

**Thérèse of Lisieux in Austria:
A Case Study of Transnational Catholic Revivalism**

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This article explores the cult of Thérèse of Lisieux in Austria within a larger context of popular devotion to her throughout the world. What place did a French saint have in the prayers of Austrian Catholics in the years after her canonization? The evidence that considerable numbers of Austrians prayed to a French saint in the interwar years is significant not only for the growing popularity of Thérèse in parts of Europe, North America, Latin America, Great Britain and Australia, but also for how national and local traditions of Catholicism in Austria had seemingly been trumped by a transnational religious movement by the start of the twentieth century. Histories of nineteenth-century Catholicism have only recently explored the wider transnational dimensions of modern religious movements.¹ Sites of religious apparitions, pilgrimage, congresses, and cults of particular saints are some of the ways that historians can begin to study transnational phenomena in modern Catholicism.² Thérésian devotion represents one example of a transnational religious movement that drew Austrian Catholics alongside their counterparts in France and elsewhere in the early twentieth century.

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¹ See Vincent Viaene, "International History, Religious History, Catholic History: Perspectives for Cross-Fertilization (1830-1914)," *European History Quarterly* 38:4 (2008): 578-607. Viaene argues that while the cultural "turn" enabled historians of Catholicism to re-enter mainstream history by examining history from a grassroots perspective of local devotional practices, a second wave of religious history is now seeking to merge the bottom-up with the top-down perspective of diplomatic and international history. Rather than the "zooming in" approach of first-wave cultural histories of religion, the newer transnational studies of religious movements represent a "zooming out" approach that broadens the notion of culture to encompass the political as well. See *ibid.*, 579-80.

² *Ibid.*, 589. Viaene also points to missionary movements, the Catholic press, Vatican diplomacy and papal mobilization initiative – including fundraising drives and the papal volunteer army – as other avenues of enquiry into what he refers to as "Catholic internationalism."

At the same time we can explain Thérèse's devotional cult in Austria as an intensely local expression that was sometimes in tension with the wishes of Vienna's Catholic hierarchy. The news of her canonization in May 1925 went almost unnoticed in the mainstream Austrian Catholic press, the leading Catholic newspaper in Vienna, *Die Reichspost*, mentioning only that St Peter's dome had been aglow for an unnamed new saint in Rome.³ Of more immediate interest to Vienna's Catholic press, and to Austria's clergy, was the canonization of the Jesuit Counter-Reformation preacher, Peter Canisius (1521-97). Austrian pilgrims bound for Rome departed Vienna on the day of Thérèse's canonization to attend the festivities in honour of the first German Jesuit and latter-day apostle to the Germans.⁴ Yet it was to Thérèse, not Canisius, whom Austrians were turning in increasing numbers for help in all manner of material, physical and spiritual matters during the 1920s and 1930s, and later during the Second World War.

Thérésian devotion in interwar Austria also intersected with a more traditional and very public form of piety in Austria: veneration of the Holy Eucharist. The Austrian practice of *pietas eucharistica* was a specifically Habsburgian cult that drew on the legend of the first Habsburg, Rudolf, who venerated the Host and received from God in return the lands and crowns of the Habsburg name.⁵ However, by the end of the nineteenth century, eucharistic piety was not just the sacred domain of the Habsburgs, but had become a modern institution of the universal Church in a revival of ultramontane Catholicism.⁶ Pope Leo XIII fostered a world-wide eucharistic movement of International Eucharistic Congresses as a way to refocus Catholics on the Eucharist in the life and mission of the Church and as a challenge to the secular rationalism that denied the doctrine of transubstantiation. The first of these congresses was held in Lille in 1881 and, in 1912, the 23rd International Eucharistic Congress was held in Vienna on the eve of the First World War. After the war and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, the Eucharistic People's League (*Der Eucharistische Völkerbund* – EVB) was founded in Vienna and grew to have nine separate chapters in Europe and the Americas. In 1929 Thérèse was popularly elected as the organization's patron saint, two years after Pius XI had declared her co-patroness of Catholic missions. Here we see evidence of devotion to Thérèse not only as the saint of "ordinary souls," but also of her mission to draw all people to the body of the Church in the Eucharist. Thérèse therefore embodied a sanctified universal eucharistic piety that could transcend the imperial and national forms of piety publicly commemorated in Austria since the Habsburg era. In this sense of incorporating local traditions within a transnational religious movement, Thérésian devotion in Austria shows how modern Catholic identities crossed national boundaries in the early twentieth century.

³ *Reichspost*, 18 May 1925.

⁴ *Reichspost*, 17 May 1925.

⁵ In her seminal study of Austrian religious culture, Anna Coreth has argued that along with devotion to Mary, the saints and the Cross of Christ, *pietas eucharistica* was the fourth element in a particular Austrian form of religious piety – *pietas austriaca* – that shaped the political culture of the Habsburg Monarchy during the Counter-Reformation era through to the empire's collapse in 1918. Anna Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca*, trans. William Bowman and Anna Maria Leitgeb (West Lafayette, 2004).

⁶ Ralph Gibson links the spread of Eucharistic devotion with the shift from Tridentine forms of Catholicism that had alienated Catholics from the Church at the end of the eighteenth century towards an "ultramontane piety" that ostensibly drew believers to God through their emotions rather than their intellect. Ralph Gibson, *The Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (London, 1989), cited in Caroline Ford, "Religion and Popular Culture in Europe," *Journal of Modern History* 65:1 (1993): 165.

Popular Thérésian Piety

In order to explain the spread of Thérésian devotion in interwar Austria, we must start not in Vienna but in a Tyrolean mountain village above Innsbruck.⁷ For it was here on the Hungerberg that villagers were making plans to build a chapel in the months following her canonization. A relic donated by one of Thérèse's sisters was placed in a garden shrine, and the first outdoor mass was held here in 1928. This small chapel, which later was extended into a church with more than 45,000 bricks donated by Tyrolean villagers, became the first Thérésian shrine in Austria.⁸ The church was begun in 1931 and completed in 1933. At the consecration of the church's exterior building, an icon of the saint, into which the relic from Thérèse's sister had been placed, was carried in procession into the church. Later a side altar in the church was erected with a tabernacle containing a monstrance holding another relic and a wax copy of Thérèse's body.⁹

The intensity of this local devotion to Thérèse outweighed the efforts by some opponents, including one parish priest, to turn the shrine into a site of veneration for the Sacred Heart of Jesus.¹⁰ Tyrolean leaders and associations had repeatedly placed themselves under the patronage of the Sacred Heart both during the Napoleonic Wars and again during the First World War.¹¹ However, by the 1930s, Thérésian devotion appeared to be replacing this historic local tradition. Those who believed they would receive help by praying to Thérèse were not only local farmers, but also doctors, students, the sick, the very young, mothers and priests. One local newspaper reported in 1935 that it was "astonishing how quickly the St Thérèse church has risen up to become the most popular pilgrimage site in Tyrol." Anyone who doubted this phenomenon "need only look at the numerous votive tablets at the entrance to the church on which not just simple folk, but also doctors express their gratitude to the saint for help received."¹² While the majority of tablets did not specifically mention the nature of the help received, those that did attest to the wide range of requests Austrian villagers brought to Thérèse: requests for employment, housing, a successful operation, a passed examination, a marriage partner or the healthy birth of a child were among the hundreds of prayers that villagers thanked Thérèse for interceding in the interwar years.¹³

Local devotion to Thérèse in interwar Austria also reveals a shift in the relationship between gender and religion that occurred in the first third of the twentieth century. Religious historians have viewed the nineteenth century as a Catholic "revival" in which women increasingly participated in both lay and religious

⁷ On the other side of the alpine border in Bavaria, village masses were said in her honour as early as 1923. See Helena Waddy, "St Anthony's Bread: The Modernized Religious Culture of German Catholics in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Social History* 31:2 (1997): 367n81.

⁸ Dieter Assmann, "Die Wallfahrt zur kleinen hl. Theresia auf der Hungerburg/Innsbruck," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 69:4 (1966): 250. A year later, a church dedicated to Thérèse was built on the outskirts of Vienna in Starchant/Ottakring, and, in 1930, another was erected in the village of Langen/Arlberg in Vorarlberg, outside Bregenz.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Lawrence Cole, "Patriotic Celebrations in Late-Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century Tirol," in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, Maria Bucur and Nancy Wingfield, eds. (West Lafayette, 2001), 75-111.

¹² Assmann, "Die Wallfahrt zur kleinen hl. Theresia," 252.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 254-55.

life and the image of female sanctity and feminine piety was promoted by women, priests and anti-clericalists alike.¹⁴ But while the “feminization of religion” may have been true of the nineteenth century, Thérésian pilgrims in Austria and elsewhere in Europe in the interwar period reveal a more diffused devotion, which attracted people irrespective of age, gender, or social group. Parallel to the Thérésian devotion during the interwar years was the growing Catholic women’s activism in both Germany and Austria. In Bavaria, local chapters of the Catholic German Women’s Union promoted forms of popular piety in the Oberammergau pilgrimages, for example, while also championing women’s roles in local welfare and education initiatives as part of a broader strategy to re-Catholicize German society after the war and revolution.¹⁵ Similarly in interwar Austria, the Catholic Women’s Organization, founded in 1925, actively championed the broader roles women performed beyond the family. Under the Austrofascist state (1933-38), when all Catholic groups were subsumed under Catholic Action, its members were often at variance with both state and Church leaders on issues of marriage laws and working women’s rights.¹⁶

Thus in Austria by the twentieth century, as in France, women had acquired a range of public roles in Catholic women’s organizations, and men, too, were being drawn to the church in an era of prominent Catholic conversions. As Caroline Ford has argued, “the spectre of the religious divide and divided houses continued to haunt the public sphere in France, but houses were no longer divided in quite the same way.”¹⁷ The phenomenon of popular Thérésian piety in the interwar years shows how that division shifted as men and women were drawn to the French saint: the private world of religion, drawn along gendered lines in the nineteenth century, assumed a public dimension in the early twentieth century as men increasingly believed in the efficacy of saintly intercession. At the same time that this inversion took place in the private world of religion, women’s roles in the state lagged behind those of men. In the past Catholic women had been able to acquire a degree of autonomy from their male relatives by joining female religious congregations that educated children, cared for the sick and assisted the poor. But after French republican institutions took over these at the end of the nineteenth century, women’s emancipation in the early twentieth century did not afford them equal opportunities alongside men in the state. Instead public lives were drawn along gendered lines of women’s activism and women’s advocacy roles, while in their private lives – their prayers and pilgrimages – they participated in a universal religious movement. As we will see, Thérésian piety was promoted both in the associational and devotional lives of Austrian Catholics as a mission without borders – whether gender or national.

Patron Saint of the Eucharistic People’s League

The Eucharistic People’s League (*Der Eucharistische Völkerbund [EVB]*) was another site of Thérésian devotion in interwar Austria, but unlike the churches and shrines in her honour that represented a physical and spiritual encounter with the saint, the League provided an associational life through which members and readers of its

¹⁴ See Waddy, “St Anthony’s Bread,” 347-48. For a more critical appraisal of the literature that discusses but does not adequately explain this trend in nineteenth-century Europe, see Ford, “Religion and Popular Culture in Europe,” 167-75.

¹⁵ Waddy, “St Anthony’s Bread,” 359-62.

¹⁶ See Laura Gellott and Michael Phayer, “Dissenting Voices: Catholic Women in Opposition to Fascism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 22:1 (1987): 91-114.

¹⁷ Caroline Ford, *Divided Houses: Religion and Gender in Modern France* (Ithaca, 2005), 144.

monthly publication could participate in Thérèse's mission in the world. The League's founder, the Jesuit priest Anton Puntigam (1859-1926), had spent many years as a missionary in Bosnia before the war. In 1914 he famously anointed the dying Archduke Franz Ferdinand after he was shot in Sarajevo. During the war, he sought to raise funds for a memorial and school named after the Archduke and his wife Sophie.¹⁸ Many supporters of his Bosnian mission became supporters of the EVB after the war. While Puntigam's work in Bosnia had a similar purpose to the EVB in converting souls for the Church, his mission for the League was to promote an international Catholic movement after the war that transcended boundaries of race, nation and class. He wrote in his autobiography: "At the altar, at the communion table, there is no difference between poor and rich, Germans and French, coloured and white people."¹⁹ He saw in the International Eucharistic Congresses a new mandate for Catholics to join with their co-religionists through the Eucharist, and once described the EVB as "an International Eucharistic Congress in perpetuity."²⁰ The EVB gave extensive coverage to each of the world congresses held in the interwar period in Rome, Amsterdam, Chicago, Sydney, Dublin, Buenos Aires, Manila and Budapest.

Along with the eucharistic congresses, the EVB's magazine also regularly featured stories of conversions to Catholicism of writers, diplomats, royals, priests and other individuals. An English convert and Jesuit scholar at Oxford, Cyril Martindale (1879-1963) was one of the prominent Catholics who regularly contributed to the EVB.²¹ Other famous converts who became celebrity writers for the magazine included the Georgian Princess Anastasia, who had converted from Orthodoxy in 1901, and the Russian diplomat, Michael Andreew, who had been in Vienna with the American Red Cross after the First World War where he had met the Apostolic Nuncio to Vienna, Monsignor Machetti, in the Canisius church.²² Later Andreew entered the Jesuit novitiate in St Andrä in Tyrol.²³ Both conversion stories were published in several instalments in the magazine and later sold as gift booklets to raise money for the EVB.²⁴ Each edition featured a section on new conversions around the world: one American report in November 1920 said that over 1000 new Catholic converts had been confirmed in Boston's cathedral in a single day.²⁵ Many stories featured conversions from Protestantism, such as the Lutheran pastor from Saxony who first became acquainted with Catholicism in Styria and Carinthia and subsequently entered a Benedictine monastery in Bavaria. Other Protestant converts were said to have been drawn to the "warmth" of Mary in contrast to the "cold" churches of Luther.²⁶

While Mary, wartime experiences and encounters with other Catholics were common factors in many conversion stories, some converts credited St Thérèse's intercession for their soul. One such case was that of a German woman, Else Hein from Würzburg, who had grown up in a Protestant home but later renounced all

¹⁸ Leo Ashley Nicholl, "Anton Puntigam S.J.: Leben und Wirken eines Jesuiten in Bosnien" (PhD Dissertation, University of Vienna, 1970), 157-58, 210.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁰ *Der Eucharistische Völkerbund (EVB) 2:3-4* (January-February 1922), 45.

²¹ *EVB*, 1:2 (January 1921), 85-86.

²² See, for example, *EVB 2:1-2* (November-December 1921) 13-18; *EVB 2:3-4* (January-February 1921), 52-58; *EVB 2:5-6* (Mar-Apr 1921), 77-80.

²³ *EVB 6:3* (January 1926), 47.

²⁴ *EVB 6:2* (December 1925), back notices.

²⁵ *EVB 1:1* (November 1920), 14.

²⁶ *EVB 1:2* (January 1921), 61.

religious beliefs. Her wish to convert occurred when she was sharing a hospital room with a Catholic convert who had a copy of Thérèse's "Story of a Soul" lying on her bedside table. Hein asked to read it, and when she had finished it she wanted to become Catholic, which she did after receiving instruction in her local Catholic church. She wrote to the EVB to tell her story and ended with a prayer to St Thérèse to intercede "at the throne of God for many more wayward souls to be led to the true Church."²⁷ In another case, in Belgium, a Carmelite priest had been called to the bedside of a dying 84-year-old atheist, who had not set foot inside a church in over 65 years. He refused to see his parish priest, so the priest rang his Carmelite friend, who said a prayer to St Thérèse before his visit. The sick man did not want to hear about God and sent him away. The Carmelite father then instructed the man's nurse to place a relic of the French saint under his pillow and requested other parishioners, including school children, to pray for his soul. The next day the Carmelite priest said mass in honour of St Thérèse, and, later the same day, the man made his first confession in more than 65 years to his overjoyed parish priest. "St Thérèse had saved another soul," the Carmelite father wrote and, a few months later, this soul had gone to be with God.²⁸ Sickbed conversions were not uncommon tales in the EVB, but this story was unique because its central protagonist was not the elderly man, or the priest, but Thérèse herself: in physical form in the relic, in the parish prayer chain and, finally, as intercessor for a reluctant soul. The patroness of all missions, including the EVB's mission to convert separated Christians and lost souls, was at work for readers to see.

Puntigam was a fervent Thérésian and, shortly before his death in September 1926, he requested that his readers pray a novena to St Thérèse every month – starting in December 1926 – for the work of the League and for their personal requests. He himself would offer masses on the ninth day of every month.²⁹ Puntigam's personal devotion to Thérèse emerged in obituaries published in the magazine he had founded. A picture of Thérèse found in his breviary had a poem he had written on the back, entitled "My Pilgrim Song:"

The pilgrim from a foreign land
 Moves toward his home;
 There his stars are shining,
 There he seeks rest.
 The soul passes over,
 The body falls into the grave,
 The flowers grow over it
 The flowers fall away.³⁰

Puntigam may have written the poem after receiving what he believed was a gift from Thérèse a few months prior to his death. While in hospital in December 1925 a sister had brought the ailing priest a single white rose that had been left over after she had filled all the vases on the hospital altar. Puntigam requested that a white rose be placed in his hand at the hour of his death and his open casket, pictured in the EVB, was filled with white flowers.³¹ In his obituary in the EVB, his fellow Jesuit Otto

²⁷ *EVB* 9:7 (May 1929), 106-7.

²⁸ *EVB* 12:4 (February 1932), 60.

²⁹ *EVB* 6:9 (July 1926), 144; *EVB* 7:2 (December 1926), back notices.

³⁰ *EVB* 7:11 (September 1927), 168.

³¹ *EVB* 6:12 (October 1926), 178-81. See also Nicholls, "Anton Puntigam S.J.," 257.

Werner described him as “a true son of St Ignatius, a man of obedience and childlike piety” whose “devotion to St Joseph and St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and his unbounding trust in them is no secret to readers of the EVB.”³²

In May 1929, Puntigam’s last wish was fulfilled when the editors of the magazine declared Thérèse patron saint of the League by popular demand.³³ The May 1929 edition included a prayer written by an EVB reader, Alphons Werner, asking Thérèse to be “an example in this life,” to give to all “true passion for the sacrament” and to be “protectress of the People’s League.”³⁴ Popular interest in the French saint had been growing steadily in the EVB since her canonization, with poems and prayers published on or around her feast day in October each year.³⁵ The first German translations of her autobiography, published by the De La Salle Brothers (*Schulbrüder*) in Kirnach-Villingen in Baden, Germany in 1922, were given extensive review after 1925.³⁶ The magazine published stories of pilgrimages to Thérèse’s grave in Lisieux, including photographs of the basilica consecrated in 1932.³⁷ The material benefits of such popular devotion to Thérèse were not lost on the editors, who encouraged readers to buy more subscriptions for friends, families, neighbours and colleagues as an act of veneration for the EVB’s new patroness.³⁸

Subsequent notices published prayers from around the world, answered as a result of her intercession. A German seminary director wrote into the magazine in June 1929 about his cure after praying the Puntigam novena to St Thérèse.³⁹ More cures were reported in July 1929 and, in September that year, a Tyrolean laboratory assistant, blinded in both eyes by a chemical accident, attributed his restored eyesight to Thérèse’s intercession.⁴⁰ In November 1930 one anonymous reader, identified only as “a regular reader and champion of the EVB,” expressed gratitude to St Thérèse for listening to “a very important spiritual matter.”⁴¹ A missionary nun asked for prayers to St Thérèse for success in her final examination.⁴²

There are as many reasons why Thérèse should not have become the patron saint of the EVB as there are for why she did. Why a French Carmelite nun and not a known Jesuit in Vienna, such as Canisius? There had been no coverage of Thérèse’s canonization in 1925, but the EVB featured stories on Canisius immediately following his canonization. One Jesuit writer said that Austria may well have lost its Catholic faith if not for Canisius and commended him as a most worthy patron for the EVB.⁴³ The Jesuit house in Vienna, where Puntigam lived and where the headquarters of the League were based, was named after Canisius. The Canisius association and seminary for priests were promoted through the publicity channels of the mainstream Catholic press and fundraising events in Vienna’s concert halls. On the occasion of the Vienna Catholic Congress in June 1925, Cardinal Piffl spoke about Canisius’

³² *EVB* 6:12 (October 1926), 181.

³³ *EVB* 9:7 (May 1929), 105.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 105-7.

³⁵ See *EVB* 8:1 (November 1927), 3; *EVB* 8:12 (October 1928), 192; *EVB* 10:12 (October 1930), 187; *EVB* 12:12 (October 1932), 178.

³⁶ A biography of her by P. Matheo S.S.C.C. was also published by the La Salles Brothers in Kirnach-Villingen. See *EVB* 6:3 (January 1926).

³⁷ *EVB* 7:10 (August 1927), 160; *EVB* 13:3 (January 1933), 43.

³⁸ *EVB* 9:7 (May 1929), 112.

³⁹ *EVB* 9:8 (June 1929), 128.

⁴⁰ *EVB* 9:9 (July 1929), 143-44; *EVB* 9:11 (September 1929), 171.

⁴¹ *EVB* 11:1 (November 1930), 16.

⁴² *EVB* 12:7 (May 1932), 112.

⁴³ *EVB* 5:8 (June 1925), 118.

legacy as “the first German Jesuit” who had made Vienna Catholic again. For that, Austrian Catholics could now proudly refer to him as “our saint.” Piffel listed three mandates for Viennese Catholics, and for Austrian Catholics more generally, to follow Canisius’ example. The first was the re-Catholicization of Vienna, which, as in Canisius’ day, had witnessed a mass exodus of Catholics from the Church. The second was to train more priests through the work of the Canisius association and seminary. Finally, Viennese Catholics were called to support the apostolic work of the Jesuits, whose contribution to Vienna’s theological and ecclesiastical life had been vast since Ignatius of Loyola first sent Canisius to Vienna.⁴⁴

Canisius was a timely saint for Austrian politicians and clergy intent on rebuilding Austria’s Habsburg Catholic heritage in the interwar years. Another obscure saint from the Counter-Reformation era, the Spanish Franciscan Paschal Baylon (1540-92), had already been declared by Pope Leo XIII the patron saint of Eucharistic Congresses and eucharistic associations.⁴⁵ But as the growing numbers of votive tablets on the wall of a Tyrolean church suggest, it is outside the political, cultural and ecclesiastical centres of power that we discover Thérèse’s unassuming presence in the devotional and missionary lives of Catholics in interwar Austria.

Thérèse’s Sainly Helpers: St Jude, St Anthony, and “Little Guido”

The pattern of coupling Thérèse with other saints was evident from the outset of her devotional cult in Austria. St Jude of Thaddeus, the patron saint of hopeless causes, and St Anthony of Padua were twinned with Thérèse in the Hungerburg shrine and in Bavarian churches.⁴⁶ Letters from readers in the *EVB* often included both St Jude and St Anthony in their requests for intercession or gratitude for help received.⁴⁷ The charity “St Anthony’s Bread” had been established originally in France to provide food and financial assistance to the poor. In his Bosnian days, Puntigam had founded a local chapter of the charity, St Anthony of Padua and the Bread for the Poor in Bosnia, and a magazine that circulated in Germany and Austria to raise money for a Jesuit youth home in Sarajevo and to assist poor parishes and student priests.⁴⁸ In Germany, the St Anthony’s Bread charity had a particular mission to assist new converts who had been cut off from their families’ financial support.⁴⁹ Here again the spread of a devotional practice from France to the German-speaking world reveals how popular Catholic devotional practices followed transnational, rather than national or imperial, traditions.

The French child saint Guy de Fontgalland (1913-25), or “Little Guido” as he was known to readers of the *EVB* magazine, was also invoked along with Thérèse, and the magazine followed intently his case for beatification in Rome.⁵⁰ In 1928 the *EVB* published a booklet, *Vitus: A Spring Flower of the Eucharist*, a German translation of the work by a French Jesuit, H. Peroy, about the life of Guido. Two

⁴⁴ *Wiener Diözesanblatt*, 2 July 1925, 30.

⁴⁵ “We have encouraged the holding of Eucharistic Congresses, the results of which have been as profitable as the attendance at them has been numerous and distinguished [and] We have designated as the heavenly patron of these and similar undertakings St. Paschal Baylon, whose devotion to the mystery of the Eucharist was so extraordinary,” in *Mirae Caritatis*, 28 May 1902, Papal Encyclicals Online, <<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113mirae.htm>> [accessed 1 September 2010].

⁴⁶ Waddy, “St Anthony’s Bread,” 356-57; Assmann, “Die Wallfahrt zur kleinen hl. Theresia,” 258.

⁴⁷ See, for example, *EVB* 11:5 (March 1931), 80.

⁴⁸ Nicholl, “Anton Puntigam S.J.,” 27, 112-14.

⁴⁹ Waddy, “St Anthony’s Bread.”

⁵⁰ See, for example, *EVB* 11:12 (October 1931), 191-92.

years later the booklet had sold almost 200,000 copies.⁵¹ In “Little Guido” it seemed Puntigam’s prayers for a patron saint for children of the EVB were answered. One of Puntigam’s early initiatives had been the “Children’s Monstrance.” In January 1921 the magazine had printed thousands of cardboard monstrances showing each month of the year. Children were encouraged to colour in a circle or dot, as a jewel on the monstrance, every time they received Holy Communion. These decorated monstrances would then be sent to the pope from the children of the EVB as a gift of gratitude for the pope’s prayers and the donations of the whole world for the starving and sick children of Vienna and Austria after the Great War.⁵²

Like Thérèse, Guido embodied a model of piety that identified with spiritual childhood. Historians of popular Catholic devotion in Bavaria have suggested that this attachment to saints who represented the Child Jesus was a modern religious response to the economic, social and psychological distress in post-war Germany and also Austria.⁵³ While this interpretation would appear to explain the growing interwar devotion to Thérèse in the shrines, votive tablets, prayers and poems of thanksgiving for answered prayers in personal matters, it does not explain why Thérèse should outshine the Counter-Reformation preachers of Canisius or Baylon as the preferred patron for the Church’s mission. Why in Austria, where the Counter-Reformation was such a political and cultural triumph for the Church over its enemies from within and without, did a French nun become the most constant presence in that country’s churches and in parish prayer circles?

Thérèse’s Mission from Lisieux to Mariazell

In 1953 the French biographer of St Thérèse, Abbé André Combes, visited Vienna on a lecture tour and offered some explanation for why Thérèse should be of interest to Austrian Catholics. Speaking to the Catholic Academy of Vienna, he told how Thérèse’s father had received a letter from his daughter on his feast day while visiting Vienna in 1885. He also mentioned that Thérèse’s Jesuit spiritual director had once come to preach in Vienna. These were tenuous connections, though no doubt heart-warming ones to his listeners. A more persuasive argument as to why Austrians were drawn to Thérèse was what Combes has called her “universal actuality.”⁵⁴ In other words, her own personal search for “the Kingdom of God and his justice” stood as a universal story of what every soul could do on earth, and it was this that marked her out for distinction among all the saints.⁵⁵ According to Combes, many souls in Austria had already been attracted to Thérèse and her unique mission in the world. “In Austria, as in France,” he said, “she has known how to find a place around every fireside.... She has won the hearts of university professors and of generals as well as those of fervent novices and unlettered workmen.” Thérèse’s indiscriminate “helping hand of fraternal aid” to all – farmer, worker, soldier, priest, nun, professor or child – enabled people to “solve the most difficult of the problems with which modern life ceaselessly besets them.” Unbelievers, married couples, priests and Tyrolean peasants, who “joyfully pile up the bricks which will build her a sanctuary at the

⁵¹ Nicholl, “Anton Puntigam S.J.,” 255; *EVB* 10:11 (September 1930), 175-56.

⁵² *EVB* 1:2 (January 1921), 47-50.

⁵³ Waddy, “St Anthony’s Bread,” 356-58.

⁵⁴ André Combes, *Saint Thérèse and her Mission: The Basic Principles of Theresian Spirituality*, trans. Alastair Guinan (Dublin, 1956), Appendix I, 160.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

Hungerberg in Innsbruck,” united with Thérèse and sought her help as they committed themselves to faith and good works.⁵⁶

It is not clear whether Combes’ story was based on information gained first-hand – he did not mention whether he paid a visit to Hungerberg and read the countless answered prayers on the walls and in the prayer books, though he may have done so after the lecture tour. His reflections about Austrian devotion to Thérèse may also have been passed on to him by the Carmelite sisters in Lisieux who corresponded with the Tyrolean parishioners about their plans to build a chapel and then a church at Hungerberg. Whichever was the case, it was evident that Austrian devotion to the French saint was not just a sign of spiritual affinity between the two countries: it also bridged a political and military gulf that had separated Austrian and French Catholics during the recent war. At the time of Combes’ lectures in Vienna, French soldiers were still occupying Austrian territory. While the Allies continued to supervise the political and economic reconstruction of Austria after the war, a French saint could help Austrians to work towards the moral reconstruction of Austrian society. Combes recalled to his audience’s minds the words of Pope Pius XI at Thérèse’s canonization recommending her “way of spiritual childhood” for “the restoration of moral order in human society.”⁵⁷ Thérèse’s way of spiritual childhood should not be misconstrued, Combes cautioned, as representing the way a child approached its father for affection and personal petitions, a concept that might be easier to grasp for a nun than for the “great majority” of ordinary believers in daily life. God sent Thérèse into the world not to humble humanity, Combes explained, but to teach the Gospel taught by the Church. Thérèse accepted the teaching of the Gospel and the Church and, above all, she accepted the Eucharist, “which united her to the historic Christ of the Crib and the Cross.”⁵⁸ True Thérésian spiritual childhood, therefore, was intimacy with the Jesus of the Gospels and of the Eucharist. Moreover, her message was not a spiritual balm for the simple-minded and emotionally fragile, but rather a “resurgence” of divine truth over human pretension. For at “the very time that rationalism, deism, agnosticism, and unbelief seemed to cover everything, a little daughter of France, enmeshed by singular grace, decided to turn with all her heart to Jesus Christ.”⁵⁹

Austrians had turned to this “daughter of France” in growing numbers in the years before the Second World War for their individual intentions. She in turn had made herself at home in their families. Now Austrians were confronted with a larger mission beyond their personal and familial needs to transform “all humanity into the Church of Christ by the universal acceptance of the Gospel.”⁶⁰ Transformation would occur not just through intellectual fidelity to the Gospel’s teachings, but also through the reception of what Combes referred to as “the pith of the Gospel.” By this Combes meant the physical and permanent presence of Christ in the world, the Eucharist. “Thérèse is a soul essentially eucharistic,” Combes observed, and it was “this link in her between the Gospel, the Eucharist, and the spiritual life, which explains the nature of her doctrine, as well as the whole character of her example and teaching.”⁶¹ Combes’ reference to Thérèse’s eucharistic soul may have been a reminder to his listeners of Austria’s own eucharistic heritage from imperial days. Unwittingly, perhaps, Combes had stumbled upon a common mission for French and Austrian

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 196-99.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 204-5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

Catholics to rebuild their respective communities on the “pith of the Gospel,” the eucharistic presence of Christ for humanity’s restoration.

The difficulty for Combes’ audience lay in putting aside their imperial and national imaginations to embrace Thérèse’s universal mission. Just a few years before Combes’ lectures in Vienna, the canon of the Mattsee monastery, Leonhard Steinwender, published a memoir of his two years spent in Buchenwald concentration camp. Prior to his incarceration in 1938, Steinwender had been editor-in-chief of Salzburg’s Catholic newspaper, *Salzburger Chronik*, and the director of the Austrofascist state’s propaganda office there. Both out of personal conviction and his duties as a press functionary in the state, Steinwender was one of many prominent Austrian Catholics in the interwar period who believed themselves to be the heirs of St Boniface, the eighth-century Apostle to the Germans, charged with a divine pan-German mission to be the bearers of true German Christianity in Europe. Steinwender later claimed he had found the “paths of grace” inside Buchenwald, from which he was released in November 1940, spending the remainder of the war under house arrest. His memoir, published in 1946, included a collection of the homilies he had given in secret to fellow inmates and which he had written down only after his release. Both in his homilies and his reminiscences of the camp, Steinwender acknowledged the Austrian state’s persecution of Social Democrats and its leniency towards National Socialists. The German nation that he had believed in now lay amid the ruins of the “idol” of the Third Reich “in the deepest abyss of its history.” He asked all who still loved the German nation “in spite of everything” to “pray with deep distress ‘*De profundis*,’ the *de profundis* of the German nation.” For “if after the bitter experiences of the last century we are serious in acknowledging that only Christ and his law of justice and love can save a human life, then this call of distress from the depths of depths will not remain a cry of the dead, but will awaken new life.”⁶² Steinwender’s reflections after Buchenwald illustrate how his and his fellow Austrian Catholics’ belief in their German spiritual and cultural heritage blurred with the pan-Germanism of National Socialists and only unravelled amid the moral, physical and spiritual deprivation of a Nazi concentration camp.

For those in Combes’ audience who may have read Steinwender’s popular post-war memoir and were grappling with the death of the German nation and apparent birth of a new Austrian national consciousness, Combes’ lecture may have given them reason to believe again in Austria’s post-imperial, transnational presence in the universal Church. Steinwender’s “*de profundis* of the German nation” was an example of what Thérèse’s way of spiritual childhood might mean for the restoration of Austria’s soul. It was not a rosy way, but a purple way, Combes said, marked with much bloodshed in order to enter more fully into the Eucharistic mystery. Hers was a “spiritual martyrdom” of dying to herself, not a heroic martyrdom of defending life, but a martyrdom, nonetheless, of dying in order to live.⁶³ Readers of the EVB had already witnessed such a sign that Thérèse could transcend national differences. In early 1924 a German priest reported that he had prayed to the Blessed Thérèse (she had not yet been canonized) on his sickbed and asked for a sign that she would help a German Catholic, not just a French one.⁶⁴

At the conclusion of his lectures, Combes challenged his listeners to declare Thérèse their patroness, as she had already been in France in the recent war:

⁶² Leonhard Steinwender, *Christus im Konzentrationslager: Wege der Gnade und Opfers* (Salzburg, 1946), 133.

⁶³ Combes, *Saint Thérèse and her Mission*, 169.

⁶⁴ *EVB* 4:3-4 (January-February 1924), 43.

Why should she not become also the patroness of this country of Austria so tried and tested...and which has not rested in satisfied contentment of her own heroic practice of faithfulness to Jesus Christ and to his Church, but has so often defended – and will again defend – the Christian West against all the terrors of barbarism and atheism?... My last word will, therefore, be a prayer that St Thérèse of the Child Jesus will adopt, with special favour, the holy Austria of Vienna and Mariazell.⁶⁵

Vienna, capital of the Holy Roman Empire under the Habsburg crown, and Mariazell, with its Marian shrine venerated by Central European Catholics since the twelfth century, represented Austria's imperial heritage. With its German national heritage in disarray, "holy Austria" needed a new patron saint to champion its place in the universal Church. Counter-Reformation preachers and apostles of the German nation were out of step with this new universal mission. Instead it was a diminutive Carmelite nun from Lisieux on whose saintly intercession Austria was now to rely.

Thérèse was not just a saint to whom Austrian Catholics prayed for help along with countless thousands of Catholics around the world. She also gave to Austrian Catholics a mission that extended beyond their imperial and national mental worlds. Like Thérèse, their vocation was to love the universal Church through devotion to the Eucharist, prayer and acts of charity. They could do this in practical ways by donating bricks to build a church in honour of Thérèse in Tyrol or through the work of the Eucharistic People's League by purchasing a gift booklet featuring one of the many conversion stories from the magazine for their neighbours, colleagues, friends and family who were not yet Catholic. They could encourage eucharistic piety in the very young, as Thérèse herself had shown at a young age, or by buying a copy of the children's monstration to give to their children or others they knew. They could support the work of training missionary priests through the foundation established in Puntigam's name after his death, or they could join with other Catholics in praying a novena to St Thérèse for the ongoing work of conversions of more souls around the world. That this devotion to a French saint emerged in Austria in the wake of a first military defeat and continued to flourish after a second defeat in 1945 suggests that Austrian Catholics chose to identify with the life and mission of a French saint in spite of their national circumstances. Women, men, school children, city workers, farmers, professionals, politicians, nuns and priests could all participate in a universal religious movement that extended beyond their private and public lives. It is in this sense of her mission from France to the world that explains the popular cult of Thérèse in interwar Austria.

⁶⁵ Combes, *Saint Thérèse and her Mission*, 214-15.