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<td>The Controversy Surrounding the Doctorate of St. Thérèse of Lisieux</td>
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<td><strong>Thesis Director</strong></td>
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Abstract

The anticipated declaration of St. Thérèse of Lisieux as a Doctor of the Universal Church on October 19, 1997 was received with mixed responses. Though the Catholic world was largely supportive of the new “little doctor,” numerous reasons for denying the saint the title were also adrift in the theological world, many of which were undeniably reasonable. Ultimately, despite the abundant criticisms that had been raised during the process of her declaration, St. Thérèse of Lisieux has rightfully received the title of Doctor of the Church. This paper will begin by providing a brief biography of St. Thérèse’s life, as well as a synopsis of the history of the title of doctor in the Catholic Church. It will continue with an in-depth look at the reasons for denying the saint her doctorate, and will conclude with responses to these arguments as well as additional reasons that St. Thérèse was justly declared a Doctor of the Church.
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“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to little children” (Lk 10:21).

St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) identified this passage as one that was foundational to understanding what she called the Little Way, a pathway to God that recognized and even celebrated humanity’s littleness, our role as children of the heavenly Father, and the importance of confidence in the Lord’s merciful love. The passage is also embodied by the saint of Lisieux, who, though she was little and seemingly inconsequential in the eyes of the world, had divine truths revealed to her and received the divine directive to make them known to the world. This mission began during the last years of Thérèse’s short life, and lasted into the third millennium, where it continues to minister to the people of today and, God willing, to many for years to come.

St. Thérèse wanted nothing more than to love the Lord and to bring others to love Him, and she made this her life’s mission. At the request of her superiors, the young Carmelite set about writing down her own experience of God, and these writings became the bulk of her theology. The finished product was her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, and within its pages her unique doctrine can be found. Her sister Marie called it her “little doctrine,”¹ but its simplicity and littleness are the very aspects of her theology that make it so great and have

brought St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a little Carmelite nun who died in relative obscurity at the tender age of 24, recognition as a Doctor of the Universal Church.²

This acknowledgement did not come without its difficulties. As it became more apparent that the little saint might become the thirty-third doctor named by the Catholic Church, controversies began to arise. Though it was indisputable that St. Thérèse had always been an exceptional teacher of the faith, it was not unanimously believed that she deserved the title of ‘doctor.’ Theologians questioned whether her doctrine, if she in fact had any, was comparable to that of the great saint-theologians and doctors that had already been named by the Church. Could the Little Flower³ honestly be compared to the great Thomas Aquinas? Various priests and bishops warned that devotion to the little saint of Lisieux was a popular fad that would fade with time, and that the declaration of St. Thérèse as a Doctor of the Church would strip the title of its former value and prestige. Finally, on the margins of the great controversy were the liberal feminists. To some opponents, St. Thérèse was a martyr for the feminist cause, whose image was now wrongfully being used to advocate the continued oppression of women, but to others she was a weak, sentimental child who could never represent the aspirations of the modern woman.

² The title ‘Doctor of the Universal Church’ is a recognition reserved for the greatest Catholic intellectuals, whose theological insights have profoundly influenced the Church’s understanding of the faith and Christian life.
³ This particular title for St. Thérèse of Lisieux is taken from her autobiography where she described herself as a little flower of the field intended to please God in her simplicity, and is now commonly used to refer to the saint.
Many of the arguments against the Little Flower’s reception of the doctorate were undeniably reasonable, and her lack of a defined corpus of doctrinal teaching proved to be the largest obstacle faced by those arguing in favor of the declaration of St. Thérèse as a Doctor of the Universal Church. However, those who desired that she be denied the doctorate were the minority, and the overall response to the anticipated declaration was largely positive. The vast majority of the Catholic world was supportive of the Little Flower’s reception of the title, embracing the new little doctor with open arms. By the time Pope John Paul II named her a Doctor of the Church on October 19, 1997, the dissenters had largely been silenced by the resounding cries of the Catholic world at large, which demanded that St. Thérèse be recognized as the thirty-third doctor. Despite the numerous criticisms that had been raised during the process of being declared a Doctor of the Universal Church, St. Thérèse of Lisieux has rightfully received the title as a champion of orthodoxy, a role model for the young and women, and a precursor to the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council.

The first section of this paper will provide a brief biography of the Little Flower’s life, beginning with her birth and ending with her canonization and subsequent reception of the doctorate. A brief explanation of the title ‘Doctor of the Universal Church’ will follow, which will explore the development of the title from its origins during the first centuries of Christianity, through the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, to today. A particular emphasis will be placed on adjustments to the title made within the last century, such as the inclusion of women and the
alterations to the three main factors for ascertaining whether a particular saint might be called a doctor. The paper will continue with an in-depth look at the reasons for denying St. Thérèse her doctorate, and will conclude with responses to these arguments as well as additional support for the little doctor.

**Biography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux**

Thérèse was born Marie-François-Thérèse Martin on January 2, 1873 to Louis Martin and Zelie Guerin in the town of Alençon, France. She was the youngest of nine children, only five of which (all girls) survived infancy. According to Thérèse, who recalled her early childhood in *Story of a Soul*, the years spent at Alençon were some of her happiest, primarily because of the presence of her mother. The young child’s bliss was brought to an abrupt end with the death of Zelie Guerin when Thérèse was only four. Though she eventually recovered, the days following her mother’s death were somber. However, the little child did not lack the hope that the saintly woman was now at home in heaven. The young Thérèse responded to her mother’s death with a startling amount of courage, and elected to adopt the second-eldest Martin daughter, Pauline, as her new mother. This decision would become a foreshadowing of later events in Thérèse’s life, particularly Pauline’s election as Mother Prioress at the convent at Lisieux where both the sisters then resided.

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From an early age, the little saint showed a passion for theology, excelling at her catechism classes and even managing to memorize Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* in its entirety.\(^5\) Thérèse was so exceptional at her studies that Father Domin, her catechism teacher, on at least one occasion called her his “little doctor.”\(^6\) Her life’s mission to teach the faithful began to take form early in life, as did her vocation. Pauline announced her intention to don the Carmelite habit in 1881, when Thérèse was just eight, and the little child vowed to follow her sister as soon as she was able.\(^7\) In the years preceding her reception as a Carmelite nun, the Little Flower focused on growing in holiness and devotion to the Lord, preparing herself to become a Bride of Christ.

Thérèse’s vocation to become a Carmelite increased dramatically as she began her teenage years, a period of intense development in maturity and holiness. According to the saint, “the divine call was so strong that had I been forced to pass through flames I would have done it to be faithful to Jesus.”\(^8\) Though Thérèse did not need to pass through physical flames in order to achieve her dream of donning the Carmelite habit and giving herself entirely to Jesus Christ as His spouse, she did face a great deal of opposition. Hoping to enter the order at an age that was typically considered premature, the young woman was unable to acquire the permission of her diocese’s bishop, a condition that was required of all young women desiring to join the Carmelites. Even Pope Leo XIII, when Thérèse approached him

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\(^5\) Ibid., 102.
\(^6\) Ibid., 81.
\(^7\) Ibid., 58.
in 1887 with her request to be permitted to respond to her vocation, answered with the quip, “Go...go...you will enter if God wills it.”

Not long after the little saint made her request in Rome, she was given permission to enter the convent as a postulant prematurely, at the age of 15. She became a fully professed member of the community on September 8, 1890, taking the name Sr. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. The Little Flower's mission took its most concrete form within the walls of the Lisieux convent, as Thérèse spent her days in prayer, allowing her life’s work to mature in the depths of her soul. She felt the call deeply to be “the apostle of the apostles,” calling the world to return to the open arms of its creator, like a child who had strayed from his father. This image became the foundation of her theology, of her Little Way, a path to heaven to which ordinary Christians could adhere by achieving holiness by the ‘little’ means that were available to them in the midst of their everyday lives.

When Thérèse informed Pauline, who was then known as Mother Agnes, of her life’s mission and her Little Way, the elder responded by asking her younger sister to expand on her thoughts. According to the saint’s autobiography, which began to take form in 1895, Thérèse replied, “it is the way of spiritual childhood, the way of trust and absolute surrender.” The Little Flower had no desire to keep this wonderful revelation to herself for it was her wish “to enlighten souls as did the

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9 Thérèse of Lisieux, 134-135.
10 McGinn, 170-171.
11 Thérèse of Lisieux, 122.
12 Ibid., xi.
prophets and doctors,”¹³ and at the request of Pauline, Thérèse began to record her thoughts and theology within the pages of a copybook that eventually became her well-known autobiography, *Story of a Soul*. Though the saint rarely considered the possibility that her words would one day be published (she was in fact known to have laughed at the mere suggestion), when the thought did cross her mind, she prayed that they would bring about the conversion of sinners and encourage more souls to love the Lord.¹⁴ Thérèse only ceased writing her story when her hand became too weak to grasp a pencil.¹⁵ At this point in her life, it seemed as though the saint’s death was near.

St. Thérèse died of tuberculosis on September 30, 1897, at the age of 24, after having suffered for one and a half years with the disease.¹⁶ Her suffering was not merely physical; even as her body weakened and surrendered to the disease that was killing her, the Little Flower suffered from an interior sickness that was capable of destroying her soul as well. This spiritual affliction, which would later be identified as what St. John of the Cross had described as the ‘dark night of the soul,’ began on Easter Sunday in 1896 and presumably did not end until just minutes before her death.¹⁷ However, Thérèse never lost hope in the Lord, and for her faithfulness, she was rewarded with the crown of sainthood.

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¹⁵ Thérèse of Lisieux, 261.
¹⁶ McGinn, 169.
When the Little Flower died in 1897, few people knew of her, and of those, most did not see anything exceptional about her. In fact, most of her Carmelite sisters did not think she was even a first-rate religious, and they scoffed at the Martin sisters’ efforts to circulate the first edition of the revised autobiography of Thérèse of Lisieux, which was then entitled The History of a Soul.\textsuperscript{18} Within two decades, to nearly everyone’s surprise, the Little Flower had gone from being a relatively obscure French nun to the Catholic world’s newest love.\textsuperscript{19} Copies of her autobiography could be found throughout the world, in various languages. Multiple editions were published, and it was not long before pious Catholics were beginning to categorize Story of a Soul (the book’s more authentic title, coming from the saint’s own pen) among their spiritual classics. Just as the Little Flower had hoped, her mission had been a success and her message, the Little Way, had spread across the globe like wildfire.

The Catholic world fell in love with the Little Flower, Thérèse of Lisieux, and saw in her life and mission the makings of a great saint. Pope Pius X in 1907 called her the “greatest saint of modern times,”\textsuperscript{20} a declaration that foreshadowed her canonization by Pope Pius XI in 1925.\textsuperscript{21} However, her canonization was not enough. Within years of Thérèse’s recognition as a saint of the Catholic Church, the devout began calling for something more: her doctorate. The princes of the Church

\textsuperscript{18} Hansen, 6.
\textsuperscript{19} Payne, 63.
\textsuperscript{20} Pope Pius X, as quoted by Hansen, 6.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 6.
responded to the people’s cries, and bishops across the globe began to seriously petition that St. Thérèse of Lisieux be declared a Doctor of the Church.\(^\text{22}\)

The first person to formally petition was the Jesuit P. Gustave Desbuquois (1869-1959)\(^\text{23}\) in 1932, on the occasion of the inauguration of the crypt of the Basilica at Lisieux. By 1933, 342 bishops had responded in the affirmative, supporting the priest’s desire to see St. Thérèse declared a doctor.\(^\text{24}\) The petition of Fr. Desbuquois was presented to Pope Pius XI who, though he was in fact pleased with the efforts of the priests and bishops, remarked that it would probably be best not to speak of St. Thérèse’s doctorate just yet. It seemed as if it was not yet the proper time to name a female Doctor of the Church.\(^\text{25}\) Despite his rejection of the petition, Pope Pius XI (and later his successors) continued to encourage the faithful to adopt the teachings of the Little Flower, asserting, “we earnestly desire that all the faithful should study her in order to copy her, becoming children themselves; since otherwise they cannot, according to the words of the Master, arrive at the Kingdom of Heaven.”\(^\text{26}\) It would not be until 1970 that the tides would turn in her favor.

Efforts to have St. Thérèse declared a doctor were revived with the astounding decision of Pope Paul VI to name both St. Teresa of Avila and St.

\(^\text{22}\) Payne, 33.
\(^\text{23}\) Ibid., 75.
\(^\text{25}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^\text{26}\) Thérèse of Lisieux, xii.
Catherine of Siena Doctors of the Universal Church in 1970. The next two decades were a flurry of activity as “more than thirty Episcopal conferences and thousands of Christians, priests, religious, and lay people of 107 countries pronounced themselves in favor of the doctorate.” Their cries were deafening, and it was not long before the Church responded. On August 31, 1992, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (CCS) requested from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) their overall opinion of the eminence of Thérèse’s doctrine, a factor in the process of bestowing doctorates that will be explored in detail in the next section.

By 1997, the centennial of the saint’s death, several groups had begun correspondence with the intent of determining whether or not the Little Flower properly fulfilled the criteria for being declared a Doctor of the Church. In early 1997, the Carmelite convent in Lisieux was tasked with preparing the positio, or evidence in support of St. Thérèse’s potential doctorate. Within just a few months, the 965-page completed positio was submitted to the CDF and the CCS. A conclusion about the saint’s suitability for the title Doctor of the Universal Church would not be reached without a bit of controversy.

Seven theologians had been requested to give their opinion of the Little Flower’s potential as a doctor, six of whom were in favor of her doctorate and one

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27 Payne, 78-79.
28 Maccise, 6.
29 Payne, 79.
30 Maccise, 6-7.
opposed.31 These judgments were included in the finished *positio* and were eventually considered, along with the other evidence available, by the consulters for the CDF. The twenty-two consulters were then asked to vote in favor of, in favor of *iuxta modum* (with reservations), or against Thérèse’s potential reception of the title Doctor of the Church. Nineteen members voted in favor of her doctorate, two were in favor *iuxta modum*, and only one opposed.32 However, though it seemed as though Thérèse had little chance of not being declared a doctor, the decision remained indeterminate.

Opposing theologians and consulters for the CDF had very good reason for wishing to deny the Little Flower her doctorate. Their primary reason was one concerned with the presence of eminent doctrine, which was one of the criteria that must be present in order for a saint to be named a Doctor of the Universal Church. The opposing theologians believed that St. Thérèse did not possess a doctrinal corpus that was worthy of being called ‘eminent.’ Though these voters were the definite minority, their arguments were solid and worthy of consideration.33 The little saint’s future as a doctor was not yet set in stone. Pope John Paul II, in whom the ultimate decision rested, could still have chosen not to declare St. Thérèse of Lisieux the thirty-third Doctor of the Church.

Of course, at this point in time we know what the papal decision was, since today we do in fact have thirty-three Doctors of the Church, three of whom are women. Pope John Paul II announced his intention to declare St. Thérèse of

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31 Payne, 83.
Lisieux a doctor on August 24, 1997 on the occasion of the 12th World Youth Day, in Paris, France, and did so on October 19, 1997 amidst the joyous cries of all gathered in Rome at the time.\textsuperscript{34} In his address to the pilgrims present for the celebration, John Paul II did not hesitate to acknowledge, “Although her writings were not of the same nature as those of theologians, for each of us they are a powerful help in understanding the faith and Christian life.”\textsuperscript{35} And that, according to Pope John Paul II and the modern understanding of the title, is what it means to be called a Doctor of the Universal Church.

\textit{History of the title “Doctor of the Universal Church”}

A great deal of the controversy surrounding the decision to name St. Thérèse of Lisieux a Doctor of the Universal Church stemmed from misunderstandings concerning the fundamental meaning of the title. The concept of a doctor did not emerge at one particular time in history in the same form that it now takes, but has gradually developed since the birth of the Church over two millennia ago. The adjustments that have been made to the criteria for determining the qualifications of a particular saint to be declared a Doctor of the Church, specifically those that have been made within the past century, have allowed for a broader definition of the term ‘doctor.’ As a result, St. Thérèse, who could never have received the title

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, 1.
\textsuperscript{35} John Paul II, Pope, \textit{Address to Pilgrims in Rome for the Proclamation of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face as a Doctor of the Universal Church} (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1997), 1.
prior to these changes, has been declared the thirty-third Doctor of the Universal Church.

Before exploring the history of the title, and particularly the changes that have been made to the title during the past two thousand years, those features that have remained the same throughout should first be considered. As Pope John Paul II pointed out in his apostolic letter *Divini Amoris Scientia*, “the Doctors of the Church...in every historical context remain witnesses to the unchanging Gospel and, with the light and strength that come from the Holy Spirit, they become messengers, returning to proclaim it in its purity to their contemporaries.”

Evidently, the two characteristics of the title that cannot be altered without changing the fundamental meaning of the word are the doctor’s purpose - that of an authoritative witness to the faith, and his or her inspiration - the Holy Spirit.

Doctors, from Christianity’s earliest years, were those men who were deemed teaching authorities in regard to the faith and the Christian life. The term ‘doctor’ is in fact taken from the Latin word *docere*, which literally means ‘to teach.’ In its most fundamental and ancient form, Christian doctors were those men, mostly religious, who gave instruction in the faith. At this point in history, the term was not yet a distinct title, but merely referred to teachers of the Christian faith whose words were taken as authoritative and orthodox. The term ‘doctor’ would only be considered in a more official capacity several centuries later.

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37 McGinn, 4.
During the patristic era, the term ‘doctor’ was only used loosely to designate prominent teachers of theology, who were believed to have acquired their knowledge through an intimate relationship with God, rather than having merely studied a great deal.\textsuperscript{38} Even when, in the medieval era, it did become more of a title denoting profound influence on the development of the Catholic faith, only patristic writers were considered suitable to receive the title.\textsuperscript{39} This did not change until the sixteenth century when the two “giants of medieval theology”\textsuperscript{40} Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure were recognized as Doctors of the Church. This was a significant alteration because it meant that saints whose doctrine was influential but differed from that of the patristic era could also be considered doctors.\textsuperscript{41}

The next noteworthy adjustment to the definition of the title ‘Doctor of the Universal Church’ occurred with the declarations of St. Francis de Sales in 1877 and St. John of the Cross in 1926. These two saints became the first doctors recognized not for their theological treatises that were “written to defend the church’s teaching or to promote a particular theological perspective,”\textsuperscript{42} but for their preaching from the pulpit and from various spiritual writings.\textsuperscript{43} As can be seen, as more doctors were included in the official list, the criteria for determining a particular saint’s appropriateness broadened so that more types of saints could be included and their influence on the development of the faith acknowledged.

\textsuperscript{39} Payne, 216.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}, 216.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}, 216.
\textsuperscript{42} John F. Russell, "St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor of the Church?" \textit{America} 167, no. 10 (October 1992): 250.
\textsuperscript{43} Payne, 216.
While the inclusion of St. Francis de Sales and St. John of the Cross among the ranks of the Doctors of the Universal Church did indeed encourage broader criteria for determining whether particular saints were potential candidates for the title, it did nothing for the great teachers of the faith who were being denied because of their gender. Throughout history, only men were considered for the doctorate, a practice that had its roots in the Scriptures. Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, wrote, “I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent” (1 Timothy 2:12). Traditionally interpreted as a condemnation of female doctors, no female saint was seriously considered as a possible recipient of the title until the late twentieth century.

This changed in 1970 with the additions of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Catherine of Siena to the list of recognized Doctors of the Church, the first to be “members of the laity, non-ordained believers who were neither trained to teach nor recognized as teachers in their own time.” The pope of the time, Paul VI, defended his decision to forego tradition by asserting that the apostle Paul was referring to the exclusion of women from the particular teaching authority that is now called the Magisterium, and did not have the intention of forbidding all female teachers. In fact, to deny the Church the opportunity to embrace “the feminine genius” is to deny the fact that “many women have arrived at great heights, even to the point

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44 Ibid., 16.
45 McGinn, 3.
46 This term refers to bishops’ teachings that are in communion with the Pope’s, and thus can be considered authoritative.
47 Ibid., 18.
48 John Paul II, Divini Amoris Scientia, 11.
where their words and their writings have become lights and guides for their brethren.”

However, as a result of the flood of petitions that occurred immediately following this revolutionary change, Pope Paul VI announced that he was suspending all further declarations until the criteria for determining the suitability of particular saints for the doctorate had been thoroughly investigated.

Before another Doctor of the Church could be named, the Magisterium, particularly under Pope John Paul II, considered the current version of the criteria with the intent of improving them in order to make them more specific. Cardinal Prospero Lambertini, the future Pope Benedict XIV, had set the most primitive authoritative set of criteria forth between 1734 and 1738 in his *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione*, with the intent of outlining the prerequisites for recognition as a Doctor of the Church. Lambertini identified three criteria: “eminent doctrine; outstanding holiness of life... and a declaration passed by the supreme pontiff or the legitimately assembled General Council.”

These three criteria for determining the suitability of a saint who could potentially be declared a Doctor of the Universal Church had been used prior to the eighteenth century, but it was not until then that they took a concrete, authoritative form. The second and third criteria would never prove difficult to apply when considering the potential of a saint. Only canonized saints, having already demonstrated that they had been exceptionally holy by their very...
canonization, were considered. The declaration passed by the pope or the General Council was the final step in the process, occurring only after all other factors had been considered. Unfortunately, however, the last criterion, that of eminent doctrine, would be much more difficult to apply consistently.53

It was impossible to determine definitively whether or not a particular saint’s writings should be considered ‘eminent.’ In the centuries following the criteria’s initial formation, numerous theologians expanded on what was meant by the word ‘eminent.’ In 1871, the Congregation of Rites54 asserted that those writings that should be considered eminent were those that “gave light of some sort to the universal church.”55 Additionally, the theology expressed in a particular saint’s writings should be novel in some way, while still adhering to orthodox Catholic teaching. While these details were set forth with the intention of making the criteria more objective, they failed to create an absolute standard that could be applied universally to all saint’s writings. More qualifications were still required.56

When the congregation considered the dilemma again in 1981, Cardinal Umberto Betti stressed that those saints being considered should have:

multiple written documentation, duly examined by literary and theological criticism; original contribution at least to some fields of knowledge, such as to offer a real help in deepening study of Divine Revelation, in illustration and increase of Christian life; its confirmation by use, not occasional but continuous, on the part of

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53 Ibid., 18-19.
54 Pope Paul VI dissolved this congregation in 1969, and divided it into the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for the Cause of Saints.
55 Payne, 19.
56 Ibid., 20-21.
scholars in the field of sacred sciences as well as pastors of the Church.\textsuperscript{57}

In addition to these requirements, potential doctors “must have exercised a considerable influence on the thought of the Church...and must have remained faithful to the doctrine of the Church.”\textsuperscript{58} When considering the suitability of a particular saint, there must be evidence that the entire Church, present and future, will embrace his or her message.\textsuperscript{59}

The criteria for identifying eminent doctrine took their present form under the guidance and with the approval of Pope John Paul II in 1996, when the CDF took Betti’s framework and organized it into a list of six criteria. These were: (1) evidence of the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in the writings of the saint; (2) doctrinal teaching that is profound and influential in the theological world; (3) a message that is in line with traditional, orthodox Church teaching; (4) a body of doctrine that has been drawn from Scripture, Tradition, and the teaching of the Magisterium; (5) an overall beneficial influence on the entire Body of Christ, and (6) a message that is of lasting value. This new outline was central in the debate over the Little Flower of Lisieux’s being declared a Doctor of the Universal Church, as will soon be demonstrated.\textsuperscript{60}

As can be seen, many adjustments to the title ‘Doctor of the Church’ were necessary before a saint such as Thérèse of Lisieux, who was a woman with no intense theological training whatsoever, could be considered as a possible recipient

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Ibid.}, 22.  
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ibid.}, 23.  
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, 23.  
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.}, 79-80.
of the doctorate. The Holy Spirit guided the development of the title, and when the
time was right, He gave the Little Flower 24 years to make her message known to
the world. He then worked for nearly a century preparing the Catholic world for
her reception as the thirty-third Doctor of the Universal Church. Though she had
previously been recognized as a teacher of the faith and an example of the properly
lived Christian life, in 1997, St. Thérèse of Lisieux officially received the title that
she so deserved. Of course, this was only achieved after a great deal of struggle.
Not everyone was convinced that they saw the makings of a legitimate doctor when
they regarded the little saint of Lisieux.

 Opposition to bestowing the doctorate on St. Thérèse

As the petitions to see St. Thérèse of Lisieux declared the thirty-third Doctor
of the Universal Church began to suggest that the majority of the Catholic world
was of one mind in the matter, the first dissenters decided that it was time to make
their opinions known. Though they never successfully convinced the majority of
their position, in the years preceding 1997 they did pose a significant threat against
efforts to see the Little Flower receive her doctorate. Their reasoning was plausible
and largely logical, and their arguments were fairly diverse. Most significantly, a
substantial number of the opposition identified what would eventually be
considered the ‘weak link’ in the armor of St. Thérèse’s cause: namely, her lack of a
definitive corpus of doctrine. Even when Pope John Paul II decided to bestow upon
the little saint her doctorate, he was willing to admit that her declaration
“represented a watershed in the evolution of the understanding of this ecclesiastical title”\textsuperscript{61} and that it departed “from previous practice.”\textsuperscript{62}

St. Thérèse of Lisieux was no theologian; that was undeniable. She had little theological training beyond what she had received in her childhood and adolescent catechism classes and what knowledge she had gathered while behind the walls of the Carmelite convent. Beyond her spiritual readings of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, her copy of \textit{The Imitation of Christ}, and the Scriptures, Thérèse did not have access to an extensive amount of theological writings. In addition to her lack of theological training, the Little Flower never held a position of teacher, unless one includes her role as assistant novice mistress, where she was responsible for guiding the spiritual development of the aspirants as they prepared to receive the Carmelite veil.\textsuperscript{63}

A second argument concerning the saint’s lack of eminent doctrine was linked with the first. Not only was St. Thérèse of Lisieux not trained in theology, but she also never produced a strictly theological text. The largest work that she authored was her autobiography, which was written for the purpose of documenting her life’s experiences, particularly those associated with her spiritual life. Thérèse never considered this a work of theology, but rather it was her autobiography, the musings of a young Carmelite nun who other people considered to be a saintly figure. She wrote freely, with little concern for promoting orthodoxy or condemning

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, xi.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.}, 4.
\textsuperscript{63} Thérèse of Lisieux, 209.
heresy.\textsuperscript{64} She wrote because she had been instructed to do so; she had no intention of producing an apologetic piece of theology or one that advocated a new form of theology. The orthodoxy of her autobiography, as well as her other writings, was the result of her faith in Jesus Christ and his bride, the Church. Her Little Way, which became the core of her theology, drew from her experience and from divinely inspired wisdom. Though the Little Flower’s musings were adequately orthodox, those who opposed St. Thérèse being declared a Doctor of the Church questioned whether or not that was sufficient. Most did not think so.\textsuperscript{65}

Those who opposed the declaration on the basis that St. Thérèse lacked a strict body of doctrinal teaching also argued that to soften the criteria use to define eminent doctrine would be to make the title a synonym for that of ‘saint.’ As such, the title ‘doctor’ would cease to identify those saints whose mission within the Church was primarily that of a teacher.\textsuperscript{66} If the Little Flower had all the qualifications to be a Doctor of the Church, then why not consider Ignatius Loyola, John Vianney, and Thomas More? Were they not teachers as Thérèse was?\textsuperscript{67} It could not be denied that St. Thérèse had served as a teacher to her novices, her fellow sisters, and later, those who embraced the Little Way discussed in her autobiography, but this was only in a secondary manner. The Church learned from studying her very life, not her theology.\textsuperscript{68} While this made the little saint worthy of

\textsuperscript{64} Payne, 172.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 129.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 126.
some sort of recognition, according to dissenters who thought along this line, bestowing the title of doctor on Thérèse was not the answer.

In addition to this, many opponents suggested that to equate ‘saint’ with ‘doctor’ would be to return to a more primitive definition of the title, and thus would cause the Church to undo nearly two millennia of progress in regard to the title. Some adversaries even went so far as to insist that St. Thérèse’s positio should be considered an impediment because the theologian who compiled the information for the portion dealing with her theology took entire blocks of text from François-Marie Léthel, who presumed that all great saints had to be great theologians, and thus were suitable for the title of Doctor of the Church. This of course proved untrue, though his opinion and his role in the production of St. Thérèse’s positio proved to be a hindrance to many theologians considering her cause.

These theologians, specifically those who voted against bestowing upon the Little Flower her doctorate and those who voted in favor but with reservations, had issues other than those directly related to the question of St. Thérèse’s eminent doctrine. Many voters were concerned that to declare the young saint a Doctor of the Church would be to respond to popular piety surrounding the Little Flower of Lisieux. No theologian could deny that the Catholic world had entered into a love affair with the Carmelite nun, whose life and death had a ‘romantic’ feel to it and whose aptitude for intercessory prayer had become world renowned by this point in history. Thus, numerous theologians feared that the general public, and perhaps some members of the theological world who were involved in the saint’s cause, 

69 Ibid., 99-103.
might have confused “excellent holiness and doctrinal eminence.” Some dissenters even went so far as to suggest that Pope John Paul II’s personal devotion to St. Thérèse might cloud his judgment in the matter.

Another argument that was a major obstacle to be overcome by promoters of the Little Flower’s cause has already been discussed briefly, namely, that of Pauline’s tampering of the original texts. While much of the difficulty associated with this obstacle was resolved with the release of the unedited version of St. Thérèse’s *Story of a Soul* in the 1950s, the controversy is still worth exploring since it was linked with a much more complicated obstacle for Thérèse’s supporters to surmount, that of the theological atmosphere in which she was raised and educated. Before discussing this, one must be at least somewhat familiar with the controversy surrounding the publication of St. Thérèse’s autobiography.

As the saint’s health began to decline in the last months of her life, Thérèse gave her sister Pauline, then the prioress Mother Agnes, permission to make what alterations to the text that she deemed necessary. The young Carmelite had not intended to have her writings published when she had begun documenting her childhood experiences, and thus there were numerous spelling and grammatical errors. As death approached, Thérèse became less capable of expressing herself, and so Pauline was permitted to change historical facts that her younger sister had gotten incorrect in her manuscripts. In addition to these more ‘legitimate’

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70 Ibid., 131.
71 McGinn, 19.
73 Ibid., 14.
alterations, Pauline also edited the text with the intent of polishing the style, as well as modifying or deleting passages that Pauline considered too personal or that might have served as an obstacle to Thérèse’s canonization.74

Naturally, when the public learned that Thérèse’s original manuscripts had been edited, there was an immediate demand to have the original released.75 Pauline was accused of distorting and even falsifying “both the image and message of Thérèse to fit popular notions of sanctity, in order thereby to promote her possible canonization.”76 Though Pauline had had honorable intentions when she had made the changes, which included the removal of over thirty pages of text, her decisions were more cumbersome to Thérèse’s cause than they were helpful. While they had not impeded the Little Flower’s canonization, they proved an obstacle for those petitioning that she be named a Doctor of the Universal Church.77

Some of Pauline’s revisions had been to amend Thérèse’s wording so that it possessed the flowery style of writing typical of the time. She removed passages that did not fit the norms for theology as it was then understood in an effort to help along her sister’s canonization process. However, as a result, St. Thérèse was often accused of having fallen prey to the faulty theology that was common in the nineteenth century French culture in which she lived. In addition to this, some of her most profound theological passages, because they might have been considered too revolutionary at the time that Thérèse was writing, had been omitted and kept

74 Payne, 64-65.
75 Ibid., 65.
76 Ibid., 66.
77 Ibid., 67.
from the scrutinizing eyes of those involved in her cause for canonization. Unfortunately, those passages of novel theology that might have impeded her recognition as a saint were the same ones that were fundamental when theologians began petitioning for her recognition as a Doctor of the Church.\footnote{Ibid., 67-68.}

As already mentioned, Thérèse of Lisieux was raised in nineteenth century France, in a culture that adhered to a form of Roman Catholicism that was incredibly pietistic, overly sentimental, and definitely lacking in theological depth. The theology most commonly embraced by the average French Roman Catholic was “often legalistic and rigoristic, encouraging believers to count up their devotions and penances so as to earn divine favor and, ultimately, assure their entrance to heaven.”\footnote{Frohlich, 28.} Thérèse’s religious education most likely lacked a properly developed theology of grace and salvation since Jansenism, a heresy that had yet to be completely stamped out, most likely tainted her education while she studied at the Benedictine abbey.\footnote{Ibid., 29. The heresy commonly referred to as Jansenism was characterized by a ‘hellfire and brimstone’ spirituality similar to that of Calvinism, and denied that souls were free to choose whether or not they were going to accept the graces that God sought to bestow on them.}

This was the world in which the little saint of Lisieux had grown up, and because of the negative implications such a culture might have had on the beliefs of a Catholic, it is no surprise that theologians involved in the cause for Thérèse’s doctorate considered this a possible obstacle to be overcome. Even her staunchest supporters conceded that St. Thérèse might have been “a ‘victim’ of the religiosity
and flowery language of her times.”\textsuperscript{81} As for her opponents, they were more than willing to provide examples of passages that revealed how the young Carmelite had fallen prey to the theological culture in which she had been formed. Some noted her ‘pretty’ language, with descriptions of little rabbits, little balls, little birds, and other such little metaphors. Others mocked her practice of counting her good deeds by moving beads on her chaplet,\textsuperscript{82} and claimed that this was evidence of her acceptance of Jansenist theology.

The accusation that St. Thérèse’s thoughts were most likely tainted by the harmful theological atmosphere in which she lived posed one of the greatest obstacles for those petitioning on behalf of the saint. To claim that the Little Flower fell prey to the type of theology commonly embraced by believers in nineteenth century France would be to cast a definite aura of apprehension over the entire process of declaring Thérèse a Doctor of the Universal Church. Quite possibly the most interesting characteristic of this argument in opposition of the cause is that it seems to contradict another very strong reason against naming the little saint the thirty-third doctor: that she lacked doctrine. According to opponents embracing the argument discussed here, not only did St. Thérèse have a corpus of doctrine, but there was also a chance that her environment had tainted this theology.\textsuperscript{83} However, since numerous dissidents had different opinions about why the Little Flower should be denied her doctorate, it should not be surprising that some of these reasons might contradict one another.

\textsuperscript{81} Hansen, 6.  
\textsuperscript{82} Thérèse of Lisieux, 25.  
\textsuperscript{83} Payne, 182.
While there were indeed those who saw Thérèse’s doctrine as being potentially detrimental to the Catholic world, most theologians did not perceive Thérèse as much of a threat. In fact, they did not even believe that the ‘little’ saint had a strict corpus of doctrine with which to threaten orthodoxy. For the majority of those opposed to bestowing upon St. Thérèse her doctorate, the young woman was most certainly a saint, but certainly not a theologian. However, there was a small group of dissidents who considered the Little Flower from a very different angle. These were the feminists, and their opinions of the ‘little’ saint varied greatly. Some saw Thérèse as a threat to their cause because she was being used to advocate the supposed misogynist agenda of the hierarchical Church, while others considered her to be a sentimental figure too weak to represent their cause. Regardless of their specific arguments, the feminist opposition was united in their belief that St. Thérèse of Lisieux was an unworthy candidate for the title Doctor of the Universal Church.

There were among the opposing feminists a group of men and women who expressed a devotion to the saint, but believed that it would be detrimental to the liberal feminist agenda to have her named the thirty-third Doctor of the Church. In their opinion, Thérèse had lived a life worthy of their praise, having “openly entertained the unthinkable possibility that women might be called by God to the Church’s priestly ministry.”84 Drawing from Thérèse’s autobiography where she wrote, “I feel the vocation of the WARRIOR, THE PRIEST, THE APOSTLE, THE

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84 Ibid., 180.
DOCTOR, AND THE MARTYR,” such feminists saw in Thérèse a strong woman who had been brave enough to consider the unthinkable possibility that women might be called by God to be priests, though her dreams had been stifled by the misogynist Church from which she was unable to break free. Thérèse became a figure to be mourned, a martyr for the liberal feminist cause, and a saint that the modern-day woman with her dreams and ambitions could emulate. According to these feminists, though she never was given the opportunity to become a priest, the Little Flower’s efforts were most certainly praiseworthy.

If truth be told, it seems doubtful that St. Thérèse of Lisieux, whose theology exuded orthodoxy in all matters, ever had any real hope of one day becoming a priest, nor does it seem as though she would have supported such a major change. As the writer Thomas McKeon suggested, “No doubt her fidelity to the doctrine and practice of the Church would not allow her to entertain the least doubt about the invalidity of orders conferred upon women.” In other words, even if St. Thérèse did have a legitimate desire to perform those duties associated with the priesthood, she most likely would have accepted that this would be innately impossible for a woman to accomplish. However, the reality of the situation did not seem to faze those liberal feminists who were fond of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

That being said, unfortunately for such men and women, most of the Catholic world would not remember St. Thérèse for her supposed ‘feminist inclinations,’ but

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85 Thérèse of Lisieux, 192.
86 Payne, 180.
for her patience, humility, poverty, and willingness to suffer and sacrifice. These were the characteristics that the Church would stress, encouraging the faithful to imitate her. In the minds of those feminists who were antagonistic towards the hierarchical church, this was done in an attempt to encourage docility among the faithful, to encourage the obedient acceptance of an all-male priesthood and female passivity, among other things. In other words, by advocating the Little Way as a means of achieving heaven, the institutional church was advocating the continued discrimination against women. According to these opponents, the caricature of St. Thérèse’s life advocated by the Church “reinforce[d] the patriarchal situation that limits women’s expectations to passive, subordinate, and auxiliary roles.” To name Thérèse a Doctor of the Universal Church would thus have created a false notion of the Little Flower’s opinions, as well as would have stifled the progression of the liberal feminist movement.

There were also numerous feminists who, though they did not question the sanctity of the life that Thérèse had lived, did not believe that the Little Flower was a worthy candidate for the title of ‘doctor.’ Though she had lived a life of exemplary holiness, she lacked the corpus of doctrine that was typical of those saints who were considered for the title. Accordingly, to name the Little Flower a doctor was merely an attempt to compensate for past injustices towards women, or to inadvertently claim that a woman could only be recognized as a doctor if stipulations were made

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88 Ibid., 176-179.
89 Michele Marie Schumacher, "Thérèse, Woman in the Church," Logos 3, no. 3 (Summer 2000):127.
90 Payne, 178.
91 Ibid., 183.
for her weaknesses. The former reason only filled feminists with gratitude and pity for the Church’s misconstrued attempts to make up for past wrongs, while the latter merely filled feminists with contempt and anger. Neither was viewed an acceptable reason for bestowing upon St. Thérèse of Lisieux the title of ‘Doctor of the Universal Church.’

There were also within the liberal feminist camp those opponents of the Little Flower’s doctorate who were blatantly disgusted with the notion that such a figure could even be considered a martyr for their cause. In the eyes of feminists of this opinion, St. Thérèse was just what she said she was: little. Everything was little for the saint: little Thérèse, little Jesus, little rabbit, little ball, little doctrine, little maturity, little willpower, et cetera. The Little Flower, in many people’s eyes, was “the epitome of the simple, unquestioning, pious, sentimental, accepting ‘child-woman,’” and as such, was an unsuitable role model for the modern woman with her desires for equality, strength, and freedom. St. Thérèse was too sweet, too weak, and too anti-feminist to ever be considered the model for today’s women.

Because of these supposed defects in the character of the little saint, many liberal feminists believed that to name St. Thérèse a Doctor of the Church would be a step back for their cause, a step back into the misogyny and anti-feminism of the past.

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92 Ibid., 143.
94 Hansen, 6.
As can now be seen, those theologians, priests, and faithful who were petitioning that St. Thérèse receive her doctorate did not do so without opposition. The obstacles were numerous, varied, and for the most part, reasonable. They revealed the weak spots in the saint’s cause, and challenged the Little Flower’s supporters to explore in detail the events of her life and the theology, if there was indeed any, of her writings. Though her supporters vastly outnumbered her opponents, the process of Thérèse’s declaration was not without its struggles. Theologians were tasked with defending the presence of eminent doctrine and her orthodoxy. They were required to demonstrate that the Catholic world was demanding that Thérèse receive her doctorate not merely because she had become the object of popular piety, but because she was already a teacher inspired by the Holy Spirit who was positively impacting the faithful across the globe. How Thérèse’s supporters went about doing this will follow.

**Support for bestowing the doctorate on St. Thérèse**

Those who advocated that St. Thérèse of Lisieux receive her doctorate comprised the greater majority of the Catholic world, but sheer numbers did not make their mission easier. No saint has ever been a perfect candidate for the title; some had a limited corpus of writing, others were not very well-educated, and still others were not held in very high esteem by the faithful. While those who were granted the title Doctor of the Universal Church did fulfill all of the requirements that were present at the time of their recognition, no saint-doctor was expected to
do so perfectly. The Church understood that the Holy Spirit inspired the doctors in different ways, and as a result, their gifts as teaching authorities within the Body would be different as well, manifesting themselves differently and yielding different fruits. This was perfectly acceptable, and was even encouraged, because it revealed the diversity within the Catholic Church and helped to make certain doctors extremely relevant during specific eras in history.

St. Thérèse demonstrated all of the criteria for being declared a Doctor of the Church according to today’s standards, though it was only through the great efforts of those who championed her cause that she officially received the title. The young saint, who was not suitably educated in theology and had never endeavored to write a theological text, might not have seemed a possible candidate for the title in the past, but because of the broadness of the criteria as they currently stand, her supporters were able to state their case adequately enough that St. Thérèse of Lisieux was indeed named the thirty-third Doctor of the Universal Church. Despite the numerous reasons for denying the Little Flower her doctorate, the saint proved herself worthy of the title, in ways which will be explored in some detail soon, as supporters of Thérèse’s doctorate studied her life and her writings so as to extricate what was soon recognized as a theology unique to the little saint.

The question of theology and doctrine was the most prevalent argument considered by those theologians contemplating the suitability of St. Thérèse as a candidate for the title Doctor of the Universal Church. Many opponents, as has already been demonstrated, questioned the Little Flower’s role as a teaching
authority within the Church since it seemed apparent that the saint lacked a
doctrinal corpus that could be used to teach the Catholic faithful. Thérèse’s
writings are experiential in nature, and were never intended to be used to teach her
novices, or at least initially, even to be read by the public. The Little Flower wrote
for strictly personal reasons; she wrote letters to friends and family, fashioned plays
and poems for the enjoyment of her fellow Carmelite sisters, and described the
events of her young life in her autobiography *Story of a Soul* only because she was
directed to do so by her Mother Prioress. These documents were never intended to
teach theology, and yet that’s what they ultimately did.

During her life, she taught her novices, as well as her fellow sisters, biological
and spiritual. After her death, she continued to teach the Catholic faithful through
her writings as they became published. This teaching role continues even to today.
St. Thérèse’s primary purpose for writing was never to teach orthodox theology to
her readers, but rather, to teach them how to love and be loved by the God of the
universe. Her intention was never to teach using an objective scholarly method as
St. Thomas Aquinas did, but to teach through her very life. She had been blessed
with the knowledge of what it meant to love and be loved, and she felt deeply the
need to offer that knowledge to the world. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, like so many
saints before her, did not study and teach theology in the strictest sense of the word,
but rather, she lived it.

However, the fact that St. Thérèse wrote primarily from personal experience
does not exclude the possibility that her reflections on these events do not have
theological implications. Many of her musings involve an incorporation of Scripture and Tradition that was profound, shedding light on a variety of aspects of the faith and Christian life. Her insights were novel, yet in line with orthodox belief, and would eventually find their way into the theological world. In 1921, Pope Benedict XV praised Thérèse for her “ample treasure of doctrine,” and two years later Pius XI described her as a teacher within the Catholic Church. Just how this was so was revealed in the years between her canonization and her declaration as the thirty-third Doctor of the Church.

Though St. Thérèse was not a theologian herself, her writings have been used in the course of the theological studies of those men preparing to become priests. Seminarians encounter the Little Flower in numerous branches of their education, whether they are studying Christology, ecclesiology, or Mariology, among other theological areas. Her theology, particularly her thoughts on Mary and the nature of the Body of Christ, were incorporated into the documents of the Second Vatican Council. In addition to these incredible achievements, St. Thérèse was also quoted six times throughout the new edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, always at strategic points. This made her one of the most oft quoted saints within the pages of the Catechism. These accomplishments should be considered incredibly impressive for a saint who many theologians did not believe had any sort of eminent doctrine of which to speak.

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95 Payne, 195.
96 Pope Benedict XV, as quoted in Payne, 72.
97 Payne, 73.
98 Gaucher.
And yet no realistic theologian, no matter how supportive of St. Thérèse's doctorate, claimed that she should be considered a theologian in the traditional sense of the word. It cannot be denied that the Little Flower never received proper theological training, nor did she ever write any strictly theological texts. However, she clearly did teach. As Pope John Paul II so beautifully explained, “with her distinctive doctrine and unmistakable style, Thérèse appears as an authentic teacher of the faith and Christian life...[whose] particular radiance of doctrine shines forth from her writings which, as if by a charism of the Holy Spirit, grasp the very heart of the message of Revelation in a fresh and original vision, presenting a teaching of eminent quality.”

St. Thérèse’s theology can be found within the pages of her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, as well as in her various other works. Though she only lived for 24 years, nine of which were spent in the Lisieux Carmel, the volume of her writings is surprisingly large. In addition to her autobiography, the Little Flower also composed 266 letters, 62 poems, 21 prayers, and 8 plays. Her writings proved controversial in several ways. While most of the obstacles to her doctorate emerged from the content of her works, there were some opponents, as mentioned earlier, who questioned their authenticity. In the years preceding Thérèse’s doctorate, more than one opponent was known to have asked of her supporters, ‘Whose words are we reading, Thérèse’s or her initial editor, Pauline's?’

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Though most of the dissident theologians were appeased by the release of an edition of *Story of a Soul* that was free from Pauline’s erroneous corrections, there were several more resolute opponents who questioned whether a complete removal of Pauline’s editing was even possible. According to these theologians, it could not be demonstratively proven that Thérèse’s autobiography had not been negatively impacted by Pauline’s input. However, those petitioning for the Little Flower’s doctorate repeatedly pointed out that even with all of Pauline’s revisions, the most essential parts of the text - those that revealed her theology - had remained intact, profound, and distinctly Thérèse-like. Pope John Paul II assured the Church of this in his apostolic letter for the occasion of St. Thérèse being declared a Doctor of the Universal Church when he wrote, “the doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux appears in providential harmony with the Church’s most authentic tradition, both for its confession of the Catholic faith and for its promotion of the most genuine spiritual life.”

Proving the authenticity of St. Thérèse’s work was only the first step in demonstrating how her writings, and indeed her life, fulfilled the six new criteria for eminent doctrine that had been outlined by Pope John Paul II in 1996. Once it had been largely accepted that *Story of a Soul* was in fact the Little Flower’s and an accurate portrayal of the saint’s reflections, it still remained for Thérèse’s supporters to demonstrate how those reflections were in fact doctrinal in nature. It was only after delving deeply into the saint’s autobiography, as well as her other

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101 Payne, 70-71.  
writings, that it steadily became clear that St. Thérèse of Lisieux truly did have a distinct theology to offer the Catholic world. It was only after an intense study of her writings that those petitioning that the Little Flower be declared a Doctor of the Universal Church were able to sufficiently demonstrate how she fulfilled all six criteria.

First, Thérèse’s writings needed to reveal that the saint had been inspired by the Holy Spirit and had been imbued with the charism of wisdom as she wrote. St. Thérèse provided the proof for this within the pages of her autobiography when she wrote, “Here is the teacher whom I am giving you; he will teach you everything that you must do. I want to make you read in the book of life, wherein is contained the science of LOVE.” She repeatedly stated that she felt that she was being taught by the divine ‘teacher,’ Jesus Christ, who was revealing his ‘divine teachings’ to her so that she might bring them to the world.

Second, St. Thérèse’s teachings had to have a profound impact on the Catholic theological world, whether it was apologetic in nature, or spiritual, or relating to one specific domain of doctrine. Evidence for this was found in her reflections on Mary as ‘mother,’ the Church as a united Body, the relationships between the persons of the Trinity and between God and man, and numerous other examples. Numerous popes, beginning with Pope Pius X in 1907 and continuing even to modernity with both Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI, attested to her profound doctrine in their discussions of the saint’s own influences as well as on the

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103 Thérèse of Lisieux, 187.
104 Thérèse of Lisieux, as quoted by Pope John Paul II in *Divini Amoris Scientia*, 7.
105 Payne, 110-111.
impact that she has had on the Catholic world at large. Linked with the second criterion is the third, that of orthodoxy. If a saint is having a profound impact on the theological world, it is best that her doctrines be orthodox. Opponents rarely questioned St. Thérèse’s fulfillment of this criterion, and Pope John Paul testified to her orthodoxy in his apostolic letter *Divini Amoris Scientia*.  

The fourth criterion for eminent doctrine, which required that the saint’s work draw from Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterial teaching, was also easy to demonstrate in the Little Flower’s case. John Paul II noted how “Thérèse immersed herself in meditation of the Word of God with exceptional faith and spontaneity,” and these meditations of Scripture permeated her works. The fact that St. Thérèse drew so heavily from Scripture is in fact novel for a female saint, since Scripture reading was far from common for laity during the nineteenth century.  

Shockingly, the Little Flower quoted Scripture 157 times throughout *Story of a Soul*, drawing from 26 books of the Bible. In addition to this, St. Thérèse drew from, and on occasion quoted, her *Catechism*, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, and the writings of both St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Thus, St. Thérèse drew from all three sources: Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterial teaching.

Fifth, the Little Flower’s works needed to have a positive reception within the Church. Evidence for the fulfillment of this criterion can be found in the fact that

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108 Ahern, 195.
109 Thérèse of Lisieux, 305-306.
110 Payne, 111.
Thérèse was quoted in the newest edition of the Catechism multiple times, as well as in documents from the Second Vatican Council.\footnote{Ibid., 111.} In *Divini Amoris Scientia*, John Paul II spoke of “the resonance [her work] has had in the Church,”\footnote{John Paul II, *Divini Amoris Scientia*, 7.} observing that “the spiritual doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux has helped extend the kingdom of God.”\footnote{Ibid., 10.} Properly fulfilling the fifth criterion also means fulfilling the sixth, that her theology must be relevant to all generations. This is fundamentally linked with just how the saint went about extending the kingdom of God. The young, missionaries, as well as religious aspirants have especially embraced her theology. The Catholic world has adored her for over a hundred years, studying her theology and aspiring to live a life based on her teachings about God. In addition, even members of other denominations and faiths find aspects of her theology appealing.\footnote{Payne, 112.} It seems unlikely that her message, which has a lasting value in its simplicity and universality, will fade in the future.

The Catholic world embraced Thérèse of Lisieux’s message and will continue to do so not because it was a simple one to live out, but because the saint proposed a path to God that could be accessed by everyone. One did not need to be a priest or a religious to walk it; the common layperson, the teacher, parent, or factory worker, could walk it. Even St. Thérèse wrote “I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new.”\footnote{Thérèse of Lisieux, 207.} She found it, and called it her Little Way. Catholics all over the world embraced it.
as a way of attaining heaven, and theologians embraced it as the foundation of what
the Second Vatican Council called the ‘universal call to holiness,’ which will be
considered later. Thérèse's Little Way was the most profound and complete of the
doctrines to be found in her writings, but it was not her only contribution to the
Catholic theological world. The Little Flower also reflected on numerous other
areas of theology, including Trinitarian theology, sacramental theology, and
Mariology.

St. Thérèse’s Little Way existed as the core of her theology, guiding the way
in which she lived, what she believed, and how she wrote. She would develop it
over the course of several years, as it emerged from her reflections on Scripture, the
writings of the saints, and her own experiences. The Little Flower, with great
humility, admitted that she was little, weak, and unable to survive without the
grace of God, that “I am a very little soul and...I can only offer very little things.”
However, she also believed that God was not displeased with her littleness, seeing
her as a father sees his child. God did not demand great deeds and virtues, but
little ones practiced with great love for God. As Thérèse wrote, “Because I am little
and weak He lowered Himself to me, and He instructed me secretly in the things of
His Love.”

The little saint had once been distressed by her obvious weakness, but she
found comfort in the Scriptures, and finding the answer to her struggles, she
desired to share it with the world. She was finally capable of joining her voice with

\[116 \text{ Ibid., 250.} \]
\[117 \text{ Ibid., 105.} \]
Christ’s own when He said “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to little children.” (Lk 10:21). St. Thérèse was one who, because of her littleness, had a profound truth revealed to her: God desires man to remain childlike, relying not on his own virtues and accomplishments, but on the mercy of God. In doing so, man learns humility and confidence in the love and mercy of the Lord.\(^{118}\) The Little Flower revealed the foundation of her path to God when she wrote,

my way is all love and confidence in God. I cannot understand those souls who are afraid of so tender a friend...what offends Jesus, what wounds Him to the heart, is our want of confidence...we cannot have too much confidence in the good God, so mighty, so merciful.\(^ {119}\)

This confidence in God, this complete trust in Him, encourages those people who desire to be considered His children to live a life dedicated to spreading this message of the love and mercy of God by actively loving Him, which requires loving others. Throughout her works, St. Thérèse of Lisieux instructed believers to do everything in their lives for the love of God, to take every humiliation patiently, to face every difficulty calmly, to bear every sorrow courageously, to meet every disappointment bravely, and to do every little duty in their homes or at their workplaces to the best of their ability.\(^ {120}\) According to St. Thérèse, all the faithful, and not merely those who practice great virtues or perform great acts of

\(^{118}\) Payne, 197.
\(^{120}\) Johnson, 5-6.
mortification, were capable of attaining holiness. Her Little Way suggested that one could become holy by practicing little virtues and performing little acts of renunciation, by loving the Lord and fellow man in the midst of everyday life.\footnote{Hansen, 6.} As the writer Michael Novak wrote of St. Thérèse’s Little Way, “To be a saint, it is not necessary to do great things. It suffices to do all the daily tasks we face with all the love God suffuses into us.”\footnote{Michael Novak, "St. Thérèse, Doctor of the Church," Crisis (December 1997): 1, accessed March 17, 2011, http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0292.html.}

Thérèse’s Little Way proved to be significant within the Catholic world. The Little Flower hoped that the faithful would employ it as a pathway to holiness, transforming ordinary people living ordinary lives into what Thérèse called “the army of little souls.”\footnote{Thérèse, as quoted by Bishop Ahern, 195.} In the century following the saint’s death, the Catholic Church also voiced its desire to see this army come to fruition, developing what the Second Vatican Council called the universal call to holiness. Though the Little Flower was not mentioned by name in the conciliar documents issued by the Council, she has been credited as the primary force behind the emphasis on this notion of attaining holiness.\footnote{Payne, 212.} The universal call to holiness proposed by Vatican II, as well as St. Thérèse’s Little Way, were embraced by the Catholic Church, and the army of little souls that the Little Flower envisioned continues to grow in magnitude.

Directly related to her Little Way were St. Thérèse’s musings on the nature of God, and particularly, the person of Jesus Christ. The Little Flower reflected on
God’s Fatherhood, on the infinite love and mercy that He shows His children. St. Thérèse saw God as being “nothing but mercy and love,”\textsuperscript{125} which He desires to shower on His children abundantly. The little saint even went so far as to identify Christ as the most perfect expression and the revelation of God’s love for humanity. In fact, Jesus, in His desire to reveal the love that God has for His children, consented to come down to earth in the form of a little infant who would ultimately die for the ones He loved. In the eyes of Thérèse of Lisieux, the love of God was manifested in the cradle and the cross, in Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection.\textsuperscript{126}

But this was not all that Christ would do for humanity. Not only did He consent to come down once to be incarnated, live, die, and rise again, but He has also consented to take the lowly form of bread and wine, to allow believers to consume His very body and blood. St. Thérèse’s insights regarding the Eucharist were some of her most novel, though they are often overlooked when considered in conjunction with her Little Way. Throughout her life, St. Thérèse desired to receive Jesus Christ in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist as often as she was permitted. She was one of the first saints to suggest that the sacrament should not be received rarely and only when the believer considered himself worthy, but frequently, even daily. She viewed the Eucharist as a God-given help for sinners, rather than a reward for the sinless, and as such, the faithful should be encouraged

\textsuperscript{125} Patrick V. Ahern, ”Thérèse, Doctor of the Church,” \textit{Origins}, no. 27 (September 1997):194.
\textsuperscript{126} Payne, 201.
to accept this wonderful gift from the Lord.\textsuperscript{127} As the Little Flower so cleverly commented, “It is not to remain in a golden ciborium that He comes down to us each day from heaven; it’s to find another heaven, infinitely more dear to Him than the first: the heaven of our soul…the living temple of the adorable Trinity.”\textsuperscript{128}

St. Thérèse’s love for Christ in the Eucharist also influenced her view of priests, as well as the mystical Body of Christ, the Church. The saint’s admiration for priests ran so deep that she often desired that she herself had been a priest, praying to God and saying, “With what love, O Jesus, I would carry You in my hands when, at my voice, You would come down from heaven. And with what love would I give you to souls.”\textsuperscript{129} As has previously been discussed, it would be erroneous to consider these passionate words of St. Thérèse as an earnest desire to enter the priesthood; instead, they merely reveal her love of the Eucharist. The Little Flower’s thoughts concerning the Eucharist’s influence on the mystical Body of Christ were also novel. As St. Thérèse reflected, the Church is united in the Eucharist, by the love of Jesus Christ for humanity. Because of this, the Church is also present at every Eucharistic celebration, so that all the faithful, living and deceased, worship the Lord together.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid.}, 207.
\textsuperscript{128} Thérèse of Lisieux, 104.
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Ibid.}, 192.
\textsuperscript{130} This contribution to sacramental theology has its origins in St. Thérèse’s life. According to the saint, her classmates mistook her tears of joy at receiving Christ in the Eucharist for the first time for tears of sorrow because her mother, who was dead, could not be present for the occasion. Thérèse, with wisdom profoundly deep for her youth, knew this was not true because her mother, who was in heaven and thus was a member of the communion of saints, was therefore present in the Eucharist. Thérèse of Lisieux, 78.
In addition to her contributions to Trinitarian theology, sacramental theology, and ecclesiology, Thérèse also amended common misconceptions concerning the Mother of God, Mary. In the minds of many theologians of St. Thérèse’s time, Mary had become a figure who appeared to be antithetical to humanity. In attempts to stress her Immaculate Conception and sinlessness, Mary had ceased to appear fully human. She had been elevated to the level of a near-goddess, a figure with which humans no longer could identify. Mary remained the Mother of God, but she did not seem to be the Mother of the Church. St. Thérèse changed that and reminded the Catholic world that Mary, though sinless, was still human and longed to take humanity into her arms.131

The Little Flower adopted Mary as her own Mother, writing, “I could no longer give her any other name but ‘Mama.’”132 She revealed to the Catholic world the image of Mary that had been loved and lost. St. Thérèse rediscovered it, reminding the faithful that Mary was their Mother, and a woman with whom they could identify. She was “the quintessential little soul. It was not Mary who was great; rather it was the incomparable grace of the Immaculate Conception that was great, with a greatness that did not raise her above the Church but plunged her into its depths.”133 And this notion gave the Church hope, and reminded her that she had a Mother who loved her. This vision of Mary as the Mother of the Church was solidified during the Second Vatican Council, and the image of Mary that St.

131 Payne, 208.
132 Thérèse of Lisieux, 123.
133 Ahern, “Thérèse, Doctor of the Church, 195.
Thérèse had loved became a renewed image of Mary that is embraced by the Church of today.\textsuperscript{134}

St. Thérèse did not just consider grace in its relation to Mary, but also in relation to all humanity. Grace, humanity’s goodness and sinfulness, as well as its eternal destination were all linked in the mind of the Little Flower. She did not advocate counting up one’s merits as a means of ensuring salvation. Tallying one’s good deeds and performing numerous “difficult acts of asceticism and charity in order to ‘earn’ salvation for oneself and others”\textsuperscript{135} was not what God willed for humanity. Instead, according to St. Thérèse, man was supposed to go to God with empty hands, ready and willing to receive whatever graces God chose to bestow on him. Salvation and eternal life in heaven were not supposed to be based on a mathematical equation, but on a relationship grounded in love of the Lord. The Little Flower did not mean that doing good deeds was wrong, but that they should be performed for the love of the Lord and humanity.\textsuperscript{136}

Eternal life and heaven also took on a unique form in St. Thérèse’s writings, one that was novel and that revolutionized the Church’s view of life after death. According to the little saint, one’s good deeds did not need to end with death, but souls who attained heaven after living a grace-filled life would be able to continue to help those souls who continued to fight their spiritual battles on earth. As Thérèse wrote, “I will come down! I will spend my heaven doing good on earth.”\textsuperscript{137} In the

\textsuperscript{134} Payne, 208.
\textsuperscript{135} Frohlich, 31.
\textsuperscript{136} Payne, 210.
\textsuperscript{137} St. Thérèse, as quoted in Ahern, “The Case for St. Thérèse as a Doctor of the Church,” 24.
mind of the Little Flower, heaven was not eternal rest, but total union with God and, because of the communion that exists between God and all mankind, the ability to participate in Jesus Christ’s salvific work. Thérèse could not imagine resting while there was even a single soul on earth to be saved.\footnote{Ahern, “The Case for Thérèse as a Doctor of the Church,” 24.}

And there were indeed souls that needed to be saved. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, by the end of her life, knew this as well as the next sinner. As mentioned earlier, eighteen months prior to her death, the Little Flower was plunged into what is generally referred to as the Dark Night of the Soul, and she found herself “invaded by the thickest darkness, [so] that the thought of heaven, up until then so sweet to me, [was] no longer anything but the cause of struggle and torment.”\footnote{Thérèse of Lisieux, 211.} As St. Thérèse explained in her autobiography, before the experience she could not even imagine that there were souls who had no faith, but once the blackness settled within her soul, she truly felt that there were indeed souls in this miserable state of existence. The Little Flower, for the first time in her life, wondered whether there was a heaven, and doubts filled her mind. Yet in the midst of her struggles, the saint clung to her trust in the Lord, becoming a frightened child clinging to her Father, and thus performed more acts of faith than ever before.\footnote{Ahern, “The Case for St. Thérèse as a Doctor of the Church,” 13.}

St. Thérèse’s spiritual experience speaks to the modern Church, engaged in a battle against rampant atheism and disbelief. Through her dark Night, God speaks to the world, calling modernity to have faith in, trust in, and turn back to Him. In her sufferings, Thérèse was united with the sinners and unbelievers of the world,
becoming their companion, eating the bread of affliction with them. United to them, she offered her own suffering for them, that they might be given the graces necessary to have faith and trust in the Lord in times of the strongest doubt. Thérèse longed to make it known to those struggling with faith that the message of the Gospel, the message of salvation for sinners who were confident in the Lord’s power, was the answer to their disbelief. For those drowning in the “sea of disbelief” and near death, there was the opportunity for life.  

St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s Little Way, her call to accept God as Father and Mary as Mother, and her message of faith, confidence, and trust in the Lord in the face of doubt have been embraced by the Church for over a century, beginning in the first years following her death. There is a clear reason for this, one that is related to the fifth and sixth criteria for eminent doctrine when determining the suitability of a potential future Doctor of the Universal Church: namely, that Thérèse’s message can be embraced by the Church, present and future. The Little Flower spoke to all the faithful and even to those who struggled immensely to have faith. Her message was new, but resonated with past teachings of the Church. It had a timeless quality to it, speaking about holiness and salvation, grace and merit, God and man, as well as other areas that would not fade with time. And yet, simultaneously, St. Thérèse spoke in a very profound way to the present generation, a world of disbelief, temptation, autonomy, and called it to faith, confidence, and dependence on God.

As has already been seen, there were elements to St. Thérèse’s writings and her message that were novel. In some areas of theology, such as in Mariology and

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141 Maccise, 26-28.
Trinitarian theology, she encouraged a return to beliefs that had been orthodox church teaching since the birth of the Church, but had been lost throughout the years. This included the renewed adoption of Mary as the Mother of the Church and God as the Father of all humanity, his children. In other areas of theology, such as eschatology and sacramental theology, she proposed a view that had not been considered fully by the Church previous to the eighteenth century, such as the notion of heaven as activity rather than rest and the benefits of frequent communion. In several cases, St. Thérèse’s theology broke away from ‘popular’ types that were common at the time, stressing accepting graces rather than counting merits, as well as Mary as a human mother rather than a near-goddess.\textsuperscript{142} Even in her novelty however, St. Thérèse remained rooted in tradition, and her theology as a result gained the timeless quality that is so important to Catholic doctrine and was essential in determining whether the Little Flower deserved the title of doctor.

Thérèse of Lisieux’s theology transcends time, applying to the Church of the past, present, and future. She spoke of realities that were fundamental to what it means to love God, have faith, and live a Christian life. She testified to truths that are unchanging, calling the world to respond to God’s desire to love it and have His love returned. She wrote of beliefs that have always been embraced by the Church, and will continue to survive for years and years to come. St. Thérèse has something to say to all Christians, for as she told her sister Pauline, “there is something in the pages of this book for all except those who are following extraordinary ways - that is

\textsuperscript{142} McGinn, 171.
to say, people who are exceptional ascetics or mystics.”

The Little Flower intended to speak to the hearts of little souls, to ordinary people living ordinary lives, and thus to the vast majority of the Church. She desired to bring them to Christ, so that their weak, broken hearts might be healed. As a Doctor of the Universal Church, St. Thérèse of Lisieux was given the salve to soothe the wounds of humanity that have been caused by sin. Already, her words have nourished the faith lives of millions of people throughout the world, and they assuredly will continue to do so.

Even though St. Thérèse’s message will continue to be heard and embraced for years to come, it is especially pertinent to this modern generation of Christian men and women. She was a saint who lived in the modern world, who understood the types of struggles that Christians of this generation commonly underwent throughout their lives. Her Little Way, rooted in love, dependence on God, and confidence in His divine mercy and grace, has proved to be “the answer to the rationalism, materialism, and hedonism of the modern world.” As mentioned earlier, her message of faith in God has challenged this contemporary world of disbelief and atheism, calling it to trust in the Lord even when one doubts His existence.

In his apostolic letter *Divini Amoris Scientia*, John Paul II focused on her role as a contemplative, a young person, and a woman living in the modern world. According to him, the contemporary Church needs a Doctor of the Church such as

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143 Thérèse of Lisieux, as quoted in Donohue, 15.
144 Russell, 250.
145 McGinn, 19.
St. Thérèse of Lisieux. She “offers a witness and theological illustration of the beauty of the contemplative life”\textsuperscript{146} to a Church in need of more courageous men and women willing to answer God’s call to become priests or religious. The Little Flower, who died at the young age of 24, speaks to the young people who must be encouraged to become the witnesses of the Gospel within the Church as it moves into the new millennium. Finally, the life and work of St. Thérèse remain testimonies to what it means to be a Christian woman living in the modern world.\textsuperscript{147} Pope John Paul II, despite the longevity of his papacy and the large number of potential new Doctors of the Church, only chose to name one: St. Thérèse of Lisieux. As can be seen, it was certainly not an arbitrary decision on his part; the Little Flower clearly has a lot to teach the Church.

Pope John Paul II identified St. Thérèse as an example for women to follow. As has already been discussed, there were numerous modern feminists who would have disagreed with his opinion of the saint, since they considered the Little Flower too weak of a figure to serve as a role model for the modern woman. Other feminists were outraged by the liberties that the institutional Church had taken with the figure of St. Thérèse, transforming a woman with supposed feminist ideals into one who advocated the continued oppression of women. Neither category of feminist, for its own reasons, desired that St. Thérèse of Lisieux be declared a Doctor of the Universal Church. In addition to these feminists, there were those who supported the potential doctorate of the Little Flower. Some shared the

\textsuperscript{146} John Paul II, \textit{Divini Amoris Scientia}, 11.
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Ibid}, 11.
opinion that St. Thérèse had been a feminist herself, but this particular group of men and women believed that to have a feminist doctor would benefit their agenda. Others, contrary to all opinions thus far explored, believed that St. Thérèse was no liberal feminist, but was a saintly woman who embraced what Pope John Paul II called woman’s ‘feminine genius.’ As such, they petitioned that she be made a Doctor of the Church.

Feminists in the first camp shared many of the same opinions concerning St. Thérèse as those opponents who viewed her as a martyr for the feminist cause. However, unlike those opponents who believed that to declare Thérèse a Doctor of the Church would be a betrayal of the saint’s desire for gender equality in regard to the priesthood, these feminists supported the Little Flower’s doctorate because of this same supposed desire of hers to become a priest. In their opinion, the decision to bestow upon St. Thérèse her doctorate was one that emerged from a developing inclination on the part of the hierarchical Church to consider the possibility of female priests in the future. As such, they adopted the saint as the patroness of their cause, and thus advocated that the Little Flower be declared a Doctor of the Church, with the hope that one day because of her influence, women would finally be permitted to enter the priesthood.148

As has been discussed, it does not seem as though Thérèse had any real aspiration to become a priest, nor would she have most likely advocated a female priesthood. She recognized that the institutional priesthood could not be her true vocation. As will be seen, St. Thérèse of Lisieux believed that her vocation was to

148 Payne, 180.
lie at the heart of the Church, of the Body of Christ, and recognized that the priest, as another Christ, was intended to be the head. She had no desire to assume this role, and rather was content to serve as the ‘good woman behind every good man.’ This of course was perceived by most modern feminists as weakness and a willingness to succumb to the misogynist tendencies of men, and they were not satisfied.

However, in the minds of women such as Thérèse and many Christian women of today, to be dissatisfied with being at the heart of the Body is to be dissatisfied with the role that the heart plays within the Body, that is, love. This recognition was foundational to the development of the notion of the ‘feminine genius’ in the Little Flower’s writings. Contrary to those modern feminists who consider St. Thérèse their patroness, or a martyr for their cause, the Little Flower embraced her femininity, even to the point of declaring, “I have found my place in the Church, and it is You, O my God, who have given me this place; in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be Love.”

The presence of women in the Church and in the world is vital and necessary because women, with their propensity towards love and mercy, reveal God to the world in a way that men do not. St. Thérèse knew this, and as a female doctor, now has the ability to teach this to the world. In her writings, she was unafraid to admit to her littleness and to her dependence on God with a humility characteristic of women. She understood her own role within the Church as being that of the entire Body, teaching that she, like all humanity, was created to receive love from God and

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149 Thérèse of Lisieux, 194.
give it back to Him. This is the universal vocation of the Church, to be the Bride of Christ, to receive from God and to bear fruit. In her life, St. Thérèse exemplified this truth, embracing her femininity and becoming an icon of Catholic womanhood.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux had a great deal to teach the Catholic world, though she herself never endeavored to teach anyone aside from those whom she encountered in her daily life. She never set out to formulate any type of theological treatise or to intentionally expand any area of doctrine. She wrote from her heart, out of her love of Jesus Christ, in order to glorify God. Ultimately, her writings did have an impact on the Catholic Church, and between anecdotes from her life, there can be found profound and beneficial bits of doctrine. When all of these tidbits began to be gathered together in the hope of having the Little Flower named a Doctor of the Universal Church, a distinct form of theology did begin to form. It was unlike that of St. Thomas Aquinas, or even St. Francis de Sales, but it was nevertheless theological in nature. Her musings were to impact numerous areas of theology, ranging from Christology, to Mariology, to eschatology. St. Thérèse is a woman to be emulated, a saint to be venerated, and a doctor to be studied for years to come. The Catholic Church will undoubtedly learn much from a doctor such as this.

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150 Schumacher, 139.
151 Ibid., 124.
**Conclusion**

Does the Little Flower of Lisieux, St. Thérèse honestly deserve the title of Doctor of the Universal Church? Does she really belong in the ranks of those great doctors of the past, standing alongside St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis de Sales, and St. John of the Cross? Here is a young woman, a Carmelite sister who died at the tender age of 24. She is a near-child who never received any proper theological training, and who never developed anything that even remotely resembled a definite corpus of doctrine. She is a soul who lived and died in relative obscurity, and who was only ever recognized for what she was by her closest family and friends. And yet, here we also have before us a saint with a timeless message of love and mercy who has indeed been declared the thirty-third Doctor of the Universal Church, the Doctor of Love.

St. Thérèse’s desire in life was to love and be loved by God, and to encourage the rest of the faithful to do the same. By her life, it has become clear that she succeeded in the first hope. She spent her time here on earth delving deeper and deeper into the mystery that is the Love of God. When she breathed her last, it was with a sigh of contentment because she had done what she had been called to do. She had run the good race, and fought the good fight, and the time for her eternal reward had come. And yet even in heaven, as many have testified, she continues to do good here on earth. She has continued to intercede on behalf of her fellow man, bringing believers’ prayers before the Lord. She even left a piece of her soul behind, forever to be found within the pages of her many writings. Her stories reveal a
relationship with God that has been extremely fruitful. They reveal a message of faith and hope, one that includes a merciful and loving God of the universe. This is the God with whom she now resides in heaven, and this is the God about which she longs to teach the world.

Within the pages of her writings, St. Thérèse has reflected deeply on the nature of God and man, the relationship between the divine and the human, grace and salvation, the sacraments and the Body of Christ. Though she might not have been a theologian in the traditional sense of the world, she is undeniably a teacher. Her message is a timeless one, though it is especially valuable to the modern Church. It is orthodox, drawing from Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterial teaching, and both theologians and the common Catholic faithful have embraced it as authoritative. According to the new criteria set forth by Pope John Paul II, St. Thérèse’s message definitely falls under the category of eminent doctrine, and as such, she rightly qualifies for the title Doctor of the Universal Church. Whether or not these criteria are sufficient to determine eminent doctrine can still be debated, but as has been evidenced here, as they currently stand, the Little Flower has indeed warranted her doctorate.

With the declaration of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a young woman who was by no means a theologian,

the Lord confirms what the Old Testament states and what the New Testament restates in its fullness: that God communicates himself to the simple, giving them his wisdom and revealing to them the secrets of his life and workings throughout history.152

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152 Maccise, 32.
It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that Doctors of the Church are made, and the Lord most certainly has the power to make a little saint into a great teacher of the Catholic Church, and that is precisely what He has done in the case of our Little Doctor, St. Thérèse of Lisieux. As the writer Michael Novak so eloquently says, “Thérèse really is a doctor of the Church. She really does teach, and no writer of theology you have ever read will carry you so unerringly to the living heart of the Gospels, so limpidly and beautifully put.”\textsuperscript{153}

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\textsuperscript{153} Novak, 5.
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