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Among the expectations that Pope John Paul II holds for the new millennium, the grace and mission of St. Thérèse of Lisieux surely holds a high place. When the Pontiff named this young French woman a Doctor of the Church, he confirmed for the whole world the perennial and universal value of her teaching about the Divine Love. Thérèse is known as the Doctor of Love because she instructs us about the precise way that God's merciful love embraces every human being who turns to him in faith.

Thérèse's sisterly attitude toward priests is well known to all who have read her biography, *Story of a Soul*. Thérèse also loved those preparing to undertake the challenge of ordained ministry in the Church. This affection grew out of her practice of obedience. About a year before the saint's death, Mother Agnes (her blood sister Pauline) came to Thérèse in the laundry room of the Lisieux Carmel to confide to her the spiritual well-being of an orphan seminarian named Maurice Barthélemy-Bellière.

Sister Thérèse and priest-to-be Maurice began a rapid correspondence that reveals a model for the right kind companionship that should develop between a priest and a devout woman. Maurice turned to Thérèse for spiritual support, and Thérèse constantly encouraged Maurice to fulfill his vocation in the Church. She wanted him to be a good priest. The Little Flower was able to do this with cheerful heart because she rejoiced in the vocation to holiness that God had given her. Thérèse knew the importance of her counsel to Maurice, for she had already found her own vocation in St Paul's encouragement to every Christian to practice love.

Maurice was ordained, and went on to serve as a missionary in Africa. There after a short period he fell ill, and having returned to France, died a few years later in a mental hospital. The priesthood is about service not privilege. To share uniquely in the priesthood of Christ means being willing to accept a share in the cross of Christ. That's why priests and seminarians especially need to learn the truths that God taught to Thérèse Martin, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face: there is only one tragedy in life, not to become a saint. And for those who unite themselves with Jesus, holiness of life is not an illusion, but a gift given even, and perhaps only, to little children.

To prepare for the new evangelization, the Holy Father has called for the renewal of seminaries throughout the world. When he called the seminary the 'Heart' of the local Church, the Pope must have been thinking about the Little Flower. He must have recalled that Thérèse delighted to proclaim that she had found her place, her vocation to love at the Heart of the Church. There she wanted to remain. But in order for seminaries to fulfill the task that the Holy Father desires them to do, three things, I suggest, are urgently required.

First, renewal of *intellectual formation*. Although the existing legislation adequately enumerates the areas of instruction that are required for priestly formation, these norms in themselves are not sufficient. They do not guarantee the kind of instruction in the truth of the Catholic faith that every Roman Catholic priest should possess. The reason for this is the extremely anemic state of theology at the end of the twentieth century, especially in the United States. Because the theological culture (conferences, programs, books, articles, etc.) has by and large lost touch with Catholic doctrine, it is impossible to ensure sound theological instruction in the major branches of theology. This rupture with the Tradition occurs not only in moral and dogmatic theology but also in such areas as liturgical and scripture studies. Even good-willed but uncritical instructors who rely on textbooks and articles by popularizers are easily misled, and so unfortunately can just as easily shortchange their students. Recently a leading theologian has remarked on the number of Reformation positions that have influenced Catholic theological thinking on questions such as the nature of the Eucharist, the ordained ministry, marriage, and the relationship of morality to the sacramental life of the Christian believer. The seminaries require a serious effort at *ressourcement*, "a more profound return to the sources of Christian wisdom in Scripture, patristic theology, and Thomas Aquinas—to quote George Weigel.

Second, *spiritual formation*. It is fair to assume that before the Second Vatican Council, the seventeenth-century French school exercised the greatest influence on the spiritual formation of diocesan clergy. Today, however, beyond the minimum that is set down by canon law, there exists no common spiritual doctrine that informs the spiritual life of diocesan priests. Priestly spirituality and piety remain matters of individual preference, and one can observe a reluctance on the part of spiritual directors and counselors to insist even upon the value of such standard features of priestly piety as devotion to the Blessed Eucharist, filial love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, the importance of silence and recollection, the discipline of a retreat. Confusion about the distinction between the sacred ministry of priests and the apostolate of the laity further exacerbates the situation to the extent that retreats, conferences, and other forms of spiritual exercise frequently involve the participation of persons who themselves are not clear on what is distinctive about priestly identity, nor what makes the priesthood something more than a particular function within the Church. The Church needs a new Vincent de Paul or John Eudes.

Thirdly, *moral theology* developed apart from a close reading of *Veritatis splendor* has weakened, I fear, the spiritual lives of American seminarians, especially their practice of the virtues of chastity and religion. Moral confusion more quickly emerges in seminarians who have been persuaded that their vocation is a form of social service, and therefore that the most important feature of their priestly formation involves practical training to fulfill specific tasks. Thérèse offers another prescription: The most urgent concern for the seminarian centers on the life of prayer, especially the practice of contemplative prayer (*oraison*). But this method of being united with God is unknown to and therefore unpracticed by most American seminarians. Many persons even have become persuaded that too much emphasis on and clarity about the moral life reveals a misconception about the goodness of God! In other words, it is easy to foster presumption. And this vice strikes at the heart of the Little Way, which encourages us to draw closer to the Heavenly Father, not seek compromises with Him.

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There are many seminaries, including the one at which I am privileged to teach, where these issues have been resolved in favor of sound theology. But the message of the Little Flower compels us to stay at the task. The priesthood is a vocation within the Church that is never fulfilled apart from that consummation in love that death brings to those who are found to be friends of God. This explains why another nineteenth-century French model for diocesan priests exclaimed, "Only in heaven shall we know what a priest is, if we were to know this on earth, we would die, not of grief but of love.