OUR PERENNIAL FASCINATION WITH THERESE OF LISIEUX

"I am done with great things and big plans, great institutions and big success. I am for those tiny, invisible loving human forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, which, if given time, will rend the hardest monument of pride. (William James)

"Jesus has not given me an indifferent heart!" 1

I. Therese's capacity to intrigue ...

Few persons, in recent centuries, have fascinated the religious mind as has Therese of Lisieux. Saints, generally speaking, are not very popular today. Yet her popularity continues. What is interesting too about her popularity is that it cuts across many lines, appealing to persons of all ages, every kind of religious persuasion, and every kind of academic background. What accounts for this astonishing phenomenon? What is there about Therese and her writings that so captivates and intrigues?

The question of Therese's capacity to intrigue all genre of persons is important because, in trying to answer it, we will, I believe, uncover the heart of what she was all about, both in her person and in her teaching. If we can name more clearly what about her captures the heart so strongly, we will, I believe, be in a better position to articulate her spirituality.

What does make her so intriguing? There have been younger saints, gentler saints, and more heroic saints, but never more popular ones, at least not in recent centuries. What makes Therese so special?

Therese of Lisieux fascinates us, and has a rare power to truly and healthily fire both our religious and our romantic imaginations, for three interpenetrating reasons: i) She is a child mystic, the Anne Frank of the spiritual life; ii) she is a woman of extraordinary paradox and complexity; and iii) she has that rare power to touch that previously-touched part inside of us.

What is curious is that, most often, we consciously relate to Therese only through the first of these three, the child mystic. However, even then, unconsciously, what ultimately captivates us is her other two dimensions, her extraordinary complexity and her power to touch what is deepest in us.

All of this, however, needs a lot of explication:

II. What is so special about Therese.

1) She is the Anne Frank of the spiritual life ...

Someone once said that if you want to understand the real tragedy of the Second world war,

you can read a thousand books on it - or you can read <u>The Diary of Anne Frank</u> where you will see, indeed feel, the what war does to the human soul.

The same might be said about Therese of Lisieux and the spiritual life. You can read a thousand books about how precious a human soul is before God and how, because of this, a soul should respond - or you can read Therese's, Story of a Soul.

Therese of Lisieux might be called the Anne Frank of the spiritual life. In both, Anne Frank and Therese, you get a drink from a clear, pure spring; you get to see, and feel, deep realities through the prism of a child's innocence, a child's dreams, a child's simplicity, a child's still uncursed enthusiasm, and a child's purity. Few things have the power to touch the heart as deeply as that, and to trigger piety, both good and bad. ²

Both Anne Frank and Therese of Lisieux have that rare power to inflame the romantic imagination. In them, we get the child-mystic, the Christ-child, instructing the elders in the temple. We are always intrigued by this. It triggers an archetype, though not always a mature one, within us.³

However, we would do no justice to either Therese or Anne Frank if we, naively, thought that what makes their diaries so powerful is their simple innocence. Many children are innocent, have a deep experience of God and of love, and yet their writings or crude drawings inspire no one, save their own mothers. What sets Therese and Anne Frank apart? What gives their diaries the power to fire the imagination of millions?

They are both great artists. In both of them, we see, not just a child's purity but also an artist's complexity and an artist's talent for aesthetic and transparent expression. Both of their diaries are rare works of art.⁴ Many of us keep diaries, and all of us have deep experiences, but few of us are great artists. Therese and Anne Frank are among those few and it is for this reason, as much as for their innocence and depth, that their writing so powerfully trigger certain things within us. That is what good art does.

But, beyond the truth of that, Therese is more than the Anne Frank of the spiritual life. We are, admittedly, intrigued by her innocence, but we are, I submit, even more intrigued by her complexity. There are more dimensions in Therese than there are in the young Anne Frank. She is a rare combination of paradoxes and opposites and it is this intriguing near-schizophrenia that lays the real kindling to the fires of the heart.

2) She is a rare combination of opposites

Therese is so fascinating in that, in her, you get something beyond the child-mystic, namely, that most rare combination of paradoxes and opposites seen only in great souls. ⁵

Hers, as we will try to show, was a soul formed by great love and great loss, great simplicity and great complexity, great restlessness and great single-mindedness. It is impossible to understand Therese, in her person, in her message, and in her appeal to people, without grasping this

combination of opposites, this radical paradox, within her. As well, we also need to understand this to extricate her from a certain encrusting within an unhealthy piety. She was no mere child saint, the little girl, the puella, throwing kisses to a hardened, cynical world, as her persona unfortunately often makes her out to be. She is a rare mentor of the soul. But to understand that, we must understand that combination of opposites that constellated within her.

When you talk about Therese of Lisieux, everything must be continually qualified with the phrase, "on the one hand - on the other hand" - because, while her way might be called "the little way" and exhibits a radical simplicity, she herself was not very simple at all. Her writings and her person always manifest a certain double persona. A richness, a near-contradiction, and a series of paradoxes touch us from various angles and do not let us categorize her too quickly.

The mature Therese had was a rare combination of opposites. Understanding this can help us understand why Therese is so intriguing to us. We might begin to describe her as follows:

i) The doted-on child ... who had the tragic childhood.

To understand the adult Therese, you must understand her unique childhood. As a child she was, at one and the same time, the doted-on-child - who had a tragic childhood.

On the one hand, few children have ever been loved as purely, and valued as much, as Therese was as a child. Her family literally doted on her. She was their little "Queen" and she was always treated as a Queen. Her every joy, fear, tear, and dream was noticed, valued, chronicled, and often even photographed. She was a very attractive child, physically and psychologically, and this also helped. Her family so loved her and cared for her that at age eleven she was unable to comb her own hair - everything had always been done for her. Also, her family both recognized and acknowledged her specialness from the very beginning. She was her father's favourite and her mother regularly wrote to her relatives about little Therese's exceptional character.

Added to all this love is the fact that her family itself was exceptional. Both her father and mother are being considered for canonization - as three or four of her sisters and a couple of her cousins might also be. On this score, she certainly did not draw a short straw.

In essence, she was the opposite of the abused child. Few persons, in childhood, were ever as loved and valued as purely and affectionately as was Therese. This left her with a exceptionally strong self-image and an exceptionally healthy concept of God as loving and valuing us. It helped form an exceptional soul who could later write: "I knew then that if I was loved on earth, I was also loved in heaven." ⁶

She would remain always the princess, the little girl, the puella - knowing that she was loveable and loved.

Yet, on the other hand, her childhood was marked by exceptional tragedy. She was, in effect, three times orphaned and this so hurt her that, at age nine, she went into a clinical depression from which she almost died.

When Therese was born, her mother already had breast cancer and was unable to nurse her. She was a sickly child and the family, fearing she might die, gave her, two months after her birth, over to a wet nurse, a peasant woman who nursed little Therese with milk, love, and a very healthy family environment. Therese bonded to her as she would to her mother. However, at the age of fourteen months, she was returned to her own mother and family.

Much has been written about how traumatic this must have been, a child of fourteen months switching families, despite the fact that her own family was so loving and gifted. She was, in effect, orphaned at fourteen months.

However, she soon bonded to Zelie, her real mother, and began to blossom in that extraordinary love that her family showered upon her. But this too was not to last. When she was four and one-half years old, and again secure in a network of loving relationships, her mother died. She then bonded to her older sister, Pauline, then sixteen, as a daughter to a mother. This too was to be fractured. When Therese was nine, Pauline left the Martin home to enter the Carmelite monastery. This literally shattered Therese. Within a couple of months of Pauline's leaving, Therese fell into a severe depression - within which she hyper-ventilated, lay at the edges of a massive nervous breakdown, and fell physically ill to the point where everyone, doctors and her family alike, resigned themselves to the fact that she would die.

These events, among others, helped form a soul that was over-sensitive and old before its time. Hence, despite all the love and affection she was showered with, as a child, Therese found it difficult to do the normal things of a child - make friends, play games, tease, be carefree. Reflecting back, seeing herself at age ten, she writes: "My friends were too worldly; they knew too well how to ally the joys of this earth to the service of God. They didn't think about death enough, and yet death had paid its visit to a great number of those whom I knew, the young, the rich, the happy." ⁷

These are quite the thoughts for a ten year-old, as are the ones she recounts in the famous exchange with one of her teachers: Around age seven or eight, one of her teachers asked her what she did every Thursday afternoon, an afternoon on which there were no classes. Therese replied: "I think." Her teacher asked her: "And what do you think about?" Therese replied: "I think about God, about life, about ETERNITY ... I think!" "8

Therese had a childhood of exceptional love and exceptional tragedy. These formed her soul in such a way that she became a woman of deep sensitivity and exceptional complexity. She would, throughout her whole life, exhibit both that love and that tragedy and, for this reason, she always remained a unique combination of the fairy-princess, Tinkerbell, and the archetypal wisdom woman, Sophia.

ii) The archetypal child, Tinkerbell ... but who is Sophia, the crone, the wise, white-haired, old woman.

Therese always remained the child who would end every letter she wrote with the words, "I

kiss you with my whole heart" 9 even as she was ever the white-haired, adult, crone, Sophia, who could tell us things like: "It's not death that will come in search of me, it's God. ... ¹⁰ I think we have to be very careful not to seek ourselves; for we can get a broken heart that way. ... ¹¹ I felt it more valuable to speak to God rather than to speak about Him, for there is so much self-love intermingled with spiritual conversations. ... ¹² There are no miracles, no raptures, no ecstasies - only service." ¹³

She was always the archetypal child, Tinkerbell, protesting her youth and littleness, even as she left no doubt that she had already made friends with her mortality and that her hair had whitened through an aging that is born of pain. Given her childhood, it is not surprising that Tinkerbell and Sophia were so married inside her and that everything she says bears the mark of both.

iii) The peasant ... but who is the artist.

Therese had little formal education. As a child, she had been too sensitive to stay for long in normal school and her father had, at a point, hired a tutor for her. This was a bit of hit and miss affair and, although she was obviously very bright, she did not have consistent, sustained classes. Moreover, she left home and school for the Carmelite convent at age fifteen. Hence, in terms of formal education, she had the rough equivalent to what we would today call an elementary school education. And this shows. Among other things, she has trouble spelling properly. More important than the lack of much formal education, however, is the fact that she had, in a manner of speaking, a peasant's heart. By temperament she innocent, pious, non-intellectual, always childlike, and radiated a simplicity bordering on naivete.

But, as always with Therese, there is "the other hand". Within all that simplicity and inside of that peasant's heart, she was, at the same time, a natural artist, with all the complexity, insight, and torment of personality that brings. She was an exceptionally gifted writer, faulty spelling notwithstanding. Her language and construction exhibit exceptional colour, verve, and transparency. Her diary is, first of all, a work of beauty. It does a whole lot more than communicate a bunch of biographical data. It inflames the heart, as does all good art, and, understood (as all good art should be) within the forms of its time it is also devoid of the sentimentality and saccharine quality that it is often accused of and which lesser works fall into. Story of a Soul is not an oversweet holy card, either in content or in style. There is in it the simplicity of the peasant but also the tortured complexity of the artist. Therese was both, peasant and artist. Maybe that helps explain why, today, she has been named a doctor.

iv) The martyr who is detached from the world ... but who has an excessive love for her family and the beauty of this world

Teilhard de Chardin, in his spiritual masterpiece, <u>Le Milieu Divin</u>, describes himself as waking up in this world on fire with two great loves, love of God and love of the world. He experiences each as an incurable wound. For Teilhard, a sense of God can take your breath away but so too can the beauty and power of this world.

Therese has the same great paradox within her make-up. On the one hand, she is clearly the detached, religious ascetic whose own needs always take second place to the higher demands of faith. From the time she is a very young child until the day she dies, her perspective is always coloured, indeed it is dominated, by her sense of God and the next life. She has no major regrets about living her home, giving up all dreams of husband and children, giving up all worldly ambitions, and ultimately even in dying at age twenty-four. She lives, and happily so, in this world within a certain holy detachment. God is central and everything else, including all personal desires and ambitions, must take a back seat to that.

However, she does not exactly radiate the lack of energy and joyless indifference of someone clinically depressed, nor indeed the negative attitude towards the joys of this life that is sometimes seen in unbalanced religious figures. She is more like Teilhard. The beauty of this world, and the love that this world offers, also took her breath away (even if it never managed to fully derail her). Thus, for all her detachment at one level, she was excessively attached to her family, needing almost daily letters and gifts to sustain herself. She also loved, and made no apologies for that fact, the beautiful things of this earth. She loved anything pretty - flowers, objects, clothing - and she loved herself to look pretty, albeit she never lost proper perspective on this concern.

In this matter, detachment and attachment, she was, like in everything else, a mixture of opposites. Reading Therese will help you see the preciousness of everything human, especially of human love, even as it helps you see its relativity.

v) The congenital loner ... but who is ultimately able to embrace the whole world.

Therese was, by nature, a very lonely person. Persons familiar with her have pointed this out, not only because it is evident in her biography and letters, but also by studying photographs of her. We have many photos of her and always, in every one of them, even when she is with her family or community, she is, in some deep way, profoundly alone. There was a congenital loneliness within her that all the affection in the world could never really penetrate.

And her loneliness had a particular quality to it. Where Therese was lonely was not so much in the fact that she lived, celibate and single, in a monastery within which there were long periods of silence and the rules forbade most kinds of intimacy and contact. Her loneliness was more of a moral nature. She suffered from moral loneliness. What is moral loneliness?

Inside of each of us there is a part our being that might be called our moral soul. It is that place where we feel most strongly about the right and wrong of things and where all that is most precious to us is cherished, guarded, and held. It is also the place that feels violated when it is not sufficiently honoured and respected. It is in this deep inner place that we, ultimately, feel most alone. More deeply than we long for a sexual partner, we long for moral affinity, for someone to visit us in that deep part of ourselves where all that is most precious to us is cherished and guarded. Our deepest longing is for someone to sleep with morally. This is particularly true for very sensitive souls.

From the time she was a little girl - out of place on the playground, different from her peers, and spending her leisure hours thinking about "God and eternity" - Therese was fiercely lonely, morally lonely, a pilgrim in every sense of that word. This quality of loneliness is everywhere present in her person and in her writings and is clearly one of the reasons why her <u>Story of a Soul</u> speaks so deeply to so many millions of people.

Yet, and this is a paradox that borders on contradiction, she was a person who, ultimately, embraced everyone who ever had contact with her and, in a more abstract but real way, everyone in the whole world. She was always alone and yet she was intensely in community. She stood apart from others and yet was envied by others for the way she was present inside of the group. This was true for each three of her families - her blood family, the Martins; her faith family, the Carmelites; and her universal family, the world. In each of these families, somehow she was distant, alone, and yet she is the paradigm for community within each. Thus, for example, her relationship to the world family manifests this: She was tucked away in a remote monastery and when she died she was probably known by less than two hundred people. Yet, even before she died, as she slept alone on her celibate cot, the world lay at the centre of her heart and her heart lay at the centre of the world's heart. Today, of course, she is a household name, known and loved by millions of persons, and she is the patron of world missions. She was the loner who ultimately embraced the world and both aspects, her loneliness and her intimacy with everything and everybody, colour every page of her writings.

iv) The restless, driven spirit ... but who does, as does the saint, will-the-one-thing.

Therese was by nature not just lonely, she was also deeply restless. When you have a heart the size of the Grand Canyon not a lot of things in this life will satisfy you. She was, as are all restless persons, tormented by constant yearning. She wanted everything, as a famous incident in her childhood so well illustrates. One day her older sister, Leonie, came into the room where Therese and her sister, Celine, were playing. Leonie was carrying a basket filled with colourful balls of string and pretty pieces of cloth. She asked each of her younger sisters to choose one item that they could keep. Celine chose a ball of wool. Therese ... well, she just took the whole basket and walked off with the words: "I choose all!"

That was typical of her temperament. She was a person so driven by restlessness that the world was never enough for her. Yet, in the end, she could make an obscure monastery be enough for her.

Soren Kierkegaard once defined a saint by saying **a saint is someone who can will the one thing - God**. Therese, despite the torment of a restless heart, was able to do that and sustain it. She felt within herself, as soon as she came to consciousness (as she honestly acknowledges) the sense that she was destined for glory. Yet, she could live life in a way wherein she could be satisfied to say: "My glory is to remain a hidden glory and Carmel is the place where God has chosen to hide me." ¹⁵

Tangential to this, Therese had a another remarkable paradox within her: she could, as Von Balthasar once phrased it, consciously self-canonize ¹⁶ and yet never become a narcissist. For all her

seeking for glory, she could in all truth say on her deathbed: "I'm no egoist; it's God whom I love, not myself!" ¹⁷

Therese of Lisieux is a study in contrasts. What makes her so intriguing is that rare complexity that is only found in great souls.

3) She is attuned to the preciousness of the human soul before God and has, concomitantly, the capacity to touch that previously-touched part inside of us.

Therese is the Anne Frank of the spiritual life, a true artist, and a woman of extraordinary complexity. However, at the end of the day, that is not the real reason why Therese is has the power to so deeply touch hearts. What ultimately makes her writings so powerful and rightly makes her a doctor of the church?

Therese is powerful because her writings touch that part of us that has previously been touched. That is obviously a very curious expression. What is meant by it?

Inside each of us, beyond what we can name, each of us has a dark memory of having once been touched and caressed by hands far gentler than our own. That caress has left a permanent mark, the imprint of a love so tender and good that its memory becomes a prism through which we see everything else. This brand lies beyond conscious memory but forms the centre of the heart and soul.

This is not an easy concept to explain without sounding sentimental. Perhaps the old myths and legends capture it best when they say that, before being born, each soul is kissed by God and then goes through life always, in some dark way, remembering that kiss and measuring everything it experiences in relation to that original sweetness. To be in touch with your heart is to be in touch with this primordial kiss, with both its preciousness and its meaning.

What exactly is being said here?

Within each of us, at that place where all that is most precious within us takes its root, there is the inchoate sense of having once been touched, caressed, loved, and valued in a way that is beyond anything we have ever consciously experienced. In fact, all the goodness, love, value, and tenderness we experience in life fall short precisely because we already know something deeper. When we feel frustrated, angry, betrayed, violated, or enraged it is in fact because our outside experience is so different from what we already hold dear inside.

We all have this place, a place in the heart, where we hold all that is most precious and sacred to us. From that place our own kisses issue forth, as do our tears. It is the place we most guard from others, but the place where we would most want others to come into; the place where we are the most deeply alone and the place of intimacy; the place of innocence and the place where we are violated; the place of our compassion and the place of our rage. In that place we are holy. There we are temples of God, sacred churches of truth and love. It is there too that we bear God's image.

But this must be understood: The image of God inside of us, is not to be thought of as some beautiful icon stamped inside of the soul. No. The image of God in us is energy, fire, memory; especially the memory of a touch so tender and loving that its goodness and truth become the energy and prism through which we see everything. Thus we recognize goodness and truth outside of us precisely because they resonate with something that is already inside of us. Things "touch our hearts" when they touch us here and it is because we have already been touched and caressed that we seek for a soulmate, for someone to join us in this tender space.

And we measure everything in life by how it touches this place: Why do certain experiences touch us so deeply? Do not our hearts burn within us in the presence of any truth, love, goodness, or tenderness that is genuine and deep? Is not all knowledge simply a waking up to something we already know? Is not all love simply a question of being respected for something we already are? Are not the touch and tenderness that bring ecstasy nothing other than the stirring of deep memory? Are not the ideals that inspire hope only the reminder of words somebody has already spoken to us? Does not our desire for innocence (and innocent means "not wounded") mirror some primal unwounded place deep within us? And when we feel violated, is it not because someone has irreverently entered the sacred inside us?

When we are in touch with this memory and respect its sensitivities then we are feeling our souls. At those times, faith, hope, and love will be spring up in us and joy and tears will both flow through us pretty freely. We will be constantly stabbed by the innocence and beauty of children and pain and gratitude will, alternately, bring us to our knees. That is what it means to be recollected, to inchoately remember, to feel the memory of God in us. That memory is what is both firing our energy and providing us a prism through which to see and understand.

Therese of Lisieux, in her person and in her writings, is powerful because she touches that, previously-touched, part of us. What her life and her writings do is help us remember that primordial kiss of God and in that memory we know how unique, precious, and loved we are. Reading Therese, softens our hearts (without softening our heads, as happens with saccharine piety) and helps melt the cynicism, bitterness, and callousness that accrues with age and deadens the memory of once having been caressed by hands more gentle than our own.

What Therese brings us can be understood too by comparing it to its opposite, the life of someone who has never been valued or, worse, has been positively abused.

Imagine someone who is conceived and born without being wanted, who lives in a home where he is considered only a burden and another mouth to feed, and who is constantly told in word and in attitude that he is worthless. During his youth and adult, he never once is loved and valued for who he is and never once experiences what Jesus felt when he saw the heavens open and heard the voice of his Father say: "This is my beloved child in whom I take delight!" Never once in all his life does anyone touch that previously-touched area within him where God once kissed his soul. His whole life is experienced as an unwanted accident, as something unimportant, as something useless, and as just one unnoticed, passing phenomenon among one hundred billion others. That would be the antithesis of Therese of Lisieux.

As would be the case of someone who, as a young girl, suffered the ravage of sexual abuse. What has happened in the abuse is that this person has been radically violated (rather than kissed again) in that deep previously-touched spot and that action has told her categorically that what is most important to her is not important, that she is disposable.

This too is the antithesis of Therese of Lisieux. Therese's life was the opposite. Despite being painfully orphaned and falling into clinical depression because of loss, Therese, like Jesus, heard very clearly, and pretty constantly, the words: "You are my beloved child in whom I take delight!" Again and again, that previously-touched part of her was gently kissed and she was made to know that she was precious, loved, valued, and unique among a hundred million.

The net result of being loved so specially was not that this made her an egoist (which is the result of improper, not excess, love). It had the opposite effect. It attuned her to the preciousness of the human soul and gave what she wrote about life and about her own life its great medicinal power. She has power to touch us deeply because she was herself deeply touched; she has such great power to point out to us our own preciousness because she knew herself to be precious; and she shows us our uniqueness because her own experience of being so uniquely valued made it evident to her how unique each person is before God. This is also what, indeed, makes her a doctor of the soul, the stirring of that dark memory inside of us heals as nothing else can.

Ultimately, her appeal comes from this, and it is on this that scholars and theologians might well turn to her for some help. She understood how precious is the human soul and, being an artist, she was able to give rare articulation to this.

As well, being loved so uniquely as a child did not, as is the common supposition in these things, create a spoiled child. To the contrary, being so loved and valued she realized, very early, what was then asked of her in return in terms of response, namely, fidelity, self-sacrifice, and boldness before God.

Moreover, and this is of critical importance for understanding her spirituality, Therese's experience of being loved so specially, lies at the basis of her "little way".

Looking at her life, Therese was able to conclude that, being so loved on earth, she was also obviously loved by God in heaven. Her experience helped her to know the truth of Jesus' statement that no hair falls from one's head or tear from one's eye, except that it is noticed by God.

However, from the time of her "conversion", at age thirteen, when she overcame her hypersensitivity in her Christmas experience, leaving, as she put it, her childhood behind her, she began more and more to notice that what was true for her was less true for others. Their joys, pains, and dreams were not being noticed. Her mission then became that of "noticing the unnoticed drops of blood flowing out of the wounds of Christ".

Thus, in the essential metaphor that undergirds her "little way", she writes:

"One Sunday, looking at a picture of Our Lord on the Cross, I was struck by the blood flowing from one of his divine hands. I felt a pang of great sorrow when thinking this blood was falling on the ground without anyone's hastening to gather it up. I was resolved to remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross and to receive its dew." 18 "Oh, I don't want this precious blood to be lost. I shall spend my life gathering it up for the good of souls." 19 "To live from love is to dry Your Face." 20

What Therese means by this metaphor is quite complex, and will be more fully explained in the next chapter, but suffice it here to say the core of Therese's spirituality is not as much doing little hidden things for Christ as it is noticing the unnoticed drops of blood within the body of Christ, that is, noticing and valuing fully the unique and precious quality of other peoples' stories, tears, pains, and joys.

III. Conclusion

Therese intrigues for many reasons. She is the Anne Frank of the spiritual life and she manifests a rare and a most fascinating complexity. That alone would suffice to explain her popularity. But it would not explain why her person, her story, and her writings are so powerful and so healing. Therese is powerful because her person, her story, and her writings touch us in that previously-touched place inside of us. Therese helps stir God's kiss.

ENDNOTES...

- 1) Story of a Soul, ICS Publications, Washington, D.C., 1996 edition, p. 217.
- 2) Because Therese died so young and because her diaries express so much the purity and the innocence of a child (and, in her case, all of this coupled with the tragic loss of her mother), it is no accident that a piety has grown up around her that has unfortunately, but effectively, frightened off many persons. For too many people, devotion to Therese of Lisieux is understood to be a drink from a cup of sugar sickening in its sweetness. That is a tragedy, for many reasons, but, in a manner of speaking, it comes with the turf. Her life is ideal putty to the pious imagination. Hence serious studies of her must, always, do a certain hermeneutic of "de-encrustment".

On the other hand, however, her capacity to fire piety has its upside. A number of religious analysts, including Karl Rahner, Eric Mascall, and Ernst Kasemann, have, looking at the crisis of belief in our culture and the agnosticism of our daily consciousness, suggested that the churches which have a devotional life, piety, will have the best chance of survival. As Rahner once put it: The day will soon be here when we will either be a mystic or an unbeliever. Piety is the "poor man's" mysticism.

3) Scholars who study archetypal symbols and energy, tell us that we have four basic archetypal energies - **King/Queen**, **Warrior**, **Magus**, **Lover**. And we have both a healthy and an unhealthy (adolescent) intrigue with the adolescent expressions of these. Hence there is a perennial intrigue with the child prodigy, the hero, the trickster, and the romantic, i.e., the adolescent expressions of mature energy (**the adolescent King/Queen = the Christ Child**; **the adolescent**

Warrior = the hero; the adolescent Magus = the Trickster; and the adolescent Lover = the Romantic). Thus it is natural to have a certain (immature) intrigue with the Christ-child prodigy who is instructing the elders.

4) The philosopher, Louis Dupre, in his classic work on religious symbol, <u>The Other Dimension</u>, normatively defines what makes for true religious art. For him, something is a work of religious art (a book, a piece of music, a statue) if it brings together two things: i) It has its origins in a true and a profound religious experience, and ii) It has been given real aesthetic expression.

Therese's writings, especially, <u>The Story of a Soul</u>, fit this description admirably; indeed <u>The Story of a Soul</u> can serve as a paradigm. She had a profound religious experience (of preciousness before God) and she was a great artist (she gave rare aesthetic expression to this experience).

- 5) You see this, for example, in people like Socrates, Aristotle, and St. Augustine and, as a prime analogate of course, in Jesus. Great souls are large enough to hold, in tension, near opposites and that is why their disciples are usually not up to the task of faithfully following them and, instead, invariably over-simplify and distort their master's teachings. That is also why someone once coined the expression: Consistency is the product of small minds. That is an exaggeration, of course, but it can help us understand the paradox that lies so deeply in great souls, including that of Therese of Lisieux.
 - 6) Story of a Soul, ICS Publications, Washington, D.C., 1996 edition, p. 93.
 - 7) Story of a Soul, ibid., p. 73.
 - 8) Story of a Soul, ibid., p. 74. The emphases are her own.
- 9) She uses this expression, and other similar ones, countless times, but for just one example, see her letter to Pauline of March 1, 1884: <u>General Correspondence</u>, ICS Publications, Volume I, 1982 edition, p.191.
 - 10) Last Conversations, ICS Publication, Washington, D.C., 1977 edition, p 41.
 - 11) Last Conversations, ibid., p. 111.
 - 12) Last Conversations, ibid., p. 87.
 - 13) Last Conversations, ibid., p. 235.
 - 14) Story of a Soul, ibid., p. 27.
- 15) Story of a Soul, ibid., p. 58. and p. 72 (For her sense of being born for and destined for glory.)

- 16) See an article by Raymond Gawronski, <u>Word and Silence Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter Between East and West</u>, in MYSTICISM AND HOLINESS, Eerdmans Publishing, Michigan, p.206.
 - 17) <u>Last Conversations</u>, ibid., p. 114.
 - 18) Journey of a Soul, ibid., p. 99.
 - 19) Last Conversations, ibid., p. 126.
 - 20) Last Conversations, ibid., p. 190.