desire to see the fruits of your efforts, " she writes to Marie Guerin. "Jesus likes to keep for Himself alone these little nothings which console Him." And to the novices: "Offer to the good God the sacrifice of never collecting your own fruits. If it is His will that all your life long you feel repugnance at having to suffer and being humiliated, and seeing all the flowers of your desires and goodwill fall to the ground without bearing fruit -- do not be disturbed."

Therese on her sick-bed is like a tree which lets its fruit fall unregarded, and therefore does not worry about it. "I cannot bring myself to say, 'Dear God, this one is for the Church; this other, dear God, for France', and so on. The good God knows already what use He will make of my little merits; I have given Him everything so that He may have the joy of it, and in any case it would make me dizzy to be saying at every moment, 'Give this to Peter, and that to Paul'. I do it quite automatically when a Sister asks me for some special purpose, but after that I never think of it. When I am praying for my missionary brothers, I do not offer up my sorrows. I say simply, 'Dear God, give them everything I wish for myself'."

When the fruit vanishes from sight, however, it takes away the consciousness of achievement, and leaves one feeling incapable of anything more. Quite early she writes to Celine: "What unutterable joy to bear our crosses FEEBLY! ... The *grain of sand* would set herself to the task without joy, without *courage*, without *strength*, and all these *conditions* will make the enterprise easier, it wants to work for love." "Here are we wanting to suffer generously, greatly... What folly!... We want never to fall? What does it matter, my Jesus, if I fall at every instant, for thereby I see my weakness, and that for me is great gain."

Not until we are suffering without display, but suffering in weakness, are we really suffering with Our Lord: "It is very consoling to remember that Jesus, the *God of Might*, knew our weaknesses, that He shuddered at the sight of the bitter cup, the cup that earlier He had so ardently desired to drink." The desire for martyrdom may prove to be one of those spiritual treasures which "*make us unjust* -- when we rest in them complacently and think they are something great. These desires are a consolation that Jesus sometimes grants to weak souls like mine (and such

souls are numerous) but when He does not give this *consolation* it is a grace of *privilege*. Remember the words of the Father [the Jesuit, Pichon], 'Martyrs have suffered with joy, and the King of Martyrs suffered with sorrow' . . . Are you not ready to suffer whatever the good God wants? I know well that you are; then if you want to feel joy in suffering, to be drawn to it, what you seek is your own consolation, for when one loves a thing, the pain vanishes -- one must consent to stay always poor and without strength, and that's the difficulty, for where are we to find the man truly poor in spirit ... Ah! Do let us stay *very far* from all that is brilliant, let us love our littleness, love to feel nothing, then we shall be poor in spirit." "*Please understand that to love Jesus, to be His victim of love, the weaker one is, without desires or virtues, the more apt one is for the operations of that consuming and transforming Love.*"

And Therese is again relentlessly taken at her word, as the end of her life brings her nearer at each step to sheer impotence -- for the first time, perhaps, in the history of mysticism we find a privileged soul who has passed through the Passion but whose Resurrection is put off into the next world. She hangs there suspended unto death: "I shall never know how to die!... I cannot go on!... I can't breathe, I can't die! "

More important even than the renunciation of her strength is her renunciation of progress. Not that life in God means standing still, and accepting a condition where nothing happens. On the contrary, God asks us to step out, one foot after the other. But these steps do not mark any progress. When one's vision is obscured and one loses all sense of what has been achieved it becomes impossible to measure distances. That is why Therese invokes the eloquent image of the underground journey.

Our Lord asks her where she wishes to travel; as a good Carmelite she chooses the ascent to the summits of love. And immediately she is confronted with many different paths; she feels incapable of basing her choice on her own survey; she leaves the way to the divine Leader. "*Then Jesus took me by the hand and brought me into a subterranean way, where it is neither hot nor cold, where the sun does not shine, and rain and wind do not come; a tunnel where I see nothing but a brightness half-veiled.... My Spouse says nothing to me, nor do I say anything to Him either, save that I love Him more than myself, and in the depth of my heart I feel that this is true, for I am more His than my own!... I do not see that we are advancing toward the mountain that is our goal, because our journey is under the earth... I shall consent, if it is His will, to walk all my life the dark road upon which I am, provided that one day I arrive at the goal of the mountain of love, but I think it will not be here below.*"

This also is something new in the history of mysticism, and of tremendous significance. Every means of measurement is abandoned and the measure rests with God alone. Nor is this just an episode, a dark but temporary night of the senses or the spirit; it is lasting, unto the end. The difference from St. John of the Cross -- and particularly from St. Teresa -- is more marked than ever; they faced

the road, walked it and put it behind them, whereas she goes on striding endlessly in the darkness, below the earth, without bearings. Instead of the satisfaction of climbing higher, she puts one foot in front of the other along a road whose direction God alone knows.

That is the message in her metaphor of the little bird vainly fluttering its wings: "I wish to fly, I wish to imitate the eagles; but the most I can do is to flutter my little wings; it is not within my poor power to fly off... But if You should remain deaf to the plaintive chirpings of Your pitiful creature, if you remain in obscurity... Very well! Then I am content to remain drenched, numb with cold, and I shall even rejoice at this suffering which is so well merited." We are reminded again of the child trying in vain to climb the stairway: "You be that child, keep on lifting your little foot ... but do not imagine that you will ever be able to reach even the first step."

The three images, of the subterranean way, the little bird and the tiny child, together convince us of the truth that all Christian effort is *but a beginning*. Only God can bring a work to perfection; and the more a Christian realizes that his efforts are but a beginning the more room God is allowed to achieve perfection. Therese stands by this teaching right up to the end: "If I am ever inclined to get worried because of some misguided words or thoughts, I turn towards myself and say, 'Ah, still standing at the same spot as at the beginning!' But I say it to myself very peacefully, and without sadness. It is so good to feel one's weakness and littleness."

This quotation shows that the renunciation of progress is only complete when a person realizes that falls are inevitable. The natural man wishes to climb or at least to stand. But Jesus, who descended from heaven, chooses to fall. "Why should it frighten you that you cannot bear His Cross without weakening? On the way to Calvary Jesus fell three times; and you, a poor little child, would not be like your *Spouse*, would not fall a hundred times, if need be, to prove Him your love by rising up again..." "He would rather see you striking your foot against the stones of the way by night, than walking in broad daylight along a road gemmed with flowers which could easily slow your advance." "You are wanting to climb a mountain, whereas the good God wishes you to climb down. He is waiting for you in the fertile valley of humility." Once more it is the trick of slipping underneath: "Pass underneath . . . that is the advantage of keeping little."

But there is a finality about this decision to "slip underneath", for the person doing it knows there will be no standing upright again, only the ultimate fall into the hands of God. A week before her death: "This afternoon I heard the answer given by one of the Sisters when someone asked how I was, 'She is terribly tired'. And I thought to myself, that is very true. I am like a tired traveler arriving worn out at the end of the journey. Yes, but it is into the arms of the good God that I am falling." And again this falling shows the advantages of being a little person; children do not fall far. "Children often fall, but they are too little to do themselves serious harm."

We must also, however, renounce any heroics in our falls. If our Lord deigns to share his falls with us that is no reason for us to start comparing our own with his. Children's falls are usually the result of faults or silly mistakes. And it is not until *those* falls are taken at their true worth that Therese is completely sure that her little way is valid. During her younger days this had proved the tender point at which her scruples and anxiety had festered. This was also the point where the flow of healing began when she was assured that there are faults which do not offend the good God.

This assurance was given to her during conversation with P. Alexis; she was confirmed in her belief that there is a narrow but vital area between sin, which can never be permitted, and a faultlessness which cannot be attained -- and ought not to be sought, on account of the danger of Pharisaism. Therese has again introduced something original into the tradition of Christian spirituality, which had previously drawn a straight line from mortal sins to venial sins through imperfection to the point where perfection is reached in an immaculate condition of sinlessness.

For Therese there is no such simple diagram. There are faults which do not offend God. There are even faults which it is better to have committed if one would otherwise have missed the grace and tears of repentance through not falling. *"Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven he loveth less"* (Luke vii. 47). *"I know that a mother is ready at any time to forgive her child for small, indeliberate bits of naughtiness... Children are always up to something: they tumble over, get themselves dirty, break things, and yet their parents love them very much."* P. Alexis told her that her little faults were no concern to God. But two years before that she had written to Pauline: *"It seems to me that Jesus could very well give one the grace never to offend Him again, or rather to commit only faults which do not OFFEND Him, but merely have the effect of humbling oneself and making love stronger."*

We can well understand, therefore, why she should say that P. Alexis' words were *"nothing else but the echo of my innermost thoughts"*. The discovery originates in her own experience and could only have been made in connection with her doctrine of childhood, which does not propose any abstract norm of perfection but is adapted to every stage of human development with all its vicissitudes. Taken in the abstract the notion of a fall is inseparable from that of defeat and disgrace. But the same is not true in the realm of love, where a man's fall is incorporated into the law of Christ's fall, which is itself one moment in the downward movement of Christ from the Father to the world, to the Cross, to hell. For this is the realm where God or his angels quickly set everything right. *"At the moment of Communion I liken my soul to a little baby of three or four whose hair is all tangled and his clothes all dirty as a result of playing -- these accidents have happened to me through struggling with souls -- but soon the Virgin Mary takes me in hand. She quickly takes off my dirty little pinafore, straightens my hair and adorns it with a pretty ribbon or simply with a little flower... and that is*

enough to make me presentable so that I can take my place at the feast of angels without blushing."

There are certain conditions which make these falls and faults permissible, and Therese adheres to them most faithfully: one must stand up again immediately after falling and return to the way of perfect love. "For those who love Him and, after each discourteous act, cast themselves into His arms and ask pardon, Jesus is vibrant with joy. We must humble ourselves, see our own nothingness, which is what many souls will not do." This immediate conversion is not called forth by the shame a person feels that such a thing could happen to *him*. If that were its basis it would still be dominated by the Old Testament ideal of perfection. Its only adequate basis is the need to have God's light streaming over the whole of one's soul. "If we meekly accept the humiliation of being imperfect then the grace of God's love returns to the soul immediately." Neither the desire for perfection nor its renunciation acts as her standard. The one standard is love, the love of God and the loving response to it of the soul which puts itself entirely at the disposition of God's love.

By this time it has become clear what this way of renunciation involves, and what a surprise it holds in store for those accustomed to traditional spirituality: Therese's demand that we must even love our own imperfection and not long to escape from it. First the joy of being treated as weak and imperfect. "What you need, what is most profitable for you, is that you should be found imperfect. When creatures realize that you are without virtue that deprives you of nothing and does not make you any the poorer; it is they who lose inner joy! For there is nothing sweeter than to think well of our neighbor... For myself it is a great joy not only when others find me imperfect but, above all, when I feel I am."

The first thought was traditional. The originality comes in the conclusion. "Now I have reconciled myself to seeing myself imperfect always and even to finding my joy in it" -- and this knowledge is connected with another one, which clarifies it: "At the beginning of my spiritual life, at the age of about thirteen or fourteen, I asked myself what I should learn later; I then thought it impossible for me to understand perfection better; but I realized very quickly that the further one advances along this road the further from the goal one believes oneself to be."

It is indeed the case that the feeling of getting nowhere is a sort of indirect guarantee of being on the right road. Yet Therese's joy has an even deeper foundation -- a genuine love of her imperfection. "How fortunate I am to see my imperfection, to need God's mercy so greatly at the hour of my death." Mercy can only be fully accepted with the whole soul by a person who feels a deep need for it. Faults are welcomed as occasions of humility towards God: "Whenever I have been guilty of a fault which causes me sorrow, then I know that this sadness is a result of my infidelity. But I do not let it rest at that. I say to the good God, 'I know that I have deserved this feeling of sorrow; nevertheless, let me offer it to You as a trial bestowed on me by Your love. It grieves me that I have done it, but I am glad to have this sorrow to offer to You!'"

They are also occasions of humility towards one's neighbor. When she was seriously ill one of the Sisters asked her to perform some superfluous service: Therese, betraying her momentary annoyance, then stood there silently blushing. "That evening she wrote me a little note, 'This evening I have again shown you my 'virtue', my 'store' of patience. I, who am so good at preaching to others! I am glad that you were present to observe my failure. You did not correct me, and yet I deserved to be... Oh, how it does me good to have behaved badly; I prefer to have failed rather than to have appeared, by God's grace, a model of gentleness. It helps me beyond measure to find that Jesus is just as gentle and loving towards me as ever'." It is better to feel humbled through remembering one's faults than to be self-satisfied at the thought of one's conquests. "The remembrance of my faults humbles me and prevents me from ever relying upon my own strength, which is only weakness; it just tells me more and more of God's mercy and love."

Not that Therese loves her weakness for its own sake. But she prefers to be in a condition where she is naked to the grace of God. Weakness, not only physical but moral weakness, also brings with it a marked sensitivity to grace which she would not have apart from her failures. Therese's Christian view of time as a constant encounter with eternity demands this refinement of her soul if her whole being is to be bared to the whole stress of God's love. In this fallen world that is only possible through constant humiliations. Without them the soul would soon relapse into contentment and transform the uniqueness of eternity into a long extent of time.

And since this encounter with eternity in faith, hope and charity is not a measurable "experience" the refinement of soul is not directed towards exquisite feelings but towards a more intense fidelity, described in the New Testament as patience. Infidelity, according to Therese, stands very close to unbelief: "Mother, if I were to be unfaithful, if I were to commit the very least infidelity, I should have to expiate it with the most frightful mortifications and it would leave me incapable of facing death. I always pray to the good God, 'O God, preserve me from the misfortune of infidelity'. From any involuntary thoughts of my own superiority, such as imagining that I have acquired some virtue which I am certain to be able to exercise. For then I should be relying on my own strength, and whoever does that is in danger of plunging into the abyss. If I were to say, 'O God, You know I love You too much to be disturbed by thoughts against faith', this would so increase my temptations that I should undoubtedly succumb to them."

One would have to be blind not to see that Therese's doctrine of the little way answers point by point the programme outlined by the Reformers, and that she presents the Church's bold, irrefutable answer to Protestant spirituality. One can find innumerable points of contact between Therese and the Reformers: the rejection of Old Testament justification by works; the demolition of one's own ideal of perfection to leave room for God's perfection in man; the transcendent note in the act of faith, the center of which remains in God; the existential fulfillment of the act of faith, which means more than a mere intellectual assent to

the content of faith and involves utter personal fidelity towards the personal truth of God; and, finally, disregard for one's own failings -- even for that joy over them which says *felix culpa*.

But the contrasts between Therese and the Reformers are equally striking. Therese's little way is a way to perfection, a way for those who have courageously resolved to love and to do nothing else but love. And the faults of which she speaks are not the sins which Luther had in mind; they are "**faults which do not offend God**". What divides Therese from Luther is that the drama of sin never entwines itself round her soul. She recognizes the drama of God's descending into the nothingness of the creature and the flame of love with which the Absolute, God, unites himself to his creature's nothingness. But she is only acquainted with this drama within the framework of her experience in the cloister. It is Luther's error to have profaned mystical truths, which presuppose an intimate exchange of love between God and man, by treating them as general formulae for the sinner's relation to God. Therese's mistake is to have restricted the whole drama between God and the soul to what happened in her own exceptional case. But more of that later.

* * *

The succession of renunciations demanded by Therese has been entitled "Construction" because they represent the steps leading directly to the state where each new call of God's love finds its response in faith. These renunciations form the entrance to the realm of ultimate love, a love so delicate as to require special laws for its workings. Here every obligation is simply the external expression of one's deepest desires; the most exacting commands are simply preparations for that free response to love which for the lover is far more compelling than the sternest command.

Because the Son of God is perfect love the Father's wish is a command to him, which he freely fulfils -- he can do no other, for "*at all times I do what is pleasing to the Father*". All lovers love freely, and freely take upon themselves the command of the beloved. They treat his wishes as commands, and subject themselves to him as servants; to those standing outside this relationship it is all incomprehensible, they cannot grasp its laws. Few theologians have shown the same skill as Therese in mapping out the realm of love; she has sketched a sort of map of the spirit on which certain hills and rivers are noted for the first time. But how much even then she has left to be discovered!

Therese begins, as is the custom amongst saints, at the point where most Christians leave off -- where what God commands shades off into what he "merely" wishes. But again, like all the saints, she realizes that this shading is deceptive, because the supreme commandment of love includes every one of God's wishes. Only a person who is neither saint nor lover would dream of separating the obligation *ex justitia* from the free gift *ex caritate* in this commandment which requires a man's whole and undivided **heart**. For the saint

caritas becomes *justitia*; if he were ever to make the distinction in his own case he would know that he was not obeying the law of perfect love.

We have Therese's own word for it that she had never refused any of God's wishes since the age of three. As was pointed out earlier, since reaching the age of reason her relationship towards God had never been legal, but always personal. When fulfilling God's commands and wishes she never thinks about herself, about how wonderful or sorrowful she finds it or what reward she will receive. She thinks only about God, whom she loves -- whether this or that is the way to give him joy, or how she must act in order to come into line with his will.

The care she expends will appear exaggerated to the average Christian; the unbeliever will treat it as crude anthropomorphism. Therese knows better. For her there is nothing more tender than God and his love, nothing more delicate and precious, requiring to be handled with the utmost care. And if it seems that the eternal Godhead of inaccessible light and absolute power has no need of such attentions, still she knows that the Son of Man, tender of heart, whose face is hidden in sorrow, is the true revelation of God's being. Therese wishes all her life long to be doing what Veronica did once: to console Our Lord, and lighten his burden by her boundless self-surrender. Here, more than ever, we must allow her to speak for herself.

"Our Lord is thirstier than ever. He finds His disciples in this world lukewarm and indifferent; and amongst *His own disciples* He finds very few, alas, who surrender themselves unreservedly to the tenderness of His boundless love. How favored we are to be able to understand the intimate secrets of our Spouse." "When I was a postulant it cost me a great deal to perform certain exterior penances customary in our Order; but I never gave way to my repugnance, for it seemed to me that the Crucifix in the courtyard was looking at me with imploring eyes and begging these sacrifices of me."

As soon as she catches God's eye she finds it impossible to deny him anything. "O Jesus, we seem to hear You say, '*Open to Me, My sisters, My spouses, for My face is wet with the dew, and My locks with the drops of the night*' [Cant. v.]. Our souls understand the language of Your love; we long to wipe Your sweet face and console You for the neglect of the wicked. In their eyes You are still '*as it were hidden . . . they esteem You as an object of reproach*'... Knowing that the thirst which consumes You is a thirst for love we desire infinite love in order to quench Your thirst." "Then all *shall* be for Him, all! Even when I feel nothing that can be offered to Him, I shall (as tonight) give Him that nothing!" "Let us, let us suffer for them [i.e. bad priests], and on the last day Jesus will be *grateful*."

"I am sending you a lovely picture of the Holy Face which our Mother gave me some time ago. I find that it goes so well with Marie of the Holy Face [i.e. Celine's first name in Carmel] that I cannot keep it for myself; *for a long time now I have been thinking of giving it to my Celine, my Celine*. Let Marie of the Holy Face be another Veronica, wiping away all the blood and tears of Jesus, her *sole Beloved*. Let her win Him souls, especially the souls she *loves*... Let her boldly

face the soldiers, that is to say the world, to come to Him... Oh! how happy she will be when one day she gazes in glory upon the *mysterious* draught with which she has slaked the thirst of her heavenly Spouse, when she sees His lips, once parched, open to utter for her the *unique and eternal* word of love! "

"His look was as it were hidden!... it is still hidden today... for who comprehends the tears of Jesus?... *forgetfulness* -- I feel that that is what causes Him most pain." "He makes Himself poor so that we may be able to do Him charity; He stretches out His hand to us like a *beggar*, that upon the sunlit day of judgment, when He appears in His glory, He may be able to utter, and we to hear, the loving words, '*Come, blessed of My Father...*'" "Let us rejoice in our lot, it is very lovely! Let us give, give to Jesus, let us be misers to others, but spendthrifts to Him!"

So this very descent, this emptying of the soul, is simply a spontaneous gesture of love, an automatic movement to catch him as he falls, so that he lights gently on the ground without being hurt. "*Make haste, and come down*' was what Our Lord said to Zachaeus. Jesus tells us to come down! But where must we come down? Celine, you know better than I... '*the birds of the air have their nests, but I have not where to lay My head*'. That is where we must come down, if we are to serve as a dwelling for Jesus; we must be *so poor that we have not where to lay our heads...* Jesus wants us to receive Him in our hearts; by now, doubtless, they are empty of creatures; but alas! I feel that mine is not wholly empty of me, which is why Jesus tells me to come down. And I too want to hide my face, I want my Beloved alone to be able to see it ... that in my heart at least He may lay down His dear head and feel that there He is recognized and understood."

This care for our Lord eventually becomes the essential mark of sanctity. She writes to Leonie (who had left the cloister for the second time): "If you want to be a saint, it will be easy ... you have but one goal: to give pleasure to Jesus."

In order to please those who are suffering one has to tread lightly, not to disturb them. A novice imagined she was doing a great work when she promised that in future she would not cry anywhere except in the presence of God. Therese answered vigorously: "Cry in the presence of the good God! Do nothing of the sort. You ought to be less sad in His presence than in the face of creatures. Goodness! Our dear Master has only His monasteries to gladden His **heart**; He comes to us to rest, to forget the ceaseless complaints of His friends in the world; because generally people on earth moan and groan instead of appreciating the value of the Cross; and you intend to be just the same as other mortals? Really, that is not selfless love. *It is up to us to console Jesus, not up to Him to console us.*"

It is less from her words than from the uncompromising way she unmasks any hidden self-pity that we see how she is in earnest; and she assumes that anyone with the least inkling of Christianity must share her attitude. Thus she manages to smile during the prescribed scourging, "so that the good God does not notice

how it hurts me". "Let us make our heart a little garden of delight where Jesus may come to find rest." "When I am suffering a great deal, instead of adopting an air of sadness I answer with a smile. At first I never used to manage it, but now it is a habit which I am very glad to have contracted." "It hurts the good God enough to have to test us on earth without having to listen to us complaining of how hardly we are being used. So we should not let anyone notice how we are being hurt. It is really a question of delicacy and tact not to complain of the heat and cold, or wipe away sweat, or rub our frozen hands together -- or if we do, to do it secretly, so as not to reproach the good God." "The sufferings which God sends us are tokens of His love and favor. How boorish it would be to accept them with a gloomy countenance, and so burden Him with our ingratitude!" "Alas, it is great pain to Him thus to fill our cup with sorrows, but He knows that it is the only way to prepare us 'to know Him as He knows Himself'."

In one of her poems Therese asks the Mother of God: "Tell Him never to be embarrassed with me." Nor must he be allowed to think that our sole concern has been for the reward. "If the good God did not see my good deeds I would not worry over it. I love Him so much that I am glad to give Him pleasure with my love and my little sacrifices, without His needing to know that they come from me. By knowing about them and seeing them He is, so to speak, obliged to reward me, and I want to spare Him the trouble." One must constantly smile at him even when he hides himself or sends us suffering: "My smile shall shine upon Him whom I love, even when He conceals Himself in order to try me." "Comfort this Child, dear Sister, who stretches His arms towards you. To comfort Him I beseech you to smile without ceasing." And when He is weary the Christian should be ready to fight in his place. When getting up in the morning Therese used to kiss the Crucifix, lay it upon her pillow and then say: "My Jesus, You labored and wept enough during the thirty-three years of Your life on this poor earth! This day, take Your rest... It is my turn to fight and suffer."

One must not only smile upon him, one must also do everything to bring a smile to his lips. "I wish for no other joy but that of making You smile." "The great saints have labored for the glory of God. I, who am but a little soul, labor only for His pleasure, and I would be happy to bear the very greatest suffering if that would make Him smile just for once."

Yet all this is not an "achievement", an expression of her own "tender heart", but an attempt to respond to the untold, overwhelming tenderness which God showers upon us. The first essential is to see God's attentions towards us for what they are. "I am very glad that you feel no natural sense of pleasure in coming to Carmel. That is Jesus' *delicacy*, He wants to receive a *present* from you. He knows that '*it is much more blessed to give than to receive*'." And when Therese feels herself to be a castaway she interprets this as a sign of how the divine Shepherd trusts her, for he lets the faithful sheep wander off to bring back those that are lost. "How I am touched by this trust."

And as if to assure her, during the night of temptation, that it is he who is testing her he sends external tokens of it ---little favors. He sends her flowers; a robin redbreast hops onto her bed, looks at her knowingly and then performs lots of amusing antics. "Mother, I am terribly moved by these favors which the good God is showing me; to all appearances I am loaded with them... and yet I remain in the deepest darkness..." And when the infirmarian renders her an unexpected service: "I looked at her without being able to speak, and as soon as I was alone I burst into tears. How good Our Lord is! How tender and loving! How easily His heart is touched."

Here Therese truly lives up to her name, "of the Child Jesus." Although the substance of her piety is more fittingly described by her title "of the Holy Face", she conceals the pain of it in the imagery of childhood. It makes all her movements light and quick, unhampered by care. Childish imagery is the reflection of a much wider reality -- of the all-embracing universe of love -- the universe of play. Whilst the adult groans under the curse of original sin the child abandons himself to play, which originates in Paradise and is the creaturely reflection of God's creative act. God is at play with men; that is, he handles them in a divine fashion, according to his own laws -- for there are none higher.

Quite early (perhaps through contact with the Italian people?) Therese entered into the spirit of divine play: "For some time past I had offered myself to the Child Jesus to be His *little Plaything*. I told Him not to treat me like a precious toy such as children only look at and dare not touch, but like a little ball of no value that He could throw on the ground, kick, *pierce*, leave in a corner or press to His , just as He pleased. In a word, I *wished to amuse the little Jesus and abandon myself to His childish whims*. And He has granted my prayer. In Rome Jesus *pierced* His little toy ... *no doubt He wished to see what was inside* ... and then, satisfied at His discovery, He dropped His little ball and went to sleep."

"Do you wish to give Him pleasure? Then stay in His hand. May the darling Child stroke you and draw you to His breast, and occasionally throw you aside -- let it all be your joy. Let His divine glance fascinate you so that you may respond to His every whim. Henceforth all your joy will be found in His childish desires." In the same spirit she composes the prayer: "O little Child Jesus! My one treasure, I abandon myself to Your divine whims, I wish for no other joy but that of making You smile." "I am willing to suffer all that Jesus pleases, to let Him do as He likes with His *little ball*."

And again, in a less composed mood: "He RIDDLES me with *pin-pricks*, the poor *little ball* can take no more; all over it are tiny holes which cause it more suffering than if it had but one great gash!... Nothing from Jesus. Dryness ... Sleep! But at least there is silence! Silence does good to the soul...But creatures, *creatures!* ... The *little ball* shudders at the thought of them ... Realize that it is Jesus' *toy*. When it is that loving Friend who pierces His *ball* Himself, suffering is only sweetness, His hand is *so sweet!* But creatures ... Those who surround me are good, of course, but there is a touch of something in them that repels me! ... I

can't explain it to you ... All the same I am VERY *happy*, happy at suffering what Jesus wants me to suffer. If He does not Himself pierce His *little ball*, it is He who guides the hand that pierces it! ... Jesus chooses to sleep, why should I keep Him from sleep? I am only too happy that He does not put Himself to any trouble about me." "But *Jesus' toy* is weakness itself; if Jesus does not carry it, or throw His *little ball*, it stays there, inert, on the one spot."

Besides the little ball Therese invokes skittles and tops in order to illustrate aspects of the spiritual life. These similes, harsh, almost crude, become laughing and joyous in Therese's hands, as when she describes the lashes needed to keep the top turning. "Let your Sisters perform this service for you, and be particularly grateful towards those who are most bent upon keeping you going..." And finally everything likely to gladden the Child and turn into a toy in his hands is tipped into the crib: birds, stars, roses, grapes, pillows, flowers, bread, milk, mirrors cakes, honey, a little lamb, sweets and everything else that might fill a child with gladness.

But a child cannot always be praying, it must also sleep. This childish sleep is Therese's wonderfully sweet version of the dark night. "What did He do during His gentle sleep, and what became of the abandoned ball? Jesus dreamed that He was still playing, that He kept flicking the ball up and putting it down, that He sent it skimming away and finally pressed it to His Heart, never to let it go out of His hand again. You will realize the little ball's sadness, Mother, at finding itself on the floor! However, it never ceased hoping against hope." And she sings a little cradle-song with no echo from the mysterious night of darkness and abandonment in the background.

Si tu veux te reposer,
Alors que l'orage gronde,
Sur mon *coeur* daigne poser,
Ta petite tote blonde
Que ton sourire est ravissant
Lorsque tu sommeilles!
Toujours avec mon plus doux chant
Je veux te bercer tendrement,
Bel Enfant!

If you wish to rest while the storm is raging, deign to place your little golden head upon my heart.

How entrancing is your smile as you sleep! Lovely Child, I long for ever to rock you gently as I sing my cradle-song.

Then again the confession: "Jesus, the tiny child of Bethlehem whom Mary bore as '*a light burden*', grows heavy, so heavy that St. Christopher marvels..."

"Most people on earth are only willing to serve the King of Glory; if Jesus goes to sleep they stop serving Him or believing in Him. But the Child Jesus loves to go to sleep in safety, without fear of being wakened." Why not serve beside the crib? Since entering Carmel it had become normal for Therese to find Jesus sleeping. "As always, Jesus was asleep in my little skiff. Ah! how rarely I find souls

prepared to let Him sleep there. Our good Master is so weary through making fresh approaches and advances that He gladly accepts the rest that I offer Him. Doubtless He will not wake up before my great retreat into eternity."

But it needs two to play at this sleeping game. During the time of prayer when she would have loved to sing her comforting cradle-song to the sleeping Lord, she too sleeps. "It ought to worry me that I fall asleep during meditation and thanksgiving..." "During meditation, without wishing to, I shut my eyes and go to sleep, and believe all the time I am looking on my Beloved..." "Distractions and sleep interfere with my thanksgivings; so that it is by no means rare for me to resolve to continue my thanksgiving throughout the rest of the whole day, having done it so badly in choir."

What a distressing contrast between the exalted desires of the nun, and the modest, almost shameful, reality. In fact, Therese had never been able to meditate in the manner of the "great saints ". And when she is nearly dropping through fatigue she has to use a book as a crutch to help her through the period of meditation. "In my helplessness the Holy Scriptures and the Imitation come to my aid ... But it is the Gospels more than anything else which hold my attention during meditation." Therese's meditation never went further than a meditative reading of Scripture, and of the Gospels particularly, on which she nourished her spirit and devotion whenever sleep was threatening her fidelity to the Rule.

Moreover, even this humiliation is woven into her mystique of childhood. "It ought to worry me that I go to sleep during meditation and thanksgiving. Well, I don't worry! I think of how little children are as charming to their parents when they are sleeping as when they are awake. I also think of how doctors put their patients to sleep before operating on them. Lastly I think of how *Our Lord sees our weakness and knows that we are but dust.*"

The first comparison is in line with her usual teaching: she is God's child and can sleep without offence; this is also true of the third comparison where she relies on God's knowing our human frailty. But what strikes one about the second is that she shifts the responsibility onto God; he puts her to sleep, because he is obviously using this sleep for some special purpose, and through knowing this Therese has little cause to worry. She treats this petty weakness as a fulfillment of God's will, to which she is abandoned. We scarcely need to stress that Therese can only take this line in virtue of her scrupulous, heroic fidelity to the Rule, and her fervent desire to stay awake and pray as long as possible. Her "taking it lightly" has nothing in common with everyday carelessness; it is entirely derived from supernatural love.

This lightness has its own center of gravity, at the point where utter weakness is transformed into a strength that appears effortless. "What does it matter whether you have courage or not, so long as you behave as if you had!" Having trained herself to regard only her Beloved's reactions ("I do not desire love that I feel, only love that Jesus feels"), she lives outside herself all the time, yet without

enjoying mystical ecstasies. She experiences the one essential ecstasy, to be drawn by love into the Beloved. When her Beloved is happy, she cannot help being happy, whether her natural self is suffering or joyful. "If only He is satisfied with me, then I am more than happy." "Nothing else satisfies me except to do the will of God." "I have come to the point where I cannot suffer, because all suffering has become sweet to me."

The fact that she lives in a region beyond herself in no way implies that she wanders around in a rapturous condition. On the contrary she is as natural as could be, living in the sort of familiarity with God that God intended when he placed man in the garden of Eden. She writes to her cousin Marie: "You seem to me like a little village girl to whom a mighty king proposes marriage, and who dares not accept, because she is not rich enough, nor trained enough in the usages of the court; she does not reflect that her royal suitor knows her quality and her weakness much better than she knows it herself... Marie, if you are nothing, you must not forget Jesus is all."

True love is without affectation, is perfectly natural. There is a touch of irritation in one of her last letters, a reply to Abbe Belliere, who had begun to feel rather depressed and inferior in face of Therese's greatness and had tearfully described his own sinfulness. "Please, Brother, do not follow the example of the Hebrews who looked back with longing to 'the onions of Egypt'. For long I have served you too many of those raw vegetables which make you *weep* when you bring them, raw, too near to your eyes ... You must know me very imperfectly, to fear that a detailed account of your faults would lessen my affection for your soul ... Jesus has long forgotten your infidelities Please, I beg you, never again '*drag* yourself to His *feet*'; follow the 'first impulse which would draw you into His arms'... I would have you to be simple with the good God and with me too."

Just as she wishes God not to be embarrassed with her, similarly she refuses to be embarrassed by him. The way she speaks of him often seems to us bordering on irreverence. But she is a child, at home with him. And Therese possesses a quality which we seldom find in the realm of sanctity (though Thomas More, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Ignatius of Loyola had it), and which must be reckoned as one of God's good gifts -- a sense of humor. "Personally I find perfection quite easy to practice because I have realized that all one has to do is *take Jesus by the heart*. Consider a small child who has displeased his mother, by flying into a rage or perhaps disobeying her; if he sulks in a corner and screams in fear of punishment, his mother will certainly not forgive his fault; but if he comes to her with his little arms outstretched, smiling and saying: 'Kiss me, *I won't do it again*', surely his mother will immediately press him tenderly to her heart, forgetting all that he has done... Of course she knows quite well that her dear little boy *will do it again* at the first opportunity, but that does not matter; if he takes her by the heart, he will never be punished..." And the more daring sentence: "If He seems to forget me, very well, He is free to since I am no longer mine, but His ... He will weary of keeping me waiting sooner than I of waiting for Him."

The way of childhood offers no recipe for sanctity: Christianity does not dole out recipes. It is an attitude which colors everything and can therefore be displayed in ever-varied aspects, although its each aspect is quite clear and unique.

Therese herself attempted many times to give a brief synthesis of her little way, using aphorisms which were usually unprepared answers to sudden questions.

"The little way . . . *is the way of spiritual childhood, the way of trust and total surrender.* I wish to point out [to people] the little methods which have served me with perfect success; to tell them that there is only one thing to do here below -- to strew before Jesus the flowers of little sacrifices, and win Him with caresses."

"To remain little means recognizing one's nothingness, expecting everything from the good God, *as a little child expects everything from his father.* It means not worrying about anything nor being on the lookout for favors... I have always remained little, having no other ambition but to collect flowers of love and sacrifice and offer them to the good God for His pleasure. Again, to stay little means not attributing the virtues we practice to ourselves, under the impression that we are capable of such things, but to recognize that the good God places this treasure of virtue in the hand of His little child for him to use as he needs it; and that it remains God's treasure."

And finally she expresses it in theological terms which knit together the themes of St. Paul and the Gospel:

"We must do everything that is within us: give without counting the cost, practice the virtues at every opportunity, conquer ourselves all the time and prove our love by every sort of tenderness and loving attention. In a word, we must carry out all the good works that lie within our powers -- out of love for God. But it is truly essential to put our whole trust in Him who alone can sanctify our work, who can indeed sanctify us without works, since He may even bring forth children of Abraham from the very stones. It is necessary for us, when we have done all we can, to confess that we are *unprofitable servants*, whilst hoping that God in His grace will give us all that we need. That is the way of childhood."

The little way is *one* way, yet it is also *the* way. It is one way in the sense that it differs from other ways, above all from those of the "great souls" who go in for extraordinary penances and receive extraordinary mystical graces. But since neither the Gospel nor the great saints themselves reckon these latter as essential to Christian love, but recognize that love of God and one's neighbor contains the whole of the law, and all mysticism and asceticism, Therese's way, which makes this love absolutely central, can be described as *the* way.

There are many reasons for this epithet "little". In the first place, because it bypasses extraordinary methods with a warning against them, and, like the Gospel itself, presupposes everyday life as its field of application. Again, because it can find no better picture to express the soul's eagerness to receive God's love than that of a little child aware of its littleness before God. Lastly, because it is a short way: it eliminates all measurable distances and, if it is really followed, keeps one in immediate contact with one's goal.

But it is not at all little in the sense that, as opposed to the way of the "great souls", it is for the "imperfect", who hesitate and compromise. Otherwise it would not be a Christian way, for Christ's way leads without compromise to perfect love. What, then, are the hosts of the imperfect and the sinners to do? Is there no way for them? Of course; they are just the people for whom the little way has been prepared. They only need to enter upon it and expose themselves to the rays of divine love, and this fire will certainly not fail to purify them.

The objection that Therese's little way makes it all too easy is far less justified than the suspicion that it be ins too high and presupposes too much. For even though Therese tries her hardest to encourage the sinner, turning round all the time to show him just how closely he may follow her footsteps, and proclaiming her own solidarity with sinners, it is still true that her basic presupposition is that of a saint: that life has no meaning unless it is the service of God.

In fact, once a person has grasped this everything else follows automatically. And such a person will find in Therese the most delightful guide to love. But if he does not grasp this, or tries to add other possible meanings to life, then it will be useless for him to try to adopt any part of Therese's system. This system is indivisible, like the love of God and the Gospel. *"Who is not for me is against me."* *"No man can serve two masters."*

Therese cannot make the way any smoother than Christ himself made it. And insofar as she presupposes that the first step, that of total surrender to God's love and service, has already been made, her little way is meant specially for religious, who have already "abandoned all things". Primarily Therese is writing for her Carmelite Sisters; only after finishing the manuscript does it dawn on her that the effect of her writings might extend beyond the walls of the Carmel. In her letters, moreover, she tries to lead everyone to the religious life who shows a real desire for absolute surrender to God. In this sense, too, her way is *the way*, the continuation of the Gospel and the age-old tradition of the Church.

This summary of the little way cannot be concluded without a reference to how infrequently a central Christian doctrine is mentioned in it: the doctrine of the Trinity. Obviously Therese is not ignorant of this doctrine, and she invokes it decisively in places. Her act of oblation to the merciful love of God is drawn up on the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity 1895, and accordingly she addresses God: **"O My God, Blessed Trinity, I desire to love You, and make You loved."** She also makes a striking comparison between the Trinity and the kaleidoscope with the three mirrors in its tube, through which one can see creatures as they are meant to be. And at the end of her eleventh chapter she prays to the Lord, the divine Eagle, to **"carry all souls away and plunge them into the very heart of the Blessed Trinity, the eternal home of love"**.

However, only two aspects of the Blessed Trinity are concretely manifest in her teaching: The Son incarnate, the suffering Savior, who invites man to co-operate in his work and to whom we can offer all our love; and then the Father, but not so much the Father in his trinitarian relations with the Son and the Holy Spirit, as the

Father who represents divine goodness and mercy, and in whose arms we can nestle. He is also the heavenly realization of all the goodness she found in her earthly father.

The fact that Therese did not see further into the interior life of the Trinity and its reflection in the economy of salvation is to be explained by her peculiar approach to theology. Her teaching is far too narrowly conditioned by her own life: she has to demonstrate it all in her own person, and even her life cannot demonstrate such an objective, massive doctrine as that of the Trinity. Consider the way in which her visions (infrequent though they are) all refer specifically to herself: she sees the devil who flees *before her*; she sees the Mother of God, who smiles at *her* and approaches her, and the whole vision is directly related to *her* cure.

Thus her teaching cannot be explicitly Trinitarian; for this she would have needed a quite different, almost antithetical, basis of experience. Elizabeth of the Trinity is able to develop an explicitly Trinitarian doctrine because her mind goes out towards its object so completely, leaving only the very slightest scope for her own personality and history -- just sufficient to remain a subject for the operations of the Trinity. If she has barely sufficient personality, Therese has more than enough.

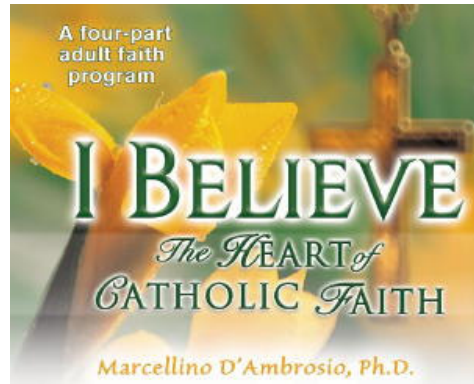
Another possible explanation of why Therese does not emphasize the doctrine of the Trinity, and especially the operations of the Holy Spirit, is that she never establishes any vital relation with the Church's ministry. After her father her only confidants were her Sisters; she never had a discussion with a confessor which went beyond subjective considerations and dealt with objective, hierarchical relations. Through the power of the Holy Spirit a saintly confessor is in a position to detect the work of the Holy Spirit in a soul; once this atmosphere of confidence is established it leads to objective exchanges free from personal overtones yet calculated to call forth the deepest truths about a person.

It is by means of this sober relationship, grounded in obedience, that the confessor can lead a soul to understand objective dogmatic truths about God. Therese had opened herself up to these truths but the recipients of her confidences were her Sisters, not a confessor. They had not the capacity to lead her further, and so her doctrine is confined to the little way. Here she is both original and masterly. She knows it inside out, because she has experienced it and tested it on herself. Her childish delicacy leaves the inner mystery of God untouched. It is enough for her to know about love, how to love and to be loved. Yet she even understands divine love in terms of human love, which reaches its summit in the love of the God-Man. She surrenders herself to this love and lets it master her, without going into its distinctions. And so to the end she remains the child trying to lift its foot, unable to get its foot onto the first step up the stairway.

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