

*Archbishop Fulton Sheen's  
St. Thérèse*

A TREASURED LOVE STORY



Fulton J. Sheen



2007



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The editors have endeavoured to preserve to the greatest extent possible Archbishop Sheen's words as he spoke them. However, there were places where the editors made slight, non-substantive adjustments for the sake of clarity and greater readability.

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The Scripture verses herein are taken from several translations as Archbishop Sheen quoted from a number of different versions.

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## Introduction

This book is meant to celebrate something very special in the Church.

On December 14, 1927, Pope Pius XI proclaimed St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus principal patroness of all missions and all missionaries, the equal to St. Francis Xavier.<sup>A</sup>

In 2007, the entire Catholic world will celebrate the eightieth anniversary of that happy event with great solemnity. The Shrine of St. Thérèse in Lisieux and the Lisieux Carmel have, in fact, already begun their commemorations.

I mention this fact for two reasons:

1. St. Thérèse, much as she would have loved to, never set foot on mission soil, and yet she most powerfully helped the missions by her

heroic prayer and sacrifices. The Pope wanted to highlight this fact and to remind us that we, too, could and should do likewise.

2. The Servant of God Archbishop Fulton Sheen, whose great love was the Catholic missions, was also very aware of the missionary power of Carmelite contemplatives such as St. Thérèse. In fact, his life-long correspondence with the Carmelite Sisters in New Albany, Indiana, is fully reserved in his Rochester archives. Very revealingly, he wrote to the Carmelite prioress, *“Your prayers and sufferings do more good than all our preaching and our hectic actions. We make the noise; we get the credit; we enjoy the consolation of a victory seen and tasted. You are responsible for it and yet you cannot see the fruits—but you will, on that day when the Cross appears in the heavens and every man is rewarded according to his works.”* He also wrote, *“I want to cling on to Carmel for I love its love of Jesus. I refuse to give it up, and like the blind man of Jericho, I shall go on shouting out to you continually to cure my blindness and my ills.”*

In 1973, the centenary of St. Thérèse's birth, I was anxious that we would celebrate this “greatest saint of modern times” in the best possible way. Given his great love of the missions (he was director of the Society of the



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Propagation of the Faith<sup>1</sup> for 16 years) and the fact that he was a professed member of the Carmelite Third Order and easily the most renowned preacher in the world of his time, I felt Archbishop Sheen was the one to invite to preach, if he had the availability. He had already preached on two special occasions in our Carmelite Church at Whitefriar Street, Dublin (1969 and 1971), and we were thrilled when he accepted our request to preach on St. Thérèse.

For me, the novena he preached was unforgettable. My only regret is that the 11 beautiful sermons he gave were never put into book form until now. For their publication I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Fr. Andrew Apostoli, CFR, vice-postulator of Archbishop Sheen's cause for canonization. It was totally his idea that these splendid talks be published, and he has done all the work to bring this brilliant jewel to light.

These beautiful talks are vintage Sheen. His approach to St. Thérèse is absolutely unique. It is abundantly clear that he is a master of her spirituality, and that his own spiritual life drew much inspiration from her. Principally using her autobiography *Story of a Soul* (written under the patronage of Our Blessed Lady, for whom both St. Thérèse and the archbishop had a most tender love), he takes us through her beautiful life and that spiritual classic in a masterful way.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the online *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "This society is an international association for the assistance by prayers and alms of Catholic missionary priests, brothers, and nuns engaged in preaching the Gospel in ... non-Catholic countries." Sheen was director of its American branch. Between 1950 and 1966, he raised \$200 million for foreign missions. In today's dollars, that would roughly equate to \$1.172 billion.

He gives us precious insights into her virtues, her faith, hope, charity, fortitude, and humility, her heroic perseverance in prayer, her science of divine love, her heroic resistance to the temptations to suicide, not to mention her total grasp of God's teaching and its application to our everyday lives. He was fascinated by her love for and knowledge of sacred Scripture (attributes that could similarly be ascribed to him).

He even gives us a count of St. Thérèse's quotations (107 from the Old Testament and 250 from the New Testament). Archbishop Sheen adds, "Think of that! One hundred and seven from the Old. And she did not study Scripture as the scholar does. For example, she picked up the Prophet Isaiah and she read, she said, about 50 chapters before there came to her an inspiration that she applied to her own life."

I find in taking up this book that it makes for compelling reading—a reluctance to put it down. Not only does it reveal the essential Thérèse, it also reveals the essential Fulton Sheen. This is a book that will be a rich resource for anyone's spiritual reading or meditation and, extraordinarily, it is as relevant to today's spiritual life as it was when first delivered 33 years ago. It is no wonder St. Thérèse is called "one of the ageless saints of God." Needless to add, it is written with all the famous Sheen wit and charm.

St. Thérèse has been greatly misunderstood by many who have attempted to interpret her. One of the greatest communicators of the twentieth century, the Servant of

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God Archbishop Sheen has not made that mistake but has left us a wonderfully readable book that directs and authentically leads us in the footsteps of St. Thérèse. He has dealt very lucidly with her great power of intercession.

May the Little Flower take special care of Fulton Sheen's cause for canonization.

To Fr. Andrew Apostoli, his staff, and to all who read these majestic sermons, may St. Thérèse send her choicest roses.

Fr. J. Linus Ryan, O. Carm.  
St. Thérèse National Office,  
Carmelite Community,  
Terenure College,  
Dublin 6W, Ireland  
October 1, 2006,  
Feast of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus  
of the Holy Face



## Notes

A. *Quam laeto animi*, declaration, Sacred Congregation of Rites, December 14, 1927, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 20, pgs. 147-8.



## Foreword

When the possibility arose of transcribing the novena talks that Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen preached on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, I thought about a story involving two saints.

The two saints were the Dominican St. Thomas Aquinas and the Franciscan St. Bonaventure of Bagnaregio. They were contemporaries, good friends, and both became Doctors of the Church.

Now the story tells us how St. Bonaventure went to the famous hermitage called Mount Alvernia in central Italy, the same mountain where St. Francis of Assisi received the *stigmata* (i.e., the five wounds of Christ crucified) in his hands, feet, and side. It was a very holy place of prayer. St. Bonaventure had gone there to write a biography of St. Francis, the founder of his Order.

The story goes on to tell us that St. Thomas Aquinas came by Mount Alvernia one day with some of his Dominican companions, and he wanted to visit with St. Bonaventure. When a Franciscan friar went to notify St. Bonaventure about his visitors, the friar found the saint in a prayerful state of ecstasy. When told of this, St. Thomas is said to have remarked to his companions, "Let us leave one saint to write about another!"

In our present case, we have one canonized person (St. Thérèse of Lisieux) and another, God willing, on the road to canonization (the Servant of God Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen). If, as an old expression puts it, "It takes one to know one," then this treatment of the life of St. Thérèse will be exceptionally blessed.

Archbishop Sheen, with his own profound wisdom, insight, and personal holiness, uniquely explores the depths of holiness of this "saint of the Little Way." He reveals the secrets of this "greatest saint of modern times," as Pope St. Pius X called her. These secrets of holiness were so hidden that, as her death approached (and knowing they would have to notify the neighboring Carmelite monasteries of her death while sharing a brief summary of her life), two of her fellow nuns remarked, "What are we going to write about Thérèse? She never did *anything!*!"

Well, for a nun who never did "anything," it was said that in the first 100 years after her death, 900 books were written about the saint from Lisieux. Because of this, some people may ask, "Is there a need for *another* work on St. Thérèse?"

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We can only reply, “Read the book!” You will be moved and inspired by what such a great evangelist as Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen has to tell us about this extremely popular saint! After all, it is a book written about a saint by a potential saint. No one can better explain what is happening than someone who has been there! The names, dates, places, and situations in the lives of saintly people may change, but the daily dying with Christ and the daily rising with Christ on the road to sanctity are basically the same!

Thus, The Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation is honored and delighted to make this present work available to the Church, especially to the many devoted followers of both the “Little Flower” and Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

The Foundation is extremely grateful to Fr. J. Linus Ryan, O. Carm. (the Carmelite priest from Dublin who invited the archbishop to preach the novena) for his permission to transcribe the beautifully preached novena into a book. This will allow the message about St. Thérèse to reach an even greater number of people in written format.

Finally, the Foundation thanks Basilica Press for printing this volume, which will serve as a spiritual guide for many. In particular, the Foundation wishes to acknowledge the work of final editing done by Carolyn Klika and Brian O’Neel, Kathleen Wilson for her research help, Ted Schleunderfritz for his cover design, and Giuliana Gerber for her interior design work. We also thank the Carmelite Convent of Lisieux and Sr. Cindy with the

Archives of the Diocese of Rochester for helping us procuring the photos herein. Furthermore, the Foundation wishes to acknowledge the work of Elaine Curzio, ocds, who transcribed the text, and Catherine Dillon, who did the initial editing. Finally, the Foundation acknowledges the dedicated work of Alan Napleton of the Catholic Marketing Network (CMN), who initiated the process of publishing along with help from others at CMN, especially Pamela Presbitero and Kate Jasmin.

Father Andrew Apostoli, CFR  
Vice Postulator of Archbishop Sheen's Cause



## **The Life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux**

*by Fr. J. Linus Ryan, O. Carm.*

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, known to millions as “the Little Flower,” is one of the greatest spiritual teachers in the history of the Catholic Church. That is why so many popes have held her up as a model and, indeed, why the Servant of God Archbishop Fulton Sheen—the supreme communicator of the twentieth century—had a similar interest in her.

Pope Pius XI, who considered Thérèse of Lisieux the “star of my pontificate,” did not hesitate to assert in his homily on May 17, 1925, the day of her canonization, that, “The Spirit of truth opened and made known to her what He usually hides from the wise and prudent and reveals to little ones; thus she enjoyed such knowledge of the things above—as Our immediate Predecessor Benedict XV attests—that she shows everyone else the sure

way of salvation.”<sup>1</sup>

The Servant of God Pope John Paul II said we can apply to Thérèse of Lisieux what his predecessor the Servant of God Pope Paul VI said of another young saint and Doctor of the Church, Catherine of Siena:

“What strikes us most about the saint is her infused wisdom, that is to say, her lucid, profound, and inebriating absorption of the divine truths and mysteries of faith... That assimilation was certainly favored by the most singular natural gifts, but it was also evidently something prodigious, due to a charism of wisdom from the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

Earlier in this same talk John Paul II had said:

“In a time like ours, so frequently marked by an ephemeral and hedonistic culture, [St. Thérèse] proves to be remarkably effective in enlightening the mind and heart of those who hunger and thirst for truth and love.”<sup>3</sup>

### *Her Life*

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus was born Thérèse

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1 *Vehementer exultamus hodie*, Pius XI, “Bull of Canonization of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.”

2 Homily of John Paul II at the proclamation of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face as a Doctor of the Church, Sunday, October 19, 1997, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/homilies/1997/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19101997\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19101997_en.html)

3 *ibid.*

Martin in Alençon, Normandy, France, on January 2, 1873, and was baptized two days later in the Church of Notre Dame, receiving the name Marie-Françoise-Thérèse. Her parents were the Venerable Zélie (née Guérin) and the Venerable Louis Martin (both of whom, hopefully, will soon be beatified as model parents). After her mother's death on August 28, 1877, the Martin family moved to the town of Lisieux where, surrounded by the affection of her father and sisters, Thérèse received a formation both demanding and full of tenderness.

Towards the end of 1879, she received the Sacrament of Penance for the first time. On Pentecost 1883, she had the extraordinary grace of being healed from a serious illness through the intercession of Our Lady of Victory. Educated by the Benedictines of Lisieux, she received First Communion on May 8, 1884. This followed an intense period of preparation and was crowned by an exceptional experience of the grace of intimate union with Jesus.

A few weeks later on June 14, she received the Sacrament of Confirmation. She did so with a vivid awareness of what the coming of the Holy Spirit meant to her personally: "Particularly on that day I received the strength to suffer, for soon afterwards the martyrdom of my soul was about to commence."<sup>4</sup>

On Christmas 1886, she had a profound spiritual experience that she subsequently described as a "complete conversion." As a result, she overcame the emotional

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<sup>4</sup> Manuscript A, Chapter IV, p. 80

weakness caused by the loss of her mother and on Christmas 1886, she had a profound spiritual experience that she subsequently described as a “complete conversion.” As a result, she overcame the emotional weakness caused by the loss of her mother and began “to run as a giant” on the way of perfection.

Thérèse wished to embrace the contemplative life in the Carmel of Lisieux, like her sisters Pauline and Marie. She was prevented from doing so, however, on account of her young age. On November 20, 1887, during a pilgrimage to Italy, she and her fellow pilgrims were given an audience with Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903). With filial boldness, she took the opportunity to ask His Holiness to enter Carmel at age 15. (Archbishop Sheen reveals the answer Leo gave later in this book.)

On April 9, 1888, she entered the Lisieux Carmel, where she received the habit of the Blessed Virgin’s order<sup>5</sup> on January 10 of the following year, and made her religious profession on September 8, 1890, the feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary. At Carmel, she undertook the way of perfection marked out by the Mother Foundress St. Teresa of Jesus<sup>6</sup> with genuine fervor and fidelity in fulfilling the various community tasks entrusted to her.

Enlightened by the word of God, and tried in

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<sup>5</sup> Editor’s note: From its earliest days, the Carmelite Order has been known as the Sacred Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, for the Carmelites not only credited Our Lady with founding the Order but with its continual preservation. Hence, “the Blessed Virgin’s order.”

<sup>6</sup> Aka, St. Teresa of Avila.

particular by the illness of her beloved father Ven. Louis Martin (who died on July 29, 1894), Thérèse embarked on the way of holiness, insisting on the *centrality of love*. She discovered and imparted to the novices entrusted to her care “the Little Way of Spiritual Childhood.” The Little Way was the means she used to enter more and more deeply into the mystery of the Church. As a result of this, and drawn by the love of Christ, she felt growing within her the apostolic and missionary vocation that spurred her to bring everyone with her to meet the Divine Spouse.

On June 9, 1895, the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, she offered herself as a sacrificial victim to the Merciful Love of God. On April 3 of the following year, on the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, she noticed the first symptoms of the illness which led to her death. Thérèse welcomed this as a mysterious visitation of the Divine Spouse. At the same time, she underwent a trial of faith that lasted until her death.

As her health deteriorated, she was moved to the infirmary. Her sisters and other religious collected her sayings, while her sufferings and trials, borne with patience, intensified until the moment of her death on the afternoon of September 30, 1897. Her last words, “My God, I love You,” are the seal of her life.

“I am not dying; I am entering life,” she had written Fr. Bellière, one of her spiritual brothers (Lettres 244). And so she did.

### ***Her Writings***

Thérèse of the Child of Jesus left us writings that deservedly qualified her as a teacher of the spiritual life. Her principal work remained the account of her life in three autobiographical manuscripts (*Manuscrits autobiographiques A, B, C*) published under the title of *Histoire d'une Âme* (Story of a Soul).

Written at the request of her sister Mother Agnes of Jesus, prioress of the monastery, and given to Mother on January 21, 1896, Manuscript A described the stages of her religious experience: the early years of childhood (especially the time of her First Communion and Confirmation); adolescence; her entrance into Carmel; and her first profession.

Considered by many as the jewel of her writings, Manuscript B was written during her retreat that same year at the request of her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart. It contained some of the most beautiful, best known, and oft-quoted passages from the saint of Lisieux. They revealed the Little Flower's full maturity as she spoke of her vocation in the Church, the Bride of Christ and Mother of souls.

Manuscript C was composed in June and the first days of July 1897, a few months before her death, and was dedicated to Prioress Marie de Gonzague, who had requested it.<sup>7</sup> It completed the recollections in Manuscript A regarding life in Carmel.

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<sup>7</sup> Mother Marie succeeded Mother Agnes as prioress.

These pages revealed the author's supernatural wisdom. Thérèse recounted some sublime experiences during this final period of her life. She devoted moving pages to her trial of faith. This trial brought with it a grace of purification that immersed her in a long and painful dark night, one that was only illuminated by her trust in God's merciful, fatherly love.<sup>8</sup>

Thus in this third set of reflections, without repeating herself, Thérèse again made the Gospel's light shine brightly. Here we find the most beautiful pages she devoted to trusting abandonment into God's hands, to the unity that exists between love of God and love of neighbor, and to her missionary vocation in the Church.

While different from one another, this trinity of manuscripts converge in a thematic unity and provide a progressive description of her life and spiritual way. As such, Thérèse has left us an original autobiography that is indeed the story of her soul. It shows how God has offered the world a precise message: Through her, He shows us an evangelical way, the "Little Way," which everyone can take because everyone is called to holiness.

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<sup>8</sup> *Grace of purification* is a common term used by all the mystics to describe part of the process that leads them to holiness. A number of the saints comment on how trials, disappointments, crosses of various kinds, and aridity in prayer, all accepted in the right spirit, help to *purify the soul* of sins and imperfections. St. Thérèse is no exception. She regards her *great trial of faith*, to which she devotes 25 of the 52 pages of Manuscript C, as "*a grace of purification*." "The long and painful dark night" is a direct referral to her *trial of faith*. Incidentally, I might add that these 25 pages are some of the most moving Thérèse wrote. What many people don't realise is that she even experienced strong temptations to commit suicide during this period.

She also wrote at least 266 *lettres* to family members, women religious, and missionary “brothers.” In these, Thérèse shares her wisdom, developing a teaching that is actually a profound exercise in the spiritual direction of souls.

Additionally, her writings also include 54 *poésies*,<sup>9</sup> some of which have great theological and spiritual depth inspired by Sacred Scripture. Worthy of special mention are *Vivre d'Amour!*<sup>10</sup> and *Pour-quoi je t'aime, ô Marie!*<sup>11</sup> an original synthesis of the Virgin Mary's journey according to the Gospel. To this literary production should be added eight *récréations pieuses*,<sup>12</sup> poetic and theatrical compositions the saint conceived and performed for her community on certain feast days in accordance with the tradition of Carmel. Among those writings should be mentioned a series of 21 *prières*.<sup>13</sup> Nor can we forget the collection of all she said during the last months of her life. These sayings, known as the *Novissima verba* and of which there are several editions, have also been given the title *Derniers Entretiens*.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Her Legacy***

The reception given to the example of her life and Gospel teaching in our century was quick, universal, and

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9 French for “poems.”

10 *Living on Love! Poésies* 17

11 *Why I love you, O Mary! Poésies* 54

12 *Pious Recreations*

13 *Prayers*

14 *Last Conversations*



constant. As if in imitation of her precocious spiritual maturity, her holiness was recognized by the Church in the space of a few years. In fact, on June 10, 1914, St. Pius X signed the decree introducing her Cause of Beatification. On August 14, 1921, Benedict XV declared the heroic virtues of the Servant of God, giving an address for the occasion on *The Way of Spiritual Childhood*; Pius XI beatified her on April 19, 1923.

Just two years later, afterwards, on May 17, 1925, the same Pope canonized her before an immense crowd in the Basilica of St. Peter, highlighting the splendor of her virtues and the originality of her doctrine. A short time later, on December 14, 1927, in response to the petition of many missionary bishops, he proclaimed her patron of the missions along with St. Francis Xavier.<sup>15</sup>

Beginning with these acts of recognition, the spiritual radiance of Thérèse of the Child Jesus increased in the Church and spread throughout the world.

- Many institutes of consecrated life and ecclesial movements, especially in the young Churches, chose her as their patron and teacher, taking their inspiration from her spiritual doctrine.
- Her message, often summarized in the so-called “Little Way,” which is nothing other than the Gospel way of holiness for all, was studied by theologians and experts in spirituality.

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<sup>15</sup> He also made her patroness of the Society of St. Peter the Apostle and of Mexico.

- Cathedrals, basilicas, shrines, and churches throughout the world were built and dedicated to the Lord under the patronage of the saint of Lisieux.
- The Catholic Church venerated her in the various Eastern and Western rites.
- Uncountable numbers of the faithful were able to experience the power of her intercession.
- Many of those called to the priestly ministry or the consecrated life, especially in the missions and the cloister, attributed the divine grace of their vocation to her intercession and example.

The Supreme Pontiffs of the twentieth century, all of whom held up her holiness as a universal example, each stressed that Thérèse was a teacher of the spiritual life with a doctrine both spiritual and profound. This she drew from the Gospel sources under the guidance of the Divine Teacher and then imparted what she had learned to her brothers and sisters in the Church with the greatest effectiveness.<sup>16</sup>

This spiritual doctrine was passed on to us primarily via her autobiography *Story of a Soul*, and it has aroused an extraordinary interest down to our day. This book, translated along with her other writings into about 70 languages, has made Thérèse known in every part of the world, even outside the Catholic Church.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Manuscript B, 2v<sup>o</sup>-3v<sup>o</sup>

THE LIFE OF ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

Thus, more than a century after her death, Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face continues to be recognized as one of the great masters of the spiritual life in our time.



## **The Life of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen**

*by Fr. Andrew Apostoli, CFR*

### ***His Early Years***

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen was born to Newton and Delia (née Fulton) Sheen, on May 8, 1895, in El Paso, Illinois. This oldest of four sons was baptized Peter John, but growing up became known by his mother's maiden name, Fulton, a name he favored. At his baptism, his mother dedicated him to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and he renewed this dedication at his First Holy Communion. Attending Catholic grammar and high schools in Peoria, Illinois, he always showed keen interest in reading rather than doing manual work on his father's farm. He later attended St. Viator College in Bourbonnais, Illinois, where he laid the groundwork for his future preaching and writing by joining the school's debate team and newspaper staff.

Not surprisingly, Sheen was an excellent student,

and he earned a significant scholarship for advanced studies after graduation. He turned this down, however, to follow his desire to become a priest. He was ordained to the priesthood on September 20, 1919.

It was during his years of study at St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, MN, that Sheen learned the story that was to effect his priesthood forever. It was that of a young Chinese girl's heroic love for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Because of her example, he made his famous promise to spend a "Holy Hour" each day before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, a promise he kept faithfully throughout his whole priestly life.<sup>A</sup>

After ordination, he first pursued post-graduate studies at Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington, DC. From there he went on to the University of Louvain in Belgium, where he completed requirements for his doctorate in Philosophy. He was then invited to apply for the highly respected *agrégé* degree in Philosophy, which he received with outstanding distinction.<sup>B</sup> During this time, he also studied at the Sorbonne in Paris and the Angelicum in Rome. Subsequently, he taught Dogmatic Theology at St. Edmund's College near Ware, England (1925). He was to receive many honorary degrees and distinguished awards throughout his long and fruitful life.

When he returned to the United States, his bishop, Edward Michael Dunne (1909-29), feared the young priest's fame and success in Europe might have filled him with pride. So to test him, His Excellency sent Sheen to St. Patrick Church, a parish in inner-city Peoria. Within

nine months, the young priest's pastoral dedication and dynamic sermons had turned St. Patrick's into a thriving parish. Bishop Dunne then assigned him to CUA's faculty, where he taught Theology, Philosophy, and Religion for 24 years (1926-1950).

### ***His Years as a Media Pioneer***

His fame and influence as a preacher, writer, and teacher of the Faith began to grow immensely. All forms of media were available to him. In 1926, he began his first radio programs from an always overcrowded Church of St. Paul in Manhattan. These talks were broadcast in the New York City area. Later, people nationwide heard him through his "Catholic Hour" broadcasts on NBC (1930-1952), which ultimately reached an estimated listening audience of four million every Sunday afternoon. These broadcasts had a solidly Catholic content.

His greatest success in media, however, came when he went on television with his series, "Life is Worth Living" (1952-1957), first broadcast on the DuMont Television Network and then ABC. Despite being opposite the very popular Milton Berle (aka, "Mr. Television"), the archbishop's weekly viewing audience grew to an estimated 30 million people and earned him an Emmy as Most Outstanding Television Personality in just his second year. These TV shows were more general in content than his radio programs, since many of his viewers were not Catholic. Many focused on the threat of communism, and during one, he is believed to have predicted the death of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

Through this time, he was doing a great deal of writing, authoring 64 books and 65 pamphlets, as well as two weekly newspaper columns and a huge amount of personal correspondence. One result of all this “media evangelization” was that he attracted large numbers of converts to the Catholic Faith. They included the rich and famous, like Clare Booth Luce and Henry Ford II, as well as a great number of ordinary people.

In 1950, the archbishop’s work began to take a new direction. He was appointed the national director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, a position he held until 1966. His popularity was a great asset, helping him to raise large amounts of money for the support of the Church’s foreign missions (he even donated from his own TV salary and upwards of \$10 million over the course of his public life, an amount that would equate to \$62 million in today’s dollars). As he would often say, “My greatest love has always been the Missions of the Church.” With Bl. John XXIII, he co-consecrated several missionary bishops in 1960 and 1961. He was also to become the first Latin rite bishop ever to offer a solemn Byzantine rite Mass in English.

### ***His Later Years***

He participated in Vatican Council II (1962-1965) and was appointed to the Commission on the Missions by Pope Paul VI. His insights on the missions as well as on the importance of the role of women in the changing world were very farsighted. In 1966, Pope Paul VI appointed him bishop for the Diocese of Rochester, NY, a position



he held for three years, when, at age 75, he submitted his resignation to Pope Paul VI. As he put it, “I am not retiring, only re-treading!” The Pope then named him archbishop of the titular See of Newport, Wales.<sup>c</sup> He spent his last years preaching and writing. Near the end of his life, he experienced tremendously painful suffering due to heart trouble. God took him to his eternal reward on December 9, 1979.

The impact of his life was summed up in the beautiful words with which Pope John Paul II greeted him in New York’s St. Patrick Cathedral on October 2, 1979: “You have written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus! You have been a loyal son of the Church!”



## Notes

A. According to the Cardinal Kung Foundation, the story is this:

“There was a little Chinese girl of 11 years. When the Communists took over China, they imprisoned her parish pastor in his own rectory near the church.

“After they locked him up, the priest was horrified

to look out of his window and see the Communists proceed into the church. There they went into the sanctuary and broke into the tabernacle. In an act of hateful desecration, they took the ciborium and threw it on the floor, with all of the Sacred Hosts spilling out. The priest knew exactly how many Hosts were in the ciborium: 32.

“When the Communists left, they either did not notice, or didn’t pay any attention to a small girl praying in the back of the church. She saw everything that had happened.

“Late that night, the little girl came back. Slipping past the guard at the priest’s house, she went inside the Church. There she made a holy hour of prayer, an act of love to make up for the act of hatred.

After her holy hour she went into the sanctuary, knelt down, bent over, and, with her tongue, received Jesus in Holy Communion (since it was not permissible at that time for laypersons to touch the Sacred Host with their hands).

“The little girl continued to come back each night to make her holy hour and receive Jesus in Holy Communion on her tongue. On the thirty-second night, after she had consumed the last and thirty-second Host, she accidentally made a noise and woke the sleeping guard. He ran after her, caught her, and beat her to death with the butt of his rifle.

“This act of heroic martyrdom was witnessed by the grief-stricken priest as he watched from his bedroom window.”

However, it may not have been the communists who perpetrated this terrible crime.

According to Fr. Andrew Apostoli, CFR, he spoke

with a bishop at an EWTN event. This bishop told him he had spoken with a seminary classmate of Sheen's at St. Paul Seminary, who said he, Sheen, and another classmate heard this story while they were students there.

Sheen entered St. Paul's in 1917 and received ordination in 1919. Chinese Communists were not a force at this time. Indeed, Mao Zedong, the man who led China into communism, was just then learning of communist principles. Zhou Enlai, arguably the second most important person in the history of Chinese communism, did not become a communist until after Sheen was already a priest. The first congress of Chinese communists did not take place until 1921. Communism as a movement during this period, therefore, if not in its infancy, was at least in its "toddlerhood." It certainly did not have the wherewithal to foment revolution or to even produce armed forces capable of doing something like what we read about above (Of course, it did things very much like this after the 1948 revolution, and Chinese communism made – and continues to make – many martyrs).

So if we are to take Sheen's classmate at his word (and there is no reason not to), this incident must have occurred during the 1911 Republican Revolution or, more likely, during the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), which was more focused on attacking anything smacking of foreign influence and was much more brutal.

In any event, the story so inspired Bishop Sheen, that he promised God to make a holy hour of prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament everyday for the rest of his life. After all, if this little Chinese girl could risk her life everyday to express her love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with a holy hour and Holy Communion, then,

at the very least, the bishop thought he should do the same.

His sole desire from then on was to bring the world to the Burning Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

The little girl showed the bishop what true courage and zeal really is, how faith could overcome all fear, and how true love for Jesus in the Eucharist must transcend life itself.

B. There is nothing comparable to the *agrégé* degree in the United States. Some have described it as a sort of “super-doctorate.” The word “agrégé” means incorporated, and by earning the degree, one becomes incorporated or “aggregated” to a European university faculty. Evidently, it is tradition to receive a dinner after sitting for one’s *agrégé*. You could tell how successful a person was in passing the exam by the beverage they served at dinner. If you did satisfactorily, they served you water. If you passed with distinction, they served you beer. If you passed with great distinction, they gave you wine, and if you passed with the very highest distinction, they gave you the best champagne. Sheen later wrote, “The champagne tasted so good that night!”

C. A titular see is a diocese that once was active but now is dormant. If someone is given a titular see, no administrative duties go along with this honorary position.