

Thérèse of Lisieux: The Appeal of a French Saint at a Time of International Crisis

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Thérèse Martin (1873-1897), known as Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, or often simply as Thérèse of Lisieux (henceforth Thérèse), was canonised in 1925. Her cult enjoyed almost immediate cross-generational, cross-class and truly transnational appeal on, as many argue, an unprecedented scale. Men and women alike were devoted to her. Biographies and studies of her writings and spirituality abound.¹ However, it is less common for scholars to consider the wider historical context of the Thérèse “phenomenon” and its intertwining with the institutional life of the Church across national boundaries. It is the broader transnational and institutional aspect of the cult of Thérèse in the middle years of the twentieth century that is the focus here. My paper aims to fill a gap in our understanding of the impact of the young French Carmelite nun on modern Catholicism and constitutes a preliminary study for a larger project that explores the cult of Thérèse and involves historians coming to the subject from different national perspectives.² This is not a systematic study of a particular body of evidence related to Thérèse’s life or her writing. Rather it draws on material broadly dating from the period between 1920 and 1960 which reflects lay and institutional evocations of Thérèse within and outside France.

Introducing Thérèse

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¹ See, among countless others, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*, trans. Donald Nicholl (London, 1953); Michael Hollings, *Thérèse of Lisieux* (London, 1982); Monica Furlong, *Thérèse of Lisieux* (London, 1987); Thomas R. Nevin, *Thérèse of Lisieux: God’s Gentle Warrior* (Oxford, 2006). Nevin’s book contains a useful annotated bibliography.

² This paper was first presented in a panel at the Seventeenth George Rudé Seminar at the University of Sydney in 2010. Alana Harris and Julie Thorpe were the other two speakers in the panel and their papers were entitled “Bone Idol? The Tour of the Relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux to England, 2009” and “Thérèse in Austria” respectively. A version of Thorpe’s paper appears in this volume.

Thérèse's story is well known. This provincial French girl, much loved and loving, was the product of a family whose pious bourgeois domesticity provided the foundation for a life lived in the fulfilment of a vocation of which she had become aware at an early age. Thérèse entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux at fifteen, having audaciously – and now famously – requested permission to do so during an audience with the Pope in 1887. Two of her sisters were already in the convent when she entered, and thus Thérèse was able to maintain her close family relationships. In 1895 she started to write recollections of her life and spiritual journey, having been strongly encouraged to do so. On Thérèse's untimely and painful death from tuberculosis at the age of 24, the manuscripts were brought together with much editing and circulated among the Carmelites in lieu of an obituary. First published in 1898, one year after her death, *Histoire d'une âme* (Story of a Soul) was a condensed version of her writings and enjoyed what can only be called a stupendous success. Within a short period, hundreds of thousands of copies were sold, and it was translated into many languages.³ Thérésian iconography depicts the saint in her Carmelite habit holding a crucifix and a bunch of roses “in memory of her promise to ‘let fall a shower of roses’ of miracles and other favours.”⁴ In some Catholic quarters there was a strong reaction against Thérèse: in their view the “Little Flower” as she was often called – insufferable, immature and provincial child of bourgeois Catholic conformism – was an inappropriate model for the modern Catholic woman and for the modern Church.⁵ But her devotees, coming from all levels within the Church, outnumbered her detractors by the millions, as the response to Thérésian spirituality attests.

Histoire d'une âme outlined what became known as Thérèse's “Little Way,” and it was upon this teaching that her reputation as a theologian would rest. In 1943 Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) described this Little Way as “a lane, by-passing the main road of the heroic.” Sackville-West went on to explain that Thérèse's was “a small orbit but it comprised nothing less than perfection.”⁶ A 1927 French Catholic encyclopedia, *Ecclesia*, describing the different qualities of the great saints, noted that Thérèse “died in the cloister at the age of 24 without having done anything save her daily duty and ... immediately attracted to her flower-bedecked tomb the wonderment of the universe.”⁷ Sackville-West observed that it would be very wrong to undervalue the effort expended in the fulfilment of that daily duty as if it came easily to Thérèse: “In its very smallness it was in a sense the natural outcome of her upbringing and her circumstances, though not of her temperament.”⁸

³ For information on the manuscripts, see *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, 3rd edition translated from the original manuscripts by John Clarke (Washington DC, 1996). See also the extensive scholarship on the subject of Thérèse and her writings by Claude Langlois including: *Les dernières paroles de Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris, 2000); *Le désir de sacerdoce chez Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris, 2002); *Le poème de septembre: Lecture du manuscrit B de Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris, 2002); *Lettres à ma Mère bien-aimée, Juin 1897: Lecture du manuscrit C de Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris, 2007); *L'Autobiographie de Thérèse de Lisieux: Édition critique du manuscrit A (1895)* (Paris, 2009); and *Thérèse de Lisieux et Marie-Madeleine: La rivalité amoureuse* (Grenoble, 2009).

⁴ David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 1978), 374.

⁵ For a summary of some negative reactions to Thérèse see Thérèse Taylor, “Images of Sanctity: Photography of Saint Bernadette of Lourdes and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux,” *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 27:3 (2005): 269-92; and Barbara Corrado Pope, “A Heroine without Heroics: The Little Flower of Jesus and Her Times,” *Church History* 57:1 (1988): 46-60.

⁶ Vita Sackville-West, *The Eagle and the Dove: A Study in Contrasts* (London, 1953 [1943]), 140.

⁷ R. Aigrain, ed., *Ecclesia: Encyclopédie populaire des connaissances religieuses* (Paris, 1927), 78.

⁸ Sackville-West, *The Eagle and the Dove*, 149.

The cause for Thérèse's canonisation was introduced in 1914, very soon after her death, and it proceeded with uncharacteristic speed. She was beatified in 1923 and canonised two years later. A number of French saints were canonised in the interwar period, including other nineteenth-century figures like the Curé d'Ars (Jean-Baptiste Vianney, 1786-1859) and Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1870). Joan of Arc had to wait much longer than Thérèse and was only canonised in 1920. Indeed, like Joan, most of the other new French saints predated Thérèse by at least a century.⁹

As I have intimated, Thérèse's story is well known and has been told many times. There have been some variations in the interpretation of her life and writings, often attributed to the fact that it was not until the early 1950s that a definitive edition of *Histoire d'une âme* appeared. Some claim that the publication of this edition precipitated the transfiguration of Thérèse from a saccharine "goody-two-shoes" into a robust, heroic example of independent womanhood. However, other factors were important in this evolution in Thérèse studies including the influence of psychology, feminism, Catholic reformism, the so-called cultural turn and post-modernism.¹⁰ For all the permutations in interpretations of the saint's life, it could be said that works on Thérèse generally tend to situate her in a narrowly national historical setting which pays cursory, if any, attention to the conjuncture of institutional Church and social history, and international affairs. Often, also, works on Thérèse are personal and inward-looking, reflecting the writer's attachment or otherwise to the saint, while the overwhelming emphasis in Thérèse studies is on the details of her life and writing. Thérésian spirituality is, as one might expect, a primary focus and the subject of countless publications: compared to other saints, even her contemporaries, she left many traces of her life for us to sift through, and in 1997 she became one of only three women to be declared a Doctor of the Universal Church. My preliminary study draws in part on this vast body of work, but my interest is in the relationship between the cult of Thérèse, the institutional life of the Catholic Church and religious practice from the 1920s to the end of the 1950s.

Within and Beyond the Nation: Interpretative Models

The approach I am suggesting begins by inviting reflection on Thérèse's cult, or "Transnational Thérèse," from the perspective of her place in the universal Church at a time when communications (among other things) facilitated greater uniformity in Catholic devotional practices and permitted greater controls from Rome. Thérèse's specifically French religious identity coexisted with, and arguably determined, her appeal as a saint of the universal Church. I take the point that we can identify links between reactionary Catholic politics in France and its Ultramontanism. Historians have studied the devotional practices associated with Marian piety, various cults (for example, of the Sacred Heart) and saints like Thérèse who seem to typify the sorrowful sacrifices offered up by a bleeding (anti-modern) Church.¹¹ However, as Caroline Ford shows, the hitherto generally accepted dichotomies, pitting progressive republican feminism against reactionary Catholicism, for example, are too neatly

⁹ For reports on the canonisations see, for example, "Une nouvelle sainte française," *L'Illustration*, 30 May 1925, 528-31; and Albéric Cahuet, "Les nouveaux saints: À la recherche du Curé d'Ars," *L'Illustration*, 20 June 1925, 622-25.

¹⁰ See Taylor, "Images of Sanctity" and Pope, "A Heroine without Heroics" for a discussion of the changing nature of Thérèse studies. See also Nevin, *Thérèse*.

¹¹ See, for example, Richard D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970* (Ithaca, 2004).

drawn and indeed inadequately explain the experiences of women in nineteenth-century France, a large proportion of whom were Catholic.¹² Ford takes a number of case studies and reveals the multiple and subtle ways in which various political and social norms shaped and were shaped by the example of female religious in France. Ford's approach, in part, informs my study, especially in its attempt to generalise from particular examples. However, I am also drawn to the transnational context that remains largely unexplored in Thérèse studies.

Sociologists, economists, historians and political scientists all explain the concept of transnationalism differently.¹³ The transnational premise of my study is, firstly and quite simply, that if we are seeking to establish the nature of Thérèse's appeal and significance after her death, the subject is best, even more fully, understood outside of the narrowly national setting.¹⁴ This is especially so given the nature of the Catholic Church in the modern period and the potential for multi-national and transnational perspectives on Thérèse's cult. Further, my relational and structural approach to the comparative and transnational treatment of Thérèse in Catholic history is eminently suitable for the study of the Church, the quintessential transnational institution.¹⁵ This is important for many reasons: it takes Thérèse out of the nationally or regionally insular context in which we tend to view her; it grounds the theological and spiritual focus of the bulk of Thérèse scholarship in a more strictly (methodologically) historical context; and it provides us with the opportunity to contribute to the debate about the nature of the "feminised Church" from the example of the cult of Thérèse.

Among other issues, the idea of the feminisation of the Church in France relates to the incredible surge in the number of women entering religious congregations and in the number of new congregations established by and for women in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ It also refers to the fact that more women than men practiced the faith and the argument that this imbalance supposedly resulted in a more "sentimental" or feminised religious teaching and practice.¹⁷ There were just under

¹² Caroline Ford suggests "it is at best problematic to equate female religiosity with the survival of a kind of traditional 'premodern' Catholicism that subjected women in the modern age." See her *Divided Houses: Religion and Gender in Modern France* (Ithaca, 2005), 14.

¹³ For a summary of various approaches to and interpretations of transnationalism see Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt, "Constructing Transnational Studies," in *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections and Innovations*, Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt, eds. (New York, 2008), 1–18. See also Patricia Clavin, "Defining Transnationalism," *Contemporary European History* 14:4 (2005): 421–39; and *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, eds. (New York, 2004).

¹⁴ According to Khagram and Levitt this is the "philosophical" premise that the subject is "inherently transnational." See "Constructing Transnational Studies."

¹⁵ See Philipp Ther, "Beyond the Nation: The Relational Basis of a Comparative History of Germany and Europe," *Central European History* 36:1 (2003): 45–73. Ther discusses the insights gained from comparative approaches to the study of institutions and structures which transcend or cross borders. The subject of German cultural history also lends itself to this kind of analysis, for example. Ther argues that German cultural history encompasses much more than what was produced within the boundaries of present-day Germany and that it hence makes more sense to study it in a transnational context. For an interesting discussion of some methodological questions see also Vincent Viaene, "International History, Religious History, Catholic History: Perspectives for Cross-Fertilization (1830–1914)," *European History Quarterly* 38:4 (2008): 578–607.

¹⁶ For the monumental study of the characteristic features of this expansion see Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin: Les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1984).

¹⁷ For a good introduction to the notion of the "feminised Church" see Ford, *Divided Houses*, "Introduction," 1–16.

400 congregations founded in France between 1800 and 1880, and over 200,000 women joined them. This was much greater than the total number of priests and male religious. The experience of persecution in the Revolution and the religious renaissance in its wake explain in part this development, as does the fact that the religious life offered women unparalleled freedom to pursue “careers” and a lifestyle that would otherwise have remained closed to them.¹⁸ How this phenomenon relates to gendered interpretations of the history of the Church as a whole beyond the potentially confusing concept of “feminisation” has yet to be established. It is tempting to differentiate between the active and contemplative congregations and orders on the grounds that choosing one over the other might imply a division between progressive individuals who wanted to be in and of the world and reactionary recluses who sought to escape it. However, this paradigm is too simplistic. These women, it could be argued, were connected rather than separated by their religiosity. Furthermore, the divergence between the spiritual and the temporal, between the contemplative and the active, was never so clear-cut.

As we have seen, it has been observed that the various evocations of Thérèse over time were incompatible and even, according to some, mutually exclusive. This observation suggests that successive waves of superior scholarship gradually revealed the strong (that is “true” or “real”), as opposed to saccharine (or “manufactured”), Thérèse. Such a distinction, I would suggest, is itself another of the false dichotomies that pervade the study of modern Catholic faith and practice.¹⁹ It remains the case that many Thérèse scholars are concerned with establishing the “true” meaning of her teaching and emphasise different elements in this quest. The questions that occupy them might include her desire to be a priest, the nature of the darkness of her final days (indicating doubt, according to some), or her relationships with her family and the other nuns. In contrast to this, my focus is on the relationship between religious practice and teaching, international crisis and the cult of Thérèse.

Among the Church’s concerns in the period under review were declining religious practice in the “old world” and the need for more intense missionary work in the “developing world.” The Church was also vexed by the challenges associated with the polarization of politics in the wake of the Great War. Thérèse figured in various strategies devised by the Church to offer guidance in the twentieth century. Episcopal pronouncements alluded to the links between Thérèse’s Little Way and the choices available to Catholics caught up in the ideological wars of the twentieth century. Furthermore, Catholic practice and devotional life comprised one of the mechanisms by which one’s local or regional and national identities coexisted with a transnational or universal Catholic identity as the example of the cult of Thérèse would seem to attest.

Peeling back layers of the “false” or “manufactured” Thérèse in order to find the “true” Thérèse takes her out of the changing historical context of her cult and fails to account for the fact that the prevailing characteristic of devotion to Thérèse, from the outset, was its catholicity. It is not the incompatibility of the different evocations of Thérèse, but their compatibility, that is important here. The idea that we can juxtapose the “true” Thérèse, as recognised by a Catholic elite, against an impostor, loved by the (inevitably Right-wing) masses perpetuates the dichotomous approach

¹⁸ Karen Offen “Review of Langlois’ ‘Le Catholicisme au féminin,’” *Journal of Modern History* 58:3 (1986): 731-33.

¹⁹ In studies of modern Catholic worship, for example, the following dichotomies are routinely evoked: progressives versus reactionaries, intellectuals versus anti-intellectuals and elite practice versus “simple faith,” with the latter generally associated with peasant beliefs and practices or “popular religion.”

which collapses under close scrutiny. Her child-like manner, emphasised in idealised Thérésian imagery, did not subsume or obscure that fastness of character that underpinned Thérèse's yearning for perfection in the fulfilment of her vocation. The "strong" Thérèse was more than evident at an early stage to her devotees and in 1914, when Pius X called her "the greatest Saint of modern times."²⁰ We can observe this in the causes, private and public, to which her cult was attached.

The First Wave of Devotion and the Beginning of the Crisis

Favours and cures attributed to Thérèse were recorded within in two years of her death. Between 1899 and 1902, that is within a year of the publication of *Histoire d'une âme*, pilgrims came to Lisieux to pray at her grave.²¹ Soon large numbers of people outside her provincial community felt a close affinity with Thérèse, on whose intercession they had relied for their personal intentions. That, in part, explains the incredible rapidity of the spread of devotion to her. Very early on, however, the Thérèse cult was also associated with causes of great magnitude, nationally and internationally. Her preference for the contemplative life, possibly the result of her fragile health as well as her background, was not an impediment to this association.²²

During the Great War, devotion to Thérèse intensified on every front, in the fields of battle and at home. Countless images of Thérèse and holy medals were distributed. Thérèse was the source of consolation and, it would seem, favours and miracles within and beyond France. On the eve of war, the Carmel of Lisieux received two hundred letters per day acknowledging or seeking the intercession of Thérèse. This increased to five hundred daily as the war proceeded.²³ An American, Alvan F. Sanborn, writing in 1929, explained that the cause for her beatification proceeded so quickly and smoothly partly because "the *poilus* wanted it."²⁴ Annette Becker has shown that together with another young French woman, Joan of Arc, Thérèse was called upon to protect France.²⁵ The two were seen to be complementary, exhibiting different forms of heroism both of which were necessary for salvation. Joan had saved France, and Thérèse would renew its faith. (As we will see, there was a similar response during the Occupation of 1941-1945). In the interwar years there was a rebuilding programme created to restore and reconstruct churches damaged in the Great War. An initiative of Cardinal Verdier, Archbishop of Paris between 1929 and 1940, and called the "Chantiers du Cardinal," it also involved the construction 100 new churches in Paris – mostly in the *banlieue* – in the 1930s.²⁶ The provision for decoration and statuary, often resulted in the twinning of freshly cast statues of the recently canonised Joan and Thérèse in many of the churches of the capital, both new and established. Thérèse was to become the most numerically well represented saint in the statuary and imagery of Parisian churches.²⁷ The stained glass

²⁰ Pius X said this when he signed the Decree for the Introduction of Thérèse's Cause in 1914.

²¹ Clarke, *Story of a Soul*, 286.

²² Steffen Lösel briefly discusses Thérèse's choice to enter the Carmel rather than one of the new congregations in "Prayer, Pain, and Priestly Privilege: Claude Langlois's New Perspective on Thérèse of Lisieux," *Journal of Religion* 88:3 (2008): 273-306.

²³ Clarke, *Story of a Soul*, 287.

²⁴ Alvan F. Sanborn, "Little Flower of Lisieux," *North American Review* 227:4 (1929): 469-74 (472).

²⁵ Annette Becker, *La Guerre et la foi: De la mort à la mémoire 1914-1930* (Paris, 1994), 69-77.

²⁶ Etienne Fouilloux, "'Fille aînée de l'Église' ou 'pays de mission?' 1926-1958," in *Histoire de la France religieuse*, Jacques Le Goff and René Rémond, eds., vol. 4 (Paris, 1992), 129-252, esp. 187-96.

²⁷ Stephen Wilson, "Cults of Saints in the Churches of Central Paris," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22:4 (1980), 548-75.

window depicting Thérèse and Joan of Arc in the ossuary at Douaumont, which dates from 1927, is a permanent reminder of the two saints' association with the protection of French Catholics in the Great War.²⁸

It was, however, the international appeal of Thérèse that seemed, to many, to propel the process for her canonisation. Sanborn wrote that while at variance with Canon Law according to which at least fifty years had to elapse "after the death of a servitor of God before the judiciary discussion of the Process of Beatification can occur," the cause for Thérèse's canonisation proceeded nonetheless. This was because "the pressure in her favour was unprecedented and irresistible."²⁹ Sanborn evoked the internationalism of the pilgrims gathered in Lisieux in 1923 in anticipation of the announcement of the beatification and suggested that this event, so dear to the *poilus*, resonated much further afield:

At Lisieux, a few days before the beatification and in prevision thereof, the remains (about to become 'relics') of Sister Thérèse were transferred from the Cemetery to the Chapel of Carmel in a white hearse ... in the presence of more than 50,000 spectators. The hearse was escorted by a detachment of American soldiers, carrying the American Flag and the ensign of the American Legion.³⁰

Two years later the canonisation was celebrated with a week of prayer, "culminating in an ecclesiastical pageant of a splendour certainly never before witnessed at Lisieux and which could not easily be paralleled outside of the Eternal City." Sanborn described the scene:

The chiselled silver and onyx Reliquary (donated to Carmel by a public subscription in Brazil) was borne in triumphal procession.... It was preceded by the flags and the religious banners of many nations, the United States included, and it was followed by four Cardinals, an Armenian Patriarch, five Archbishops and thirty-one Bishops, all in full canonicals; by scores of bareheaded, bare-footed monks and black-cassocked priests; and by lay pilgrims from every quarter of the globe.³¹

Countless reports of the canonisation were equally fulsome and internationalist in tone, paying tribute to the local and universal character of the celebration: what a "triumph" it was for the Church and "what splendour for France!," according to a 1937 biography of Pius XI (1857-1939) by Mgr R. Fontenelle.³² Fontenelle wrote that Thérèse's was to become the "archetypal canonisation" in a period of renewal, as the presence of thirty-four Cardinals from almost as many countries attested.³³ Few modern saints' cults were able to transcend national boundaries on this scale.³⁴

²⁸ See Antoine Prost, "Verdun" in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 3, Pierre Nora, ed., trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, 1998), 377-401. The window was the work of Jean Herbert-Stevens. For information on the work of the group of artists associated with Herbert-Stevens's atelier, see *L'Artisan et les arts liturgiques* 17:1 (1948).

²⁹ Sanborn, "Little Flower of Lisieux," 473.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Mgr R. Fontenelle, *Sa Sainteté Pie XI* (Paris, 1937), 102.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *L'Illustration* reproduced several photographs showing the crowds in Rome and the spectacular illuminations in and outside St Peters which were designed especially for the canonisation. *L'Illustration*, 30 May 1925, 529-31. For an introduction to the impact of Thérèse in Australia see

Friends in High Places

Pius XI had a special attachment to Thérèse who was beatified and canonised during his pontificate. He was said to have kept a statue of the saint on his desk and an image of her in his private rooms. He also had a new statue of Thérèse placed in the Vatican gardens, which underwent considerable upgrading, replanning and replanting under his instruction. And when, in 1941, his tomb in the crypt of St Peter's was completed, it was flanked by two statues, one of St Ambrose, the other of Thérèse.³⁵ Fontenelle expanded on the special relationship between France and the Pope arising specifically from the pontiff's devotion to Thérèse and the opportunities and spiritual favours that flowed as a result. Indeed Fontenelle dedicated his biography of Pius XI to Thérèse, who was also known as the star of his pontificate.³⁶ Some suggest that the papal attachment to Thérèse, which continued under Pius XII (1876-1958), constituted the appropriation of her cult for (reactionary) political ends.³⁷ But the story of this intertwining of the national and the universal was more complex than might appear on the surface. Negotiating Thérèse's French and universal Catholic identity was a delicate but unavoidable undertaking at a time when the Church sought to mount a campaign against competing ideologies of the extreme Left and Right and to win more souls. This campaign included devising strategies to combat secularisation and dechristianisation on the Continent and to increase the number of conversions through missionary work. In short, Thérèse's cult was to serve the Church at home and further afield.

Pius XI was known as the Pope of the Missions. He issued his encyclical on Catholic Missions, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, in 1926. The following year he named Thérèse "Principal Patroness equal to St Francis Xavier of all missionaries, men and women, and of the missions in the whole world."³⁸ For some, Thérèse might have seemed an odd choice as patroness of the missions. Even though she had dreamt of fulfilling her vocation in a missionary country, and prayed fervently for the missions and for her "spiritual brothers" in the field, she had no experience of missionary work or the sacrifices involved.³⁹ Indeed her delicate constitution would have prevented her from taking up such work. However, Rome deemed her an ideal choice for this role and it soon became apparent why.

Conversion and Renewal: The Mission in Peace and War

Katherine Massam, *Sacred Threads: Catholic Spirituality in Australia 1922-1962* (Sydney, 1996), 127-51. For an indication of the extent of her international and ongoing appeal one need only peruse the numerous sites, official and unofficial, dedicated to Thérèse, on the world wide web and, in particular, the astonishing reaction to the tour of her relics around the world. Lisieux is the most popular pilgrimage site in France after Lourdes and receives over two million visitors annually. See, for example, Lisieux's official website: <<http://www.therese-de-lisieux.catholique.fr/?lang=fr>>.

³⁵ "Nouvelles Brèves," *La Semaine Religieuse de Paris*, 17 May 1941, 442.

³⁶ Fontenelle, *Sa Sainteté Pie XI*.

³⁷ See Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*.

³⁸ Clarke, *Story of a Soul*, 287.

³⁹ At one point Thérèse had (unrealistically) imagined herself being placed in the newly-established Carmel in Hanoi. For the significance of her correspondence with two missionary priests who were her "spiritual brothers" and what this correspondence reveals about her own missionary fervour, see Langlois, *Le Désir du Sacerdoce* and Nevin, *Thérèse*.

Before being named patroness of the missions, Thérèse had already been assigned to the Society of St Peter the Apostle as its “heavenly patroness.”⁴⁰ This society, a branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, was founded in 1889 by two French women inspired by an apostolic vicar to provide indigenous ecclesiastical students with the means “to receive the required seminary training preparatory to the taking of Holy Orders.”⁴¹ *Rerum Ecclesiae* stated that the presence of “native priests” would inspire confidence in the indigenous populations and lead to more conversions.⁴² Thérèse was a most fitting “heavenly patroness” of the Society of St Peter the Apostle. According to *Rerum Ecclesiae*, this was because “during her life here below as a religious, [she] made herself responsible for and adopted ... more than one missionary in order to assist him in his work as was her custom by her prayers, by voluntary and prescribed corporal penances, but, above all, by offering to her Divine Spouse the dreadful sufferings resulting from the disease with which she was afflicted.” Under her protection the Church could “look forward to more abundant fruits in this work.”⁴³ The first Chinese bishop was consecrated during the pontificate of Pius XI and the first African bishop under his successor, Pius XII. These acts were consciously projected as the Church’s stand in opposition against modern racism, notably the racialism of National Socialism.⁴⁴ Interestingly, both principal patrons of the Missions were products of France, or at least recognised as such by French Catholics, since Francis Xavier, a Basque born in Navarre, was a student in Paris when he met Ignatius and became one of the first seven Jesuits in 1534. Francis Xavier and Thérèse projected the two complementary and essential components of missionary fervour: applied and spiritual. When Pius XII named Thérèse “Secondary Patroness of France,” equal to Joan of Arc, in May 1944, it seemed that a balance had been found. Thérèse was truly the saint of the nation, but at the same time represented and was embraced by the universal Church ordinary.

Catholic France had long seen itself as one of the primary sources of missionary zeal and activity, but by the 1930s there was a rude awakening: the Eldest Daughter of the Church was deemed a missionary country by its pioneering religious sociologists. Gabriel Le Bras, for example, compiled tables of religious practice which showed vast areas of the country were lost to the faith.⁴⁵ Indeed some wondered to what extent they had ever been “won.” The missionary Society for the Propagation of the Faith was established in 1822 on the inspiration of a young woman from Lyons, Pauline Jaricot. The French Catholic encyclopedia, *Ecclesia*, noted that of all the Catholic works of apostleship, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith was the “most illustrious and most widespread.”⁴⁶ It had been directed from Lyons from its inception, but Pius XI moved the headquarters of the Society to Rome very early in his pontificate.⁴⁷ Shifting the centre of activities of the Society to Rome was an acknowledgement of its success as a structure and as a missionary initiative. It

⁴⁰ *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926), para 17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, para 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, para 17.

⁴⁴ See Vesna Drapac, *War and Religion: Catholics in the Churches of Occupied Paris* (Washington D.C., 1998), ch. 2, for an account of the response to these consecrations in parish bulletins in the Archdiocese of Paris.

⁴⁵ See Gabriel Le Bras, *Introduction à l'histoire de la pratique religieuse en France* (Paris, 1942).

⁴⁶ *Ecclesia*, 1031.

⁴⁷ He was elected pope on 6 February 1922, and the Society was moved to Rome the on 3 May 1922. Just prior to this, he had made the Virgin Mary principal patron of France and Joan of Arc its secondary patron. *Ecclesia*, 466.

confirmed, too, Pius XI's deep interest in the missions and his belief that Rome should direct this important work. But it had also become evident, with the transfer of the Society for the Propagation of Faith and of the Society of St Peter the Apostle (moved to Rome in 1920), that France could no longer demonstrate effective leadership or provide adequate material support for such important international works.⁴⁸ By the late 1930s, France's Catholics supplied less than half of the resources needed to maintain French missionary activities and many would have languished were it not for the redirection of funds and leadership in this realm from Rome.⁴⁹ This was just one of the many examples taken as evidence that France itself was in need of religious renewal or, in some cases, conversion. Subsequently it was common to refer to some regions and to the working-class suburbs of certain cities and towns as *paganisé*.⁵⁰

As principal patroness of the missions, Thérèse was therefore also to inspire apostolic works within France. Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard (1874-1949) became Archbishop of Paris after Verdier's death in April 1940 and just before France's defeat at the hands of the Germans. His appointment immediately prior had been in Reims, while before that he was Bishop of Bayeux. It was he who laid the foundation stone of the new basilica dedicated to Thérèse in Lisieux in 1929. Like Pius XI, Suhard had a special attachment to Thérèse. As Archbishop of Paris, he initiated the Mission of France and the Mission of Paris during the Occupation, in 1941 and 1944 respectively, believing them to be vital to help France withstand "the ordeal" and vital for the country's future.⁵¹ The centre of training for the priests chosen for this field of action in rural and urban France was Lisieux to which Suhard was a regular visitor during the war. He repeatedly invoked the protection of Thérèse and sought her intercession in the work of religious renewal and conversion without which he believed there could be no liberation.

An article in *La Semaine Religieuse de Paris* in October 1941 announced the Mission de France as a new project "dear to the heart" of the cardinal. Religious renewal was essential if France were to deserve once again the title "Eldest Daughter of the Church" and become the new missionary force. The article claimed that the seminary of the Mission de France was situated in Lisieux because it was the source of the apostolic flame that inspired the "Little Saint." So important was this mission in Suhard's eyes that he authorised one of his *curés* to leave the diocese and to dedicate himself entirely to directing this "great work."⁵² During the Occupation, Thérèse was not invoked publicly as often as France's principal protector, the Virgin Mary, or other saints with a traditionally more national focus – Genevieve, protectress of Paris, Louis, Denis and Joan of Arc, for example – but in certain contexts she was equally significant. Prior to the defeat, at a service in Notre-Dame Cathedral, Parisians prayed for victory and called on the saints of France for support. After invoking the Mother of God, and Saints Michel, Rémy, Geneviève, Louis and Joan of Arc for protection, it was to Thérèse, the "most beautiful flower of contemporary

⁴⁸ *Ecclesia*, 1031.

⁴⁹ Mgr Georges Chevrot, *Le développement des missions catholiques et l'encyclique Summi Pontificatus* (Paris, 1940).

⁵⁰ See Henri Godin and Yves Daniel, *La France, pays de mission?* (Paris, 1953 [1943]); and Maisie Ward, *France Pagan? The Mission of Abbé Godin* (London, 1949).

⁵¹ See Jean Vinatier, *Le Cardinal Suhard: l'évêque du nouveau missionnaire en France, 1874-1949* (Paris, 1983); and *ibid.*, *Cardinal Suhard: Vers une Église en état de mission*, Olivier de la Brosse, ed. (Paris, 1964).

⁵² "La Mission de France," *La Semaine Religieuse de Paris*, 25 October 1941, 279-80.

France,” that they turned, asking that she shower all those who were “weeping and suffering” with her “consoling roses.”⁵³

Suhard was in Lisieux in September 1940 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Thérèse’s Profession, and his visit was reported in *La Semaine Religieuse de Paris* in some detail. It was “without hesitation,” that Suhard responded to the invitation to preside over the celebration as it gave him “the opportunity once again” to display his devotion to the “dear little saint” and make a pilgrimage that was more opportune than ever in the circumstances. The four-hour journey to Lisieux was much longer than “in normal times” because of the damage to the line in the recent battle. The sight of Evreux was especially painful. The bombardments left the town centre in a state of ruin and its cathedral damaged. There was a “gaping hole” in place of the nave. A number of Thérèse’s contemporaries, including her sisters, were still in the convent of Carmel, and they received a special blessing from the Cardinal.⁵⁴ This direct and living connection with the saint lent Lisieux a certain fascination.

Services on the feast of Thérèse on 3 October 1940 in the chapel of the Orphelins-Apprentis d’Auteuil attracted large crowds.⁵⁵ The cardinal exhorted those present to ask of Thérèse – on that very day and “without fear” – what they desired most, which was, for many, the prompt return of “our prisoners.” As “sad,” as “harrowing” and “even cruel” as their predicament seemed, their total and generous acceptance of it could become a “fruitful source of merits and celestial blessings.” It was up to them to seize every occasion that presented itself for their “sanctification and salvation.” To this end they were to remember to invoke their “dear saints of France,” the “glory of their nation” and the “pride of their race,” above all little Thérèse of Lisieux, “miracle worker without parallel in the modern period and for whom the love of her country was, as it is for all of us, a veritable cult.”⁵⁶ This association of Thérèse’s suffering with that of the nation on the brink of despair at the very beginning of the “ordeal” and when there was no sense of when it would end, is noteworthy. As we have seen, just over three and a half years later, she was declared a secondary patroness of France equal to Joan of Arc.

The Thérésian Model Permeates Catholic Life and Teaching

The Thérésian example was adaptable and appropriate to multiple contexts. This was evident in people’s personal devotion to the saint internationally, as well as in her role as patroness of the missions. This paper has offered only a brief overview of the ways in which the Thérésian model could be said to have underpinned a large body of twentieth-century Catholic thought and teaching, as well as Catholic culture. The guiding principle of episcopal advice on many key questions at this time of crisis and of mission was essentially Thérésian. Rome banned Catholics from membership in the Action Française in 1926, largely because of its instrumental view of religion, which was to be put to the service of the state as evidenced in its slogan, *la politique d’abord* (“politics first”). In response, the Church had declared *la primauté du spirituel* (“the primacy of the spiritual”). Thérèse articulated the modern form of this fundamentally ancient adage. Combined with the notion of proselytising “like with like,” which was the unifying thread of *Rerum Ecclesiae*, this formula was also to

⁵³ Suhard’s sermon at Notre Dame, 19 May 1940 in *La Semaine Religieuse de Paris*, 1 June 1940, 483.

⁵⁴ “Son Éminence à Lisieux,” *La Semaine Religieuse de Paris*, 21 September 1940, 585-86.

⁵⁵ Later the feast was moved to 1 October.

⁵⁶ “La Fête de Sainte Thérèse,” *La Semaine Religieuse de Paris*, 19 October 1940, 676-79, 677.

become the inspiration to the great burst of activity surrounding Catholic Action between the 1920s and 1950s. Catholic Action brought together students, professionals, businessmen and industrial and agricultural workers, among others, in specialised groups as lay activists and as the Church's new "people's elites." The groups engaged in a range of religiously inspired works, though they were barred from any political activity. The language of Catholic Action echoed the language of Thérèse, and its underlying premise was that missionary work was available to all Catholics where they were most comfortable, that is in their immediate environment, their own milieu.⁵⁷ The bourgeois background of Thérèse is also significant in this regard, as many of the new organisations were directed at girls from the bourgeoisie.⁵⁸ But, as Dorothy Day (1897-1990), American convert and founder of *The Catholic Worker* came to realise, Thérèse's appeal was not class-based. The message of Catholic Action was that the vast work of the "rechristianisation" would only be successful if undertaken by ordinary people in small ways in the course of their daily lives. This was Thérèse's teaching writ large. There was no sharp distinction between the mission abroad and the mission at home. However, some were less amenable than others to the seemingly unstoppable democratisation of Thérèse.

A twist in this version of the Thérèse story emerges in the way a French Catholic elite sought to wrest the cult of Thérèse out of the hands of those they deemed bourgeois and petit bourgeois Catholic "conformists." These intellectuals sought, perhaps, to recast Thérèse in their own image. Hers was an elite soul and, for them, the furthest thing imaginable from the plaster statuary and tepid imagery of the Holy Cards, by this point distributed in their many millions. Sackville-West, though generally sympathetic, could not avoid the subject of Thérésian kitsch. While Lisieux, she wrote, had "escaped the worst blemishes of Lourdes," it had, however:

transformed one of its streets into a series of shops where the tourist may purchase for a few francs such objects as inkstands in oxidised *art nouveau*, dominated by a figure of Thérèse, medallions and *bijoux Fix* by the thousand, coloured lithographs, miniature reproductions of the marble group at Les Buissonnets, and tinted sprays of Les Roses de Lisieux supplied also in garlands at 35 francs the yard.

A gallery displayed wax, life-size figures in scenes of Thérèse's life.⁵⁹ Sackville-West, mildly critical of the lapses in taste among Thérèse's devotees, inadvertently highlighted the paradox of the heroine of the ordinary and everyday being seen to be the very opposite of the ordinary "lukewarm" Catholics. The example of Georges Bernanos (1888-1948) whose life and work, according to some, was saturated by the Thérésian spirit, illustrates this paradox well.⁶⁰

Many Paths Lead to Thérèse

⁵⁷ Fouilloux, "'Fille aînée de l'Église' ou 'pays de mission?'" 231ff.

⁵⁸ For example, the Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne and Jeunesse Indépendante Chrétienne.

⁵⁹ Sackville-West, *The Eagle and the Dove*, 155. The "marble group" refers to a sculpture of the Martins in the garden at their family home, Les Buissonnets.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Le Chrétien Bernanos*, trans. Maurice de Gandillac (Paris, 1956 [1954]); and Guy Gaucher, "Bernanos et Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus," *Études Bernanosiennes* 56-57 (1960), 229-68. See also Mary Frances Catherine Dorschell, *Georges Bernanos' Debt to Thérèse of Lisieux* (Lewiston, N.Y., 1996).

Bernanos railed against the “half-hearted” and the “mediocre” (bourgeois) Catholics whom he thought incapable of approaching the sanctity or heroism of a Thérèse. Like many Catholic intellectuals of his age, Bernanos had strong ties with the Action Française which he had difficulty severing after its condemnation by Rome. But he broke with the Catholic Right after witnessing the violence of the Nationals in the Spanish Civil War. The Curé d’Ambricourt, the main character of his classic work, *Journal d’un Curé de Campagne* (1936), borrowed liberally from the Thérèse story.⁶¹ Indeed, the final words to appear on the screen in the highly acclaimed 1951 film adaptation of *Journal d’un Curé de Campagne*, directed by Robert Bresson (1907-1999), “All is Grace,” are Thérèse’s. It was not the only time that Bresson alluded to Thérèse: his first feature film, *Les Anges du Péché*, which appeared during the Occupation, in 1943, drew even more obviously on Thérésian themes of perfectionism, conversion, “vicarious suffering,” sacrifice, self-denial and, finally, untimely death. Made with the assistance of the Dominican *prêtre résistant* Raymond Bruckberger, *Les Anges du Péché* is set in a convent and could be said to have located Thérèse’s story in the twentieth century at a time of particular crisis.⁶² The key protagonist, the novice Sister Anne-Marie, is a wartime Thérèse. Her over-enthusiastic and uncompromising commitment to the work of the order – the rehabilitation of female criminals – leads to her expulsion and, ultimately, her death. However, before that there is reconciliation and redemption: hers is a martyr’s death. Like Thérèse, Sister Anne-Marie was not everyperson’s heroine but *une âme d’élite*, beyond the reach of the “mediocre” sisters surrounding her. After the war, Catholic *résistants*, modern-day heroes of the faith, often judged their quietistic, non-resisting co-religionists as half-hearted and lukewarm. Yet Thérèse could not be marshalled to serve a single purpose, and many paths led to Thérèse.

The different approaches to the cult of Thérèse are testament to its pluralism. Two American converts, the best-selling author Frances Parkinson Keyes (1885-1970) and Dorothy Day, and the Englishwoman Vita Sackville-West, who was not a Catholic, wrote biographies of Thérèse.⁶³ All three rejected the patronising and cynical notion that the popular cult of Thérèse was manufactured by those close to her and that her sisters and other Carmelites had wilfully misrepresented her. On the contrary, they argued, within a Church structure, the convent, Thérèse had fulfilled her vocation because she was nurtured and supported by people who loved her and whom she loved, if at times with difficulty. And while Bernanos may have regarded devotees of the Thérèse cult with some disdain, he also recognised that it was within the convent that Thérèse had found her spiritual home and her voice. The convent was not an escape for women, he wrote, but “a house of prayer where neither mediocrity nor timidity are tolerated.”⁶⁴

Initially, the politically active Day thought that Thérèse had nothing to offer the working class and its champions. But eventually she discovered in her a saint who did speak to them all and to a world laid waste by war and the ideological barrenness that came with the confrontation between East and West.⁶⁵ Day wanted her biography

⁶¹ *Journal d’un Curé de Campagne* was enormously successful and translated into many languages. It established Bernanos’s career internationally.

⁶² Interestingly, Alain Cavalier’s 1986 film *Thérèse* bears a strong resemblance to Robert Bresson’s early films.

⁶³ Sackville-West, *The Eagle and the Dove*; Frances Parkinson Keyes, *St Teresa of Lisieux* (London, 1951); and Dorothy Day, *Thérèse* (Springfield, Illinois, 1979 [1960]).

⁶⁴ Quoted in Michael Tobin, “Thérèse de Lisieux and Bernanos’ First Novel,” *French Forum* 10:1 (1985): 84-96 (90).

⁶⁵ Day, *Thérèse*, xii.

of Thérèse to touch the 65,000 subscribers of *The Catholic Worker* and to introduce them to “a saint of our day.” She also wrote the book to address “the sense of futility in Catholics” and for those who felt “hopeless and useless, less than the dust, ineffectual, wasted, powerless.” On the one hand, Thérèse was no more than a “little grain of dust,” and on the other, “her name was written in heaven.” Most of all, wrote Day, Thérèse was a saint of the people. It was “the worker, the ‘common man’ who first spread her fame by word of mouth.”⁶⁶ What Day had discovered was already evident to Pius XI almost four decades previously: Thérèse, a young French nun of limited experience, was a saint of universal significance to the modern Church.

Many studies focusing on Thérèse’s life and writings pay scant attention to the wider social and cultural context in which her cult spread. As I have intimated, some have observed a degree of politicisation in devotion to Thérèse. For example, Richard D. E. Burton notes that her cult was “discreetly politicised” in the 1930s by Pius XI and Cardinal Pacelli (later Pius XII). As Secretary of State, Pacelli consecrated the basilica at Lisieux in 1937, and Burton writes that this took on the “character of an implicit political statement” because it occurred against the background of the Spanish Civil War. Burton’s guide on this process of “politicisation” is, among others, the best-selling polemicist on the papacy in the period of international crisis and author of the provocatively titled *Hitler’s Pope*, John Cornwell.⁶⁷ In addition, taking the examples of Pierre Mabille and Bernanos, Burton shows how polarised accounts of Thérèse’s life and influence may lead to distortion. Mabille had many interests and lives before taking up with the Surrealists. He analysed Thérèse from a Marxist, Freudian and anti-Catholic position, focusing especially on the notion of the petit-bourgeois/bourgeois repression of sexuality which was a mark of her upbringing and which, by her life choices, she seemingly perpetuated. Bernanos is Thérèse’s champion but, as we have already seen, rails against those members of the bourgeoisie incapable of determining the true meaning – as understood by Bernanos – of the Thérésian message. The Church Ordinary is therefore doomed to remain ignorant of the potential and actual rehabilitative qualities of Thérèse’s teaching. On the strength of such partial evidence, we learn from Burton that Thérèse is well and truly “ideologised.”

I would like to suggest an alternative to this reductivist approach which either ignores Thérèse’s devotees or focuses almost entirely on male elites. Given the vast amount of evidence that exists on reasons for the affinity Catholics, men and women from all walks of life, felt for Thérèse, perhaps it is incumbent upon historians to trawl those archives not in search of the “real Thérèse” or the “politicised Thérèse,” but in order to seek the strands connecting her devotees. It was Day, the quintessential “social Catholic” of the twentieth century who, in 1960, recalled not the “blood and tears” of Thérèse, but the “little way.”⁶⁸ Writing at the height of the Cold War, when memories of the ravages of the second international conflict of the century were still vivid, and when “materialism” left many dissatisfied with the “world of the West,” Thérèse spoke to the common person’s “condition”:

Is the atom a small thing? And yet what havoc it has wrought. Is her little way a small contribution to the life of the spirit? It has all the power of the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 173.

⁶⁷ See John Cornwell, *Hitler’s Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (London, 1999).

⁶⁸ In contrast, Burton seems to revert to an earlier tradition in his *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, the focus of which is women and the Catholic culture of suffering.

spirit of Christianity behind it. It has an explosive force that can transform our lives and the life of the world, once put into effect.⁶⁹

Some might scoff, as Day herself did initially, at Thérèse's mortifications – the noisiness of one of the sisters, the “splash of dirty water in the laundry” – but was it not, in fact, in the small things that most ordinary Catholics could distinguish themselves? It was unlikely that they would be “stretched over a rack” and thus it was understandable that they would seek protection and comfort from a saint whose life, like their own, was outwardly unremarkable.

It has been said that saints like Joan of Arc and Thérèse are impossible to know because they have been made to serve diverse and politicised religious and secular ends.⁷⁰ These two French girls who lived centuries apart became saints within five years of each other and, as we know, inspire different people differently. This does not cancel out their individuality or make them endlessly malleable, as some have suggested. In fact it could be said that the opposite is true, that the message each offered was simple and accessible, and that this in part explains the twinning of Thérèse and Joan of Arc in one context, and the twinning of Thérèse and Francis Xavier, the saint who had conquered “entire nations” for the Church,⁷¹ in another. Perhaps it also helps to explain why Thérèse herself felt an affinity with the Maid of Orleans. Thérèse wrote plays about her and cast herself as Joan, wrote poems to her and about her, and possibly saw in her a model, not to take up the sword but to better fulfil the role that was hers.⁷² A study of the cult of Thérèse in a transnational context can provide unique insights into the nature of the twentieth-century Church and the relationship between the personal, local, national and universal in Catholic devotions and Catholic structures.

⁶⁹ Day, *Thérèse*, 174.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (Harmondsworth, 1983); Taylor, “Images of Sanctity;” and Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*.

⁷¹ *Ecclesia*, 78.

⁷² See Clarke, *Story of a Soul*, 72, 193.

Saint Therese of Lisieux is a French saint who was born on 2 January 1873 and died on 30 September 1897, at the age of 24. She was an affectionate girl in her early childhood, but the death of her mother at the age of four had a profound effect on her. She grew an increasing desire to follow her sisters into the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, even appealing to the Pope in person to let her in early. Therese is perhaps best known for her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, and her *Little Way of Spiritual Childhood*, which helped make her a Doctor of the Church. Saint Therese of Lisieux died after suffering from tuberculosis. She was declared a saint on 17 May 1925 by Pope Pius XI. The "sunny years" of early childhood. Therese was born in the little French town of Alençon. St Therese's appeal rests on the life story she wrote at the insistence of her mother superior. It is perhaps the most self-effacing autobiography of all time, and the beginning of a religious phenomenon that rolls on 112 years after her death. In the early evening I catch up with Monsignor Keith Baltrop, who has organised the month-long tour which ends this week, and ask him why the book still resonates. SAINT Therese of Lisieux, the Patron of Foreign Missions, never traveled beyond Altencon, except for a journey to Rome on November 4, 1887, with her father and sister Celine to beg permission from the Holy Father, Leo XIII, to enter religious life immediately. She applied for acceptance to Carmel in Lisieux in the summer of 1882. She was nine years old. The French Catholic Paper recounts what the pope said in Saint Therese of Lisieux by Kathryn Harrison: His Holiness encouraged her "to be patient, pray very much, seek counsel from God and her conscience. This caused the young girl to break down into sobs." On December 2, 1887, she sent the bishop a note, saying: "It is through you that Jesus is going to carry out his promise." This chapter examines the little known part played by British Catholics in the development of worldwide devotion to Saint Therese of Lisieux after her death. Focusing on the pivotal part played by Monsignor Thomas Nemo Taylor in the cultivation of her cult, this chapter also explores the role of ordinary Catholic women and men in the "making" of this now ubiquitous saint. Utilising a cachet of ex-votos received from British Catholics and kept in the archives in Lisieux - which centre on health, the family, and fulfilment of gender roles - this chapter analyses the growing appeal of a nineteenth-century saint in the early twentieth century. St. Therese of Lisieux as a young nun read deeply of Saint John of the Cross who said many beautiful things about having a close relationship with Jesus. In due time, despite difficulty in prayer and doubts about becoming a nun, Therese received the black veil in September 1890. In early 1891 the 18-year-old Therese was made sacristan's aide, a duty she carried into 1892 as her father lay slowly dying. Therese was just beginning to complete the last section of *A Story of a Soul*. Circumstances were growing more difficult for Therese in terms of her health and spirituality. In 1896 a new prioress of Carmel confirmed Therese's role in the novitiate where she could continue to teach her "little way" and work in the sacristy and the laundry room.