

**“St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897), Doctor of the Church  
and ‘Sister of Atheists,’: The Relationship between St.  
Therese’s ‘Night of Faith and Dawn of Hope’ and Friedrich  
Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) Night of Atheism and Darkness of  
Despair”**

**St. Therese of Lisieux Symposium**

**Short Summary of Bishop Barres’ Homily**

**Immaculate Conception Huntington**

**Saturday, August 2, 2025 11:00am Mass**

The theme of my St. Therese of Lisieux Symposium homily on August 2, 2025 is:  
“St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897), Doctor of the Church and ‘Sister of  
Atheists,’: The Relationship between St. Therese’s ‘Night of Faith and Dawn of  
Hope’ and Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) Night of Atheism and Darkness of  
Despair”

In processing his 20<sup>th</sup> century experience of World War I and World War II, Fr.  
Henri De Lubac, SJ (1896-1991) wrote *The Drama of Atheistic Humanism* in 1943.

The key thesis of the book is that ideas have consequences in history.

The Splendor of Catholic truth is a Light of Jesus Christ in history.

Deformed Culture of Death ideologies express the Culture of Death and Darkness  
in history.

DeLubac posits that the deformed 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophies and thought of  
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Karl Marx (1818-1883), and Sigmund Freud  
(1856-1939) led to many 20<sup>th</sup> Century horrors such as concentration camps and  
gulags.

Isn’t it interesting that these philosophers of the Culture of Death and Darkness are  
more or less peers of St. Therese (1873-1897)?

For instance, St. Therese died in 1897 and Friedrich Nietzsche died in 1900.

If the 19<sup>th</sup> century thought of Nietzsche, Marx and Freud led to 20<sup>th</sup> century expressions of the Culture of Death, so too St. Therese of Lisieux's Splendor of Catholic Truth thought in *The Story of a Soul* caught on like mystic wildfire early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and continues on vibrantly into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as evidenced by Pope Francis' 2023 Apostolic Exhortation, *C'est la Confiance*.

Fr. Bernard Bro, OP effectively places St. Therese among these “three giants who dominate modern thought.” He notes that Freud's first theory of psychoanalysis is released in 1896, one year before Therese's death. Karl Marx dies fourteen years before Therese's death in 1883. In 1886, Nietzsche published *Beyond Good and Evil*; and he published his book *The Antichrist* the year Therese entered Carmel.<sup>1</sup>

What would St. Therese's Little Way possibly have to do with these three giants of philosophical, economic and psychological thought?

In his 2023 Apostolic Exhortation on St. Therese, *C'est la Confiance*, Pope Francis writes: “Therese experienced faith most powerfully and surely in the midst of the dark night and especially amid the darkness of Calvary. Her witness culminated in the final months of her life, in the great ‘trial against the faith’ that began at Easter of 1896. In her account, she directly relates this period of testing to the painful reality of the atheism of her time. The last years of the nineteenth century were the ‘golden age’ of modern atheism as a philosophical and ideological system. When she wrote that Jesus allowed her soul ‘to be invaded by the thickest darkness,’ when she was evoking the darkness of atheism and the rejection of the Christian faith. In union with Jesus, who took upon himself all the darkness of the sin of the world when he willed to drink from the cup of the Passion, Therese came to appreciate its underlying sense of despair and sheer emptiness. Yet darkness cannot overcome the light: Therese had been conquered by the One who came as light into the world (cf. John 12:46). Her account reveals the heroic nature of her faith, her triumph in spiritual combat with the most powerful temptations. She felt herself *a sister to atheists*, seated with them at table, like Jesus who sat with sinners (cf. Matthew 9:10-13). She interceded for them ever renewing her own act of faith, in constant loving communion with the Lord.” (25-26)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fr. Bernard Bro, OP, *St. Therese of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 29.

Within St. Therese's **Little Way** is her **Apocalyptic Way**. In the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century struggle between good and evil, she has a compassionate, contemplative and intercessory role as a "Sister of Atheists" interceding for them and calling down grace and mercy upon them as she witnesses to the Splendor of Catholic existential and contemplative Truth in world and salvation history.

If Pope Leo XIII confronts the Carmelite vocation of the 15 year old Therese in 1887 in Rome, Pope Leo XIV lays a white rose on April 25, 2025 on the Tomb of Pope Francis in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in honor of St. Therese and invokes a shower of her roses on a Church confronting the evolution of Artificial Intelligence with moral truth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Industrial Revolution.

I look forward to exploring these themes in more depth with you at the St. Therese of Lisieux Symposium.

**Bishop John Barres**

**Diocese of Rockville Centre**

