

**ROSES OF LOVE, VIOLETS OF HUMILITY AND LILIES OF SUFFERING:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC STUDY OF FLORAL EXPERIENCES IN
THE DIARY OF ST. FAUSTINA KOWALSKA (1905-1938)**

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*für meine Omi
ein Leben inspiriert von Blumen*

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ABSTRACT

The presence of flowers is felt in Catholic architecture, literature, artwork, personal histories and devotional practices. This, however, has not always been the case. The Catholic Church has had a long and tumultuous relationship with flowers, the focus of which has been the subject of considerable scholarship (e.g. Fisher (2011, 2007), Ward (1999), Winston-Allen (1997), Goody (1993), Coats (1970)). What has not been much considered is a phenomenological treatment of Catholic floral experience, and how such experiences have shaped individual and shared understandings of the Catholic faith. This thesis seeks to redress this omission through an exploration of the life of the Polish Catholic mystic, St. Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938), whose mystical experiences with the divine were explicitly mediated and narrated through flowers. Through Faustina's diary, *Divine Mercy in my Soul*, we gain access to powerful, and unequivocally Catholic, experiences with flowers which comprise the very centre of her religious convictions. This thesis queries the ways in which flowers have dynamically shaped, and have been shaped by, St. Faustina's relationship with God and Catholic holy figures. To address this question I use the semiotic, phenomenological and hermeneutic approach of Max van Manen. Van Manen uses four elements of lived experience he calls lifeworld existentials, these are: lived space, lived time, lived body and lived relationality. These four categories are applied to St. Faustina's life as she engages with God spatially, temporally, corporeally and relationally; each reveals the centrality of flowers in her religious experiences. While this thesis focuses on the religio-floral experiences of a particular mystic-saint, its significance lies also in the broader Catholic narrative of which it is a part. Writing about flowers was a transformative medium in Faustina's life and has been historically significant in the lives of many other Catholic saints and mystics who recorded similar experiences. This thesis, in describing the details of St. Faustina's floral-saturated experiences from her diary, reveals a particularized instance of a paradigmatic Catholic phenomenon whereby flowers provide access to the sacred.

INTRODUCTION

All people are like grass, and all human faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.¹

At its most basic level this thesis explores the presence of flowers in human life. It does so without judging or imposing analysis; rather it presents, through rich description, the ongoing role that flowers have occupied in the life of one individual, and the significance they have held in one religious tradition. Though focused on these “particulars,” this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the topic of flowers reveals itself to be an inherently rich and insightful means through which to explore human experience.

In the span of human history the vast majority of humanity has celebrated, mourned and lived in the company of flowers—doing so out of choice and not of necessity. Archaeological evidence suggests that even our predecessors, Neanderthal humans, valued flowers enough to place them next to their buried dead.² Though we cannot know as to why, we can be certain that this was for them an *intentional* act that carried meaning. Likewise, the practice of placing flowers on graves continues in most parts of the globe. Humans have been drawn to flowers from the beginning; they are a part of our larger world, through our myths, our artistry, and our everyday lives. Often they are present at highly charged emotional times of transition, at births and deaths. Given this, it is not surprising that we find them wherever people have traditionally sought out meaning. Flowers therefore are omnipresent and enduring in the world’s major religions. To give but a few examples, in the Buddha’s lotus sermon, they serve as pedagogical symbols. They participate in religious rituals such as the Hindu puja and they are often central to

¹ Isaiah 40:6-8.

² See Solecki, Ralph. *Shanidar, The First Flower People*. New York: Knopf, 1971.

Christian miracles, for instance, in the manifestation of flowers blossoming in the snow. Given such prominent roles, the human experience³ of flowers provides insight not only into the self-understanding of individuals, but also illuminates the shared reality of a faith. Briefly put the omnipresence of flowers cross-culturally and across time make them a pertinent subject for phenomenological investigation.

Clearly, an exploration of flowers in human life can be undertaken in any corner of the globe and within any religious context. This thesis has chosen one particular religious tradition for the exploration of flowers in human life—Christianity and more specifically, Catholicism. Catholicism has a long tradition of well-documented floral history. In spite of controversial beginnings, flowers have maintained a lasting, powerful role in Catholic experience since the very origins of Christianity. Once an idolatrous symbol of Roman licentiousness, flowers came to represent Catholic figures and theological concepts like the Passion of Christ.⁴ Representations of flowers appear in Catholic architecture, literature, artwork and music. They have held a prominent place in the experiences of Catholic martyrs, mystics and saints in both natural and ‘miraculous’ ways. It is scarcely possible to survey the devotional images of Catholic saints today without finding flowers, strategically placed, alongside their likenesses.⁵

³ By human experience I mean all interactions with flowers, this includes but is not limited to: direct physical contact with flowers, representations of flowers in artwork, literature or architecture, dreams of flowers and mystical visions that include flowers.

⁴ The “Passion of Jesus” is a Catholic concept covering the sufferings of Jesus leading up to and including his crucifixion.

⁵ Flowers are sometimes a central focus in these devotional artistic representations. St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231) and St. Elizabeth of Portugal (1271-1336) are often pictured with large baskets of roses according to the legend associated with them. At times these flowers appear in the background. St. Fiacre lived in the seventh century and is the patron saint of gardening; he is often pictured with a spade while flowers surround his body.

The scope of this thesis cannot accommodate the entire depth and breadth of flowers within Catholicism. Instead, I have chosen a single entry point to gain access to the religio-aesthetic experience of flowers in Catholicism—the life of Catholic saint, Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938).⁶ St. Faustina was a Polish mystic who left behind a rich account of her floral experiences in several notebooks combined in a single text entitled *Divine Mercy in my Soul*.⁷ Originally written in her native language, Polish, these diaries have been translated and promulgated worldwide and, largely through the efforts of Pope John Paul II, have earned a lasting place in the Catholic Church and its body of believers. St. Faustina has been identified as the bearer of the image of Jesus’s Divine Mercy, and her personal history has often been subsumed by that great contribution. Her own life, including the role of flowers, has been largely overlooked. Yet, in reading her diaries it becomes clear that Faustina is an ideal candidate for an exploration of the religio-aesthetic experience of flowers.⁸ Faustina was exposed to flowers in a religious context from an early age. When she was very young she dreamt that she and the Mother of God walked hand in hand in a beautiful garden. As she grew up, she was able to help pick flowers to adorn a family shrine outside her home. As an adult at Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy convent, Faustina continued to surround herself with flowers and felt a connection to God through them. She often hid herself in convent gardens and there, surrounded by flowers, prayed

⁶ Religio-aesthetic refers to a religious aesthetic, or an appreciation of beauty as understood through a particular religious lens. For Faustina, the beauty of flowers is enhanced by an understanding of them as created entities formed by an omnipresent, Christian God. This is a shared reality with other Catholics who also recognize the createdness of flowers.

⁷ Although her text *Divine Mercy in my Soul* is the primary written source of information for this thesis, Faustina also wrote letters to her confessors and fellow sisters, as well as inscribed holy cards. All of these sources were used in writing this thesis.

⁸ Please see diary references to flowers used in this thesis. Blossom(s): 4, 142, 224, 1395; Flower(s): 65, 71, 153, 208, 239, 240, 259, 275, 296, 306, 411, 412, 501, 591, 605, 651, 949, 1064, 1105, 1119, 1306, 1306, 1395, 1575, 1675, 1713, 1734, 1735, 1751; Garden(s): 68, 87, 135, 153, 157, 175, 251, 259, 262, 296, 314, 332, 399, 401, 435, 515, 581, 591, 605, 615, 646, 664, 673, 823, 1054, 1112, 1120, 1152, 1228, 1267, 1276, 1385, 1394, 1487, 1507, 1534, 1580, 1664, 1705, 1755, 1782; Lilies: 161, 224, 591; Lily: 296, 591; Rose(s): 65, 71, 296, 591, 1575, 1735; Rosebud: 239, 1064, 1546, 1756; Violet(s): 224, 255, 296, 591.

to God. Faustina's relationship with God and the natural world are expressed through her relationship with flowers, and are recorded in her diary. Through these experiences with flowers Faustina was able to negotiate her understanding of herself and her God, eventually coming to understand her own reality in floral terms. The clear first-hand accounts of Faustina's diary, combined with her intimate relationship with flowers, have provided the rich descriptive insights necessary for this project.

On a general level flowers have been integral in shaping and inspiring Catholic traditions. Using the writings of St. Faustina, this thesis addresses their role in approaching the divine, as conceived by an early twentieth century Polish Catholic saint, and in so doing, it contributes to the existing body of literature on flowers in Catholicism. Of interest as well is the importance of writing for Faustina in her relationship with God. Though there has been a tendency to trivialize flowers by pointing to their poetic, sentimentalized uses, the writings of St. Faustina demonstrate their larger potential for existential significance. Reconsidered here are "mundane" engagements of flowers. Educational theorist Max van Manen wrote that words can often lose their original meaning, "Words that once could reverberate with lived meaning and reveal a living world ... [become] lame, limp, mute, emptied, and forgetful of their past power."⁹ This treatment of flowers highlights their ongoing sensuous, powerful and immanent roles; ultimately it permits us greater insight into Catholic experience.

To appreciate the bond between Faustina and flowers requires an approach based on openness, respect, and letting her words speak for themselves. The creative, sacred energy of which Faustina speaks cannot be reduced to fantasy or fanatical thinking if we are seeking to understand *her* perspective. This result is achieved by applying the method developed by Max

⁹ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 58.

van Manen. His method was selected for its focus on creativity, rich descriptions, and its ability to evoke empathetic understanding.

This thesis is divided into four sections. In the first section, chapter one describes the method used in this thesis, chapter two looks at the ubiquity of flowers in human history, and chapter three briefly introduces the reader to Helena Kowalska as she transitions into St. Faustina Kowalska. Section two is the core of this thesis; each chapter is dedicated to an exploration of Faustina's religio-floral relationship through the lens of an existential. It provides a descriptive account of St. Faustina's lifeworld as she interacts with flowers in the world.¹⁰ Chapter four explores the first lifeworld existential of space, chapter five addresses time, chapter six addresses the body and chapter seven addresses relationality. In each case the question is posed: how do flowers mediate between Faustina and her experience of God given the spatial, temporal, corporeal or relational element under consideration? The work of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard is used heuristically to facilitate an exploration of the experiences in Faustina's life. Bachelard is a philosopher whose works center on the elements of earth, air, water and fire as archetypes of human desire. Bachelard provides creative examples which will serve here to further define Faustina's words. His poetic expressions, rather than his philosophical thinking, will be used as a counterpoint to bring to light the experiences of Faustina. Each chapter from chapter four to chapter seven begins with the same passage from Faustina's diary—examined from the perspectives of space, time, body and relationality—in order to demonstrate how each different existential can be fruitfully applied to the *same* experience, and reveal rich levels of detail as every experience is distilled down to its four existential components. The division of

¹⁰ Although each section separately addresses one existential in the text, there is some overlap between these four sections. Additionally, there is overlap in the examples used, as the same passages are often examined from four different perspectives. This repetition is a consequence of the approach used.

space, time, body and relationality allows us to tease apart the layered complexity of Faustina's floral relationship with God. Each chapter continues with a brief introduction and an "Orientation" segment which examines how Faustina oriented herself in that lifeworld existential. The next segment, entitled "Experience," focuses on Faustina's varied experiences with flowers. Often her words are set against similar practices in the Catholic world giving a broader context to her experiences. For example, in exploring the dimension of space in St. Faustina's specific floral experiences I query whether they can be seen to fit within an existing Catholic tradition. Finally, each of these chapters finishes with a conclusion that looks reflexively at how flowers have mediated the experiences of space (chapter four), time (chapter five), body (chapter six) and relationality (chapter seven) between Faustina and God. Section three consists of the conclusion; it addresses the reception of Faustina's message after her death, the role of writing in her relationship with God, and finally brings together the modalities of experience seen throughout the thesis. Section four consists of the appendix, which provides a detailed history of Faustina's life, death and legacy, and section five consists of the bibliography.

SECTION ONE: METHOD, HISTORY AND THE LIFE OF ST. FAUSTINA

KOWALSKA

CHAPTER ONE: METHOD: SEMIOTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

So as to better define our method, this section looks at phenomenology as a general field and then, more specifically, phenomenology of religion. First, it pays attention to the field of hermeneutics, so as to compare the phenomenological and hermeneutic methodologies. We can then consider a combined phenomenological hermeneutic method, and finally, explore in detail the semiotic phenomenological method of Max van Manen as it is applied in this work.

Phenomenology as a General Field

Humanity as a species finds commonality within its members such that we may speak of a human nature continuous with the world allowing us to make sense of our surroundings. Phenomenology unearths a primal way of approaching this ordered, meaningful world—through experience.¹¹ Almost as if through *fingerspitzgefühl*¹² phenomenologists acknowledge and explore what they consider to be the *sui generis*¹³ nature of religious experience. The phenomenological approach to *religion* grew out of the wider twentieth century *philosophical* movement of phenomenology.¹⁴ Despite the occurrence of the term ‘phenomenology’ as early as the eighteenth century, it was not until the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl, two

¹¹ Jensen, *The Study of Religion*, 134; Cox, *Phenomenology of Religion*, 103.

¹² *Fingerspitzgefühl* literally means sensitive, fingertip sensation; it refers to an intuitive ability to explore.

¹³ *Sui Generis* is a Latin term meaning wholly unique, it is not reducible to another category but exists in its own right.

¹⁴ Allen, “Phenomenology of Religion,” 7086. Clive Erricker suggests that phenomenology “has never been unequivocally established in relation to religion,” making this inquiry all the more challenging. There are of course practitioners in the phenomenology of religion who proceed, like phenomenologists, with differing methodologies. See Erriker, Clive. “Phenomenological Approaches.” In *Approaches to the Study of Religion*, edited by Peter Connolly, 73-104. New York: Cassell, 1999.

centuries later, that phenomenology was established as a philosophical methodology.¹⁵ Although Husserl and subsequently another German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, arguably provided the approach with a solid philosophical footing, future self-described phenomenologists often strayed from this base.¹⁶ Some practitioners branched into other philosophical patterns, while others favoured a more descriptive, comparative approach.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the commitment to exploring phenomena “as they appear” in their pre-theorized expression, and placing an emphasis on experience, unites an otherwise widely divergent “field” of phenomenology. All phenomenologists emphasize the relational structure of knowing as a unique human enterprise, using empathy to move beyond spectator-derived ways of knowing. In general, they seek to rid us of uncritical preconceptions and provide a deepened intentional presence of diversity and complexity while turning away from the reductionism and the oversimplification of traditional empiricism.¹⁸

¹⁵ Husserl established the “science of experience” as a foundation for other sciences. He identified “the things in themselves” as they appear in our pre-conceptual, immediate sensory experience. Phenomenology is based on a premise of reciprocity between the knower (self) and the known (the world) where objective reality does not exist outside of these. Direct experience is invariably subjective and relative to one’s position so that lived, pre-conceptual experience is valuable in determining ways of knowing. James, “Phenomenology and Religion,” 319.

¹⁶ Heidegger is widely recognized as one of the most influential twentieth century philosophers whose insights impacted a range of theoretical developments from critical theory to post-structuralism. He contributed to re-thinking the meaning of human existence beyond the metaphysical assumptions of philosophy by focusing on the mind-body problem, self-world dichotomy and the primary, corporeal dimension of existence. His famous work *Being and Time* suggests that our existence is one of being-in-the-world as a whole, as we do not know the world outside of ourselves. The world is a part of the relational structural with human *Dasein*, and not an independent entity.

¹⁷ Cerbone, *Understanding Phenomenology*, 82.

¹⁸ At its inception phenomenology existed in two distinct philosophical forms: a transcendental phenomenology introduced by German physicist Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728-77) that grew into an essentialist phenomenology of religion, and a descriptive, classificatory phenomenology proposed by Scottish physicist and philosopher John Robison (1739-1805) which lead to the development of a historical-typological phenomenology of religion. Cox, *Phenomenology of Religion*, 34.

Phenomenology has widely contributed to scholarship and continues to have a positive effect today. It has influenced the fields of philosophy, theology, linguistics, sociology and cultural anthropology, and continues to be used in a host of other areas including women's studies, sociology, mysticism studies, politics, and biological anthropology.¹⁹ Phenomenology of religion, by attempting to separate itself from metaphysical questions and by incorporating other disciplines, has contributed to the independence of religious studies from theology and promoted interdisciplinary tendencies in the field of religious studies. Phenomenology remains an essential approach in interpreting meaning and in understanding the nature of religious and human experience. It takes seriously a unique, human mode of religious knowing and feeling; it moves into a wider, deeper range of experiential significance, untenable through other methodologies, yielding unique and valuable results.

Phenomenology of Religion

Phenomenologists of religion specifically seek to locate what constitutes the core of *religious* experience across spatio-temporal frameworks, as something lasting and meaningful to human existence.²⁰ Many do this by identifying and organizing what they consider to be irreducibly religious phenomena, like ritual, across traditions into comparative classificatory schemas.²¹ Often they use descriptive, historical typologies to enter sympathetically into the

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, in dispensing with existentialism and assuming a phenomenology of perception, takes the body as the ground for the appearance of objects, whereby motor-intentionality (bodily preparation or anticipation) grasps the *Gestalt* (form or shape) of phenomena. This perspective has been particularly useful in areas dealing with physicality, like women's studies and anthropology for instance.

²⁰ This phenomenological approach frees the scholar from relying heavily on highly contextualized answers that are dependant on cultural specificity, however it does not allow one to totally disregard the importance of contextualization; rather the context of the experience is one of *many* pieces of information.

²¹ In phenomenological studies if an experience is understood as 'religious' or 'sacred' by the practitioner it is also deemed so for the scholar.

material, “bracket out” (*epochè*) questions concerning the rational or objective status of ideas and practices, and intuit the essence of phenomena. For example, the descriptions from Faustina’s diary are selected based on their relevance to flowers including physical encounters, prayers and visions. The objective reality, of a vision for instance, is not important, the significance lies in the *experience* of it. The essence or core of that experience is the meaningful floral interaction between God and Faustina. Phenomenologists of religion typically seek to uncover the deep structures of religious life which are revealed in characteristically religious activities. At best they tell us *what religion is* on its own terms as an irreducible field.²² Phenomenologists of religion have sometimes been organized according to disciplines or schools; two large categories emerge within the field—essentialist and historical typologist.²³ A closer look at each reveals the diversity and also unity in this methodology as both try to uncover lived experience from the perspective of the practitioner. Essentialist phenomenologists of religion are concerned with revealing what they consider to be the essence of religious phenomena through explorations of religious consciousness.²⁴ Using intuitive insight they attempt to gain access to the pre-given

²² Another major difference between these methods, according to critics, comes from the use of bracketing. In the case of hermeneutics Ricoeur claims that “an epoche is interpreted in a non-idealistic sense.” Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” 97. That means that bracketing *out* bias is not possible. Instead, they integrate that bias in hermeneutics, for example the intimate thoughts of a scholar are included in their research notes. The hermeneutical method uses the fruits of self-reflection as essential to interpretation. The researcher thinks about their own experiences and how they relate to what is being researched. One’s philosophical biases might be explicitly included, as influences are recognized and not bracketed out. In stark contrast phenomenologists of religion often claim to identify biases and then set those aside to see the world afresh. They attempt to eliminate those preconceived notions because it prevents the imposition of those biases onto the material. Gadamer acknowledged that methods are never objective, nor are they detached from the values of a scholar. Scholarly passion, or situational aversion, are valuable signposts in research. Bracketing out bias, as is done in phenomenology, is therefore both impossible and unwanted. See Van Manen, Max. *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* New York: New York State Press, 1990 and Sharkey, Paul. “Hermeneutic Phenomenology.” In *Phenomenology: Qualitative Research Methods*, edited by R. Barnacle, 16-37. Melbourne: RMIT University Press, 2001.

²³ Erriker, “Phenomenological Approaches,” 82; Jensen, *The Study of Religion*, 30; Twiss and Conser, *Experience of the Sacred*, 7-44.

²⁴ Essentialist phenomenology is represented by the works Max Scheler or Rudolf Otto for example, and historical typological phenomenology of religion is represented by Gerardus van der Leeuw, W. Brede Kristensen or Mircea

meaning that makes religious activities (ex. prayer, devotion) intelligible in the first place and that represents the ‘core’ or the essence of religious phenomena.²⁵ Where essentialists focus on religious consciousness, often through philosophical elucidation, historical-typologists seek a qualitative understanding of empirical data from religious traditions, enlivening dry fact. Specifically, essentialists explore historical contexts, identify religious intentions, motivations and objectives. Historical-typological phenomenology diachronically compares religious traditions, often across cultures, to gain insight into practitioners’ worldviews, identify patterns and common, essential features.²⁶ A phenomenological method may make use of the features of both, blurring the lines between them. A balance can be struck between essences and typologies as they are both focused on the same goal of addressing lived experiences.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is an interpretive method compatible with phenomenological inquiry. The word hermeneutic comes from the Greek *hermēneuein*—to interpret. Since the Renaissance hermeneutics have been used to interpret religious and classical texts. In the past the aim was often to discover the objective truths about a document.²⁷ It was imagined that texts objectively meant something and it was the job of the scholar to identify that meaning. Like phenomenology, hermeneutic practice varies widely. An early example, Friedrich

Eliade for instance. There are far more phenomenological thinkers to choose from. A scholar’s work may be described as “phenomenological”—not because they constitute any sort of lineage established by Husserl and Heidegger (indeed some predate them) but because their work shares a methodological orientation that is empathetic and that seeks meaningfulness. To further complicate matters there are works widely regarded as phenomenological, such as William James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, without the author acknowledging their approach as such. Erriker, “Phenomenological Approaches,” 83.

²⁵ Sumner and Twiss, *Experience of the Sacred*, 7-24.

²⁶ Sumner and Twiss, *Experience of the Sacred*, 44.

²⁷ Harvey, “Hermeneutics,” 3930.

Schleiermacher, known as the founder of modern hermeneutics, sought out authorial intention and insight into the text's 'age.' He questioned what the author was trying to say and the historical context it was being said in.²⁸ We could enter into the historical meaning of Faustina's diaries and ask how her writings were received by the many levels of the Catholic hierarchy, or we could consider how the events of twentieth century Poland shaped the reception of the message of Divine Mercy. Exploring authorial intention might additionally address the significance of Faustina's upbringing and gender on her life and writings.

In a second hermeneutic approach, that authorial intention might be considered inaccessible and new meaning may be formed through re-contextualization and interaction between the reader and the text. In this latter case we would not focus on what Faustina *intended* to write at all, or how the text was received, because it is impossible to know her intentions or to know precisely the early twentieth century Polish context; instead, original meaning is created according to the reader's experiences with the text. Somewhere between these two extreme positions is the hermeneutic possibility of recovering *some* degree of historical context and authorial intention *combined* with the ability to create new meaning. It is this combination that is of interest here. The aim of this thesis is to say something meaningful *about* the text (what is contained within the text according to the intentions and time of Faustina) and also *beyond* the text (what is created by interacting with the text).²⁹

²⁸ Jensen, *The Study of Religion*, 245. A systematic discipline of hermeneutics was established by Wilhelm Dilthey in the nineteenth century. His approach was unique in that it was based on the "metaphysics of mankind and history as united through a supra-individual spirit." Harvey, "Hermeneutics," 3930.

²⁹ According to Ricoeur, what gives the text sense and reference is "the *world of the text*," something the text projects in front of itself. Texts are always about something and what they are about is the world—a world the reader can imagine being in. To understand a text we need to understand and be able to imagine ourselves in the world. As the "I" changes, so the meaning of the text "*as appropriated*" will change from time to time and place to place. The text does not objectively change but the understood meaning changes. This dynamic change of meaning echoes Gadamer's textual meaning-making. Pellauer, *Ricoeur*, 61.

A Critical Comparison of Phenomenology of Religion and Hermeneutics

Phenomenology of *religion* has so greatly diverged from early Husserlian phenomenology, and Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology that it is useful to review some of the more *general* trends within phenomenology of religion. We consider here the idealized category of phenomenology of religion that incorporates those characteristics common to the two major modes of phenomenology—the historical-typological and the essentialist modes—that is, using categorical features to intuit the core meaning of the experience.³⁰ In practice, it means organizing data in similar groupings and then making sense of each grouping by finding a common meaning within or outside of the grouping. The question is how does hermeneutics converge with, and then diverge from, this integrated kind of phenomenology?

French philosopher Paul Ricoeur claimed that “phenomenology remains the indispensable presupposition of hermeneutics.”³¹ The organizational, classificatory schema of phenomenology is a necessary first element of hermeneutical research. Both take on the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) of a religion, they appreciate lived experience and aim at illuminating aspects of life in a meaningful and representative way. Both seek to engage the entire human being, the total mode of being human in a non-reductionist way.³² For instance, they may incorporate psychological explanations without relying *exclusively* on psychology to understand religion. In Faustina’s life we may observe how her parents set an example of worship through flowers during the month of May, this was engrained in her early consciousness, but the religio-aesthetic bond that has come to define Faustina’s life cannot be entirely explained away or

³⁰ Sumner and Twiss, *Experience of the Sacred*, 7-44; Jensen, *The Study of Religion*, 30; Erriker, “Phenomenological Approaches,” 82.

³¹ Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” 95.

³² Allen, “Major Contributions,” 13.

reduced to this childhood event. The ongoing relationship she had cultivated with flowers throughout her daily life provides a deeper, richer source of questions. Van Manen explains that phenomenology is unique from other disciplines precisely because it operates on that level of everyday lived experience.³³ In a fashion similar to phenomenological concerns, hermeneutic philosopher Hans Gadamer proposed a hermeneutics which tried to reclaim what was lost in empirical scientific studies—a human element. Both phenomenology and hermeneutics require self-reflection on the part of the researcher as a first step towards analysis. Once the process of interaction is underway both phenomenology and hermeneutics engage with the research participants *and* their personal reflections. Personal reflection is embedded in the comparative choices made, the examples used, and overall creative linkages. Subjects are not chosen impartially but selected precisely for their capacity to offer meaningful experiences to be shared. In that light, my choice of topic is made plain: St. Faustina’s life was chosen exactly because it is rich in floral experiences, and representative of the floral experiences common to her Catholic background.

Without engaging too deeply into methodological critiques, it is important to note that the mutual engagement of hermeneutics and phenomenology is contested when it comes to description and interpretation. Some scholars, like W. Brede Kristensen, contend that phenomenology tends to be mostly descriptive—it states but does not analyze its findings.³⁴ Others contend that phenomenology focuses on the essences of structures that order experience and appear in consciousness: it does not depend on biographical, social or historical aspects of

³³ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 11.

³⁴ Allen, *Phenomenology of Religion*, 7097ff.

the interpreter—this is an especially common critique against essentialist phenomenologists.³⁵ Hermeneutics by contrast is understood as interpretive because it both describes and analyzes its data, it also puts added emphasis on historical contextualization and development both individually and socially.³⁶ Phenomenologists and hermeneutic scholars were often presented with these contrasting dichotomies, though in recent decades these apparent divisions are being increasingly challenged.³⁷ Douglas Allen, an American philosopher, suggests that this distinction between interpretation and description is misplaced. “Explanatory and critical approaches” he explains, “always involve understanding, and understanding is not possible without critical explanatory reflection. In addition there are no purely descriptive approaches, and it is impossible to do justice to the other as some purely descriptive, unconstructed, uninterpreted other.”³⁸ The position taken in this thesis is that although phenomenology claims to be descriptive, it progresses from the descriptive phase into interpretation, and, likewise, hermeneutics cannot be interpretive without first being descriptive.³⁹ According to American literary theorist Stanley Fish, at their base, religions are themselves communities of interpretation and so to study a religion is to interpret it. Description and interpretation naturally follow one another as a part of both phenomenology and hermeneutics.⁴⁰ This thesis uses a combination of both methods to achieve descriptive and interpretive categories: descriptive in the floral

³⁵ See Allen, *Phenomenology of Religion*, 7094ff; Jensen, *The Study of Religion*, 393ff; Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 40ff.

³⁶ Laverty, “Hermeneutic Phenomenology,” 27.

³⁷ Allen, “Major Contributions,” 6.

³⁸ Allen, “Major Contributions,” 6.

³⁹ The divide between interpretive and explanative approaches to religion also separates the natural and human sciences, perhaps extending as far back as Descartes. Sjöblom, ““Going, Going, Gone,”” 35.

⁴⁰ Sjöblom, ““Going, Going, Gone,”” 36.

experiences of St. Faustina as recorded in her diary and interpretive in the larger Catholic framework of meaning and the phenomenological examples which are used.

A Phenomenological, Hermeneutic Method

The flexible, intuitive approach of phenomenology and hermeneutics has led some scholars to remark that in “the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics...there is no method,” however this has not prevented scholars from describing methodologies from both fields in great detail.⁴¹ In discussing hermeneutics and phenomenology, we must remember that it is not necessary to choose one or the other. The techniques discussed can be useful and applicable in many disciplines. Joachim Wach, a scholar of religion and sociologist of comparative studies, applied the hermeneutical approach to *Religionwissenschaft*, referring to phenomenology.⁴² According to Wach, the exploration of religion required phenomenological, historical, psychological *and* sociological approaches.⁴³ His approach to religion was based on the idea of *verstehen*, or deep understanding.⁴⁴ The scholar must develop a critical ability to engage with their texts. Hermeneutics for Wach involves interpreting data by *Kombination*—a synthesis of various approaches available to a trained scholar. His method combined an in-depth understanding of religion with an intuitive feeling for religiosity in humanity. For Wach phenomenology was used to build classificatory systems that added critical depth to his

⁴¹ See Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. New York: Seabury Press, 1975.

⁴² *Religionwissenschaft* can be described as the science of religion.

⁴³ Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, 1.

⁴⁴ Wach claimed that a trained scholar must be able to intuit the core of a religion, or the very fundamental base of that religion. It requires scholars to be able to have that ‘sense for religion’ or *Organ*. Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, 13.

scholarship.⁴⁵ Max van Manen practices *Kombination* through his approach of semiotics, phenomenology and hermeneutics, by integrating features of linguistics, hermeneutics and phenomenology while paying attention to the broader contextualization of his data. We turn to Max van Manen now, and his methodology.

The Method of Max van Manen

The relationship between Faustina, flowers and God finds clear expression in the interpretive, meaning based approach of Max van Manen. Van Manen was originally from the Netherlands where he received his teaching qualifications from the State Pedagogical Academy before moving to Canada in 1967 to teach. In the course of his career his focus has been on ‘human science’ research, especially in the field of education, health sciences and psychology. Although van Manen’s pedagogical focus is far removed from twentieth century Polish Catholic mysticism, his human science approach to research is applicable to this thesis.

His term ‘human science’ is derived from Wilhelm Dilthey’s *Geisteswissenschaften*, broken down, *Geist* is translated to mean spirit or spiritual refinement, *wissen* means knowledge and *schaffen* means to create. Together it points to creatively seeking out knowledge about the human spirit. It encompasses a variety of approaches and orientations which seek out meaning in human life. Van Manen uses “descriptive-interpretive studies of patterns, structures and levels of experiential and/or textual meanings.”⁴⁶ He describes his use of human science as a ‘Human

⁴⁵ Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, 1. Mircea Eliade picked up where Wach left off, using hermeneutics to approach religion. Eliade described the religious scholar as a ‘hermeneutist.’ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 91. In response, J. G. Platvoet claimed that Eliade has overcome the ‘hermeneutical predicament’ by providing “the correct perception, interpretation and translation of the social, cultural or historical data studied.” Platvoet, *A Concise History*, 2. For Eliade, this approach required scholars to see religions as ‘spiritual universes’ using symbols as ‘ciphers’ in religion. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 98. This is just one of the unique ways phenomenology and hermeneutics have been combined to study religion.

⁴⁶ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 181.

Science Pedagogy' consistent with the phenomenological traditions found in Germany (from 1900-1965) and the Netherlands (from 1945-1970).⁴⁷ Instead of using the techniques of the natural sciences, like external observation and evaluation, human science primarily uses techniques of interpretation and understanding. Included in the human sciences, claims van Manen, are the methods of hermeneutics and phenomenology.⁴⁸

Van Manen describes his methodology as systematic, explicit, self-critical and intersubjective; these attributes constitute the goals of this thesis.⁴⁹ In addition, his methodology requires a passionate curiosity to seek out phenomena as they appear, an attuned intuition to receive these phenomena, and a sense of wonder and care in processing the data. In the case of this thesis, the primary text used is Faustina's diary, *Divine Mercy in my Soul*. Careful attention is paid to the language of Faustina's diary, both the English translation and Polish original were considered side by side; any queries regarding the precise meaning of an English term have been checked against the Polish text.⁵⁰

As described above, human understanding, whether approached phenomenologically, hermeneutically, or using a combination of approaches, is embedded in language and history. That understanding comes to the fore by having a conversation with the text.⁵¹ No *one* method

⁴⁷ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 2.

⁴⁸ For more information please see Van Manen, Max. *Researching Lived Experience*, 1-34, 181.

⁴⁹ Phenomenology claims to be "scientific in that it is systematic (uses modes of questioning), explicit (articulates through content and form of the text), self-critical (examines its goals and methods), and intersubjective (researcher meets the other)." Van Manen, *Writing in the Dark*, 11.

⁵⁰ Where necessary, footnotes clarify the original Polish term and its English translation.

⁵¹ Paul Sharkey explained that the idea of a "text" has been extended to include literary writings as well as discourse, and action. Sharkey, "Hermeneutic Phenomenology," 2001.

can do this; it requires multiple observations, reflections and judgments.⁵² We may be reminded of the Canadian scholar of comparative religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and his quest for *humane* scholarship. Cantwell Smith suggested that all scholars have an academic method in common—it is rational, critical, analytical, empirical in some ways, and above all *flexible*; it should not divide scholars, nor contort the data. Van Manen concurs that one’s method requires the whole of a person working towards a ‘broadened’ and ‘more richly embodied’ notion of rationality.⁵³ Van Manen takes seriously this aim for a full study; he tries to avoid practices that “pulverize life into minute abstracted fragments” which are of no use to any practitioner.⁵⁴ To engage in humane scholarship is not to depersonalize knowledge into detached objectivity, nor is it to be ‘scientific;’ it is rather a rational, forward moving process that allows for scholarly insight combined with critical self-awareness.⁵⁵ An application of hermeneutics, understood as scholarly understanding, satisfies these requirements and can be an essential element of phenomenological inquiry.

Van Manen also explains what his method does *not* do. First and foremost, it is not an ‘empirical analytic science’ which means it is not describing the facts of the world, answering questions of “who did what, where, to what extent, under what conditions” and so forth.⁵⁶ Neither is phenomenology, as he sees it, a kind of ‘speculative inquiry,’ it begins with lived experience, and necessarily ends there. Phenomenology is not based exclusively on either particularity or universality, but offers a particular, personal access point to universality. Finally,

⁵² Hyde, “Beyond Logic,” 34.

⁵³ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 17.

⁵⁴ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 7.

⁵⁵ Smith, *William Cantwell Smith*, 102.

⁵⁶ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 21.

phenomenology does not offer solutions to “problem questions,” but in the spirit of human science addresses “meaning questions.”⁵⁷

This thesis focuses on the experiences of Faustina as recorded in her diary—it requires a strong orientation towards semiotics and hermeneutics to uncover those written, phenomenological accounts. The emphasis on writing and re-writing constitutes the semiotic component of van Manen’s method, while hermeneutics is used to uncover and understand Faustina’s writing. Through her writing we get to the phenomenological data of lived experience—a task complicated by the ineffable nature of her experiences, and her sometimes opaque descriptions of her experiences. Each of the elements of the methodology—semiotics, hermeneutics and phenomenology—are explained in the following chapter by exploring van Manen’s five avenues of research, six research activities, and four lifeworld existentials.

Van Manen described five ways of organizing one’s research—these five are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, they are: thematic, analytical, exemplificative, exegetical and existential.⁵⁸ These may be combined, or a new approach may be created based on the phenomena addressed. I have chosen to organize my research *existentially* by using the four lifeworld existentials. This enables me to look at the same relationship, between Faustina and God as mediated by flowers, using four different perspectives. These four themes, claims van Manen, “probably pervade the lifeworlds of all human beings regardless of their historical, cultural or social situatedness.”⁵⁹ Their commonality makes them immediately familiar, and enables the reader to relate to them. This is particularly important because of the nature of

⁵⁷ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 23.

⁵⁸ See Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 167-173.

⁵⁹ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 101.

Faustina's experiences—they are often unique in their mystical dimension. These four themes are not unique to van Manen, they appear in phenomenological literature, and belong to the structure of the lifeworld as conceived by Merleau-Ponty.⁶⁰ Still, these four themes prove to be useful tools in organizing this thesis.

Van Manen outlines his six research components, reminiscent of the historical phenomenologist Gerardus van der Leeuw and his instructions.⁶¹ Max van Manen describes these methodological themes as a “practical approach” to thinking and writing phenomenologically. These are fluid guidelines, or potential tools, which allow the individual to carry out the appropriate phenomenological process for their own project. This thesis uses these guidelines as intended by Max van Manen, not as a step by step process, but as a guide for investigation. During the course of the thesis it is not practical to explicitly describe each guideline as it is occurring, because of the fluid nature of each, and because this was not the author's intention. They are *not* meant to provide “a mechanistic set of procedures,” but instead to “animate inventiveness and stimulate insight.”⁶² The first research guideline was used to create the “Orientation” component of each chapter and the second guideline was used to create the “Experience” component. The third to the sixth research activities were used throughout the entire body of the thesis. The following is an overview of what these six research guidelines are, and how they have been used in the process of writing this thesis.

The first component consists of turning one's attention to the phenomenon of interest, a lived experience in the world, in order to find a deep line of questioning to which one can be

⁶⁰ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 102.

⁶¹ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 30ff.

⁶² Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 30.

committed. In this case we are turning our attention to the lived experiences of Faustina and flowers made accessible through her writing—including botanical flowers, metaphorical flowers, allegorical flowers and symbolic flowers. Any and every experience with flowers that she has recorded in her diary is of interest here. In van Manen’s initial step, it is worth exploring Gadamer’s analogy of ‘play.’ Gadamer’s approach to understanding, stated simply, requires scholars to fully engage in the text and lose themselves in *playful interaction*. This play occurs in the *Zwischen* or middle space and takes place between the interpreter and the text as they encounter one another with creativity and imagination. The researcher is ultimately challenged to “enter the middle space that is opened up in a playful and dialogical engagement with that which is the object of the researcher’s interest.”⁶³ As interpreter and text interact in a sort of back and forth there is a fusion of horizons—*Horizontverschmelzung*.⁶⁴ Horizons are our world of understanding, and include the limits of that understanding. The lifeworld that we experience is limited by the confines of our horizons, for our horizon encompasses all that we have experienced, been exposed to, encountered, and can imagine. One’s horizon is constantly forming and hopefully expanding to accommodate new stimuli.⁶⁵ The horizon of the text meets the scholar’s own interpretations and understandings, allowing for connections and insight. In this intimate, playful fusion of the scholar and the object of their research, hermeneutics contributes to the creation of something new.⁶⁶ It is in the practice of play that scholars can discover that the meaning of a text is ultimately more than what the original author intended. Meaning is “co-determined” by the hermeneutics of the interpreter and by the horizon of the text.

⁶³ Hyde, “Beyond Logic,” 35.

⁶⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306.

⁶⁵ Hyde, “Beyond Logic,” 36.

⁶⁶ Hyde, “Beyond Logic,” 36.

In fact, presenting the ‘original’ meaning of the text would be a “dead meaning” in Gadamer’s words.⁶⁷ Accordingly meanings that co-evolve between text and reader are more fruitful and yield greater possibility. Changes in meaning from the “original intentions” of the author to the reader have the potential to create new meaning.⁶⁸ This thesis attempts to do more than just describe the experiences of Faustina; it engages with them and extends the boundaries of a single experience to reveal larger patterns of existential meaning. The changing nature of symbols or categories is also recognized in this process.⁶⁹ For instance, a floral chaplet on the head of Christ, once strongly considered a mockery by the early Catholic Church, is now condoned as a sign of admiration. Before commenting on chaplets one must know this essential piece of historical information. Stanley Fish takes a similar position when he states the following.

If meaning is embedded in the text, the reader’s responsibilities are limited to the job of getting it out; but if meaning develops, and if it develops in a dynamic relationship with the reader’s expectations, projections, conclusions, judgments and assumptions, these activities (the things the reader does) are not merely instrumental or mechanical but essential and the act of description must both begin and end with them.⁷⁰

The horizon, matched with a scholar’s ‘level’ of hermeneutics, allows for engagement with the material.⁷¹ It is important to remember that any prior assumptions are identified and *tested* in this interaction.⁷² In this thesis the significance of flowers in the life of Faustina and the larger Catholic Church must be tested and supported by the historical data of examples. Fleshing

⁶⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 167.

⁶⁸ Pellauer, *Ricoeur: A Guide*, 62.

⁶⁹ Pellauer, *Ricoeur: A Guide*, 57.

⁷⁰ Fish, *Is There a Text*, 3.

⁷¹ The ‘level’ of hermeneutics refers to the level of sophistication of the scholar, of both their knowledge of the available sources and their ability to bring them together in useful ways.

⁷² Hyde, “Beyond Logic,” 37.

out Faustina's thought is limited by the reality of Faustina's writing. An understanding of flowers in Catholic history is significant for both contextualizing and drawing out Faustina's own experiences. As Fish suggested in the above quotation the process must begin and end with scholarly engagement with the data.⁷³ This first research guideline was used to create the orientation component in each of the chapters on space, time, body and relationality. Using the existential of space as an example, the orientation component is meant to introduce and describe, in broad strokes, what lived space looks like for Faustina. "Orientation" positions and familiarizes the reader with the basic spatial dimensions of Faustina's life; this is accomplished by focusing on the spatial themes in her diary.

The second component of van Manen's process is to investigate the lived experiences of things in themselves or *zu den Sachen*, that is, basic experiences of the world. The focus on phenomena is central to the aims of phenomenology. It is an exploration of the modalities of lived experiences, of their different forms, and of the fullness of an experience. In our case we look to the experience of flowers, or how Faustina interacts with flowers either in her physical surroundings or in her devotions to God. Our central aim is to appreciate Faustina's interactions with flowers through her own understanding by looking at her descriptions of her experiences. Many interpretive schemas can be applied to experience, however base experience, or pre-reflective experience, is of primary importance here. This second research guideline was used to create the experience component in each of the chapters on space, time, body and relationality. While the orientation section is meant to provide an overview of each existential, the experience section provides detailed examples of Faustina's experiences situated in that existential. Using the existential of space as an example, we focus on those particular spatial *experiences* described

⁷³ Fish, *Is There a Text*, 3.

in Faustina's diary. This is accomplished by focusing on the *zu den Sachen*, those significant experiences revealed and described in each chapter.

The third component is to reflect on the essential themes which characterize the phenomena under study. This is where the four lifeworld existentials are used, and form the body of this thesis as explained previously.⁷⁴

During the fourth component phenomena are described through the process of writing, and re-writing in order to develop precise ideas. Research and writing are understood as inseparable, making writing a fundamental component of van Manen's approach. It is in this writing process that we find the 'semiotics inspired dimension' of van Manen's research.⁷⁵ Semiotics was used "to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics."⁷⁶ In other words, the writing and re-writing required in a phenomenological hermeneutic study, with all of the reflection that entails, is itself a semiotic activity.⁷⁷ Like Ricoeur and Gadamer, van Manen reminds us that phenomenology is largely a textual activity beginning with the gathering of textual data, culminating in the final written product. The goal is to write so that the things are offered up unto themselves, and made clearer, uncovered, and open to understanding.⁷⁸ As Heidegger proposed, language is an integral part of

⁷⁴ Aside from the four existential categories listed above, it is important to understand that other intentional structures of consciousness have been identified. These may also involve awareness of one's experiences, the self in different roles, linguistic activity using meaning and communication, or purpose and intention in action. See Woodruff, David. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Fall 2011 Edition*, s.v. "Phenomenology," edited by Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/phenomenology/> (accessed February 21, 2012).

⁷⁵ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, ix.

⁷⁶ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 4.

⁷⁷ Van Manen also describes particularized uses of the term 'semiotics' as employed by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida. Please see Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 185-186.

⁷⁸ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 114.

our humanity, wrapped up in our thinking and being and is worthy of careful consideration. For van Manen, when we talk about essences we are talking about a “linguistic construction, a description of a phenomenon.”⁷⁹ Language constitutes the very core of that phenomenon, it is a “linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive.”⁸⁰ Writing, suggests van Manen, externalizes what was interior, it distances us from what was close at hand.⁸¹ It both decontextualizes *and* restores phenomena to the world, both abstracts, and concretizes our understanding.⁸² In a similar move French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre explained, “I would write out what I had been thinking about beforehand, but the essential moment was that of writing itself; writing is the essential thing.”⁸³ The crafted aspect of a text, produced in writing and re-writing, results in a style. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, “style gathers language to suddenly swell with meaning which overflows into the other person when the act of speaking or writing binds them into a single whole.”⁸⁴ Texts are ultimately oriented towards, not separated from, life. One “must meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and, as well, be consumed by it” claims van Manen.⁸⁵

The fifth component is to maintain a strong and oriented relation to one’s research and to focus on how it relates towards the subject at hand. Van Manen warns of straying into “wishy-

⁷⁹ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 39.

⁸⁰ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 39.

⁸¹ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 125.

⁸² Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 128.

⁸³ Sartre, *Life Situations*, 5.

⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 235.

⁸⁵ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 151-153.

washy speculations...preconceived opinions...and narcissistic reflections.”⁸⁶ The goal is to remain focused on the experience in question. So for instance, this research remains firmly grounded in religious studies without straying into theology, and focuses on the lifeworld around Faustina, including her devotional experiences.⁸⁷ In this case it is crucial to focus on the experiential life of Faustina, freed from complex interpretation, made accessible and clear through creative presentation. The writing of Faustina must be allowed to speak for itself; this thesis is illuminating those essential experiences through a careful re-organization, and creative presentation of written material.

The last component in this process is to keep together the parts and the whole, the experience and its context. The end result is the discovery that something is revealed through the phenomenological treatment of the data.⁸⁸ For instance, in our case Faustina’s experience of flowers must be balanced against the overarching relationship of Catholicism and flowers, and reveal a unique picture of the indispensable role of flowers. Allen warns us that creative interpretation and the generation of understanding does not give one a license to abuse relativism and subjectivism. There is still a need for engaging in critical reflection, one remains *accountable* to one’s data. Some necessary structures and limits are already imposed by history and language for instance, and so what was held true at the time needs to be re-considered in the present. Intentional symbolic expressions, intentional relations and firm boundaries still exist.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 33.

⁸⁷ Max van Manen, as an educational theorist, writes about the relationship between pedagogy and his own research. The fifth step in his methodology has been adapted to suit my topic of interest. The original three factors within the step are: confusing pedagogical theorizing with other discipline-based forms of discourse, tending to abstraction and thus losing touch with the lifeworld, and failing to see what the subject understands as meaningful from the lifeworld. Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 135-160.

⁸⁸ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 30-31.

⁸⁹ Allen, “Major Contributions,” 13.

These boundaries require that the final product must be consistent and contiguous with the original textual data even while additional meaning is being created. In this final step, I propose that the hermeneutical circle can be useful.

In our case the hermeneutical circle is built on identification, description and interpretation of data using linguistics, the horizons of the scholar, history and the religious traditions of the time. It is a useful methodological process where ‘particular data’ meets ‘general characteristics’ in an open ended circular process. The process begins with particulars, like texts, meeting with cultural and historical data. For instance, Faustina’s diary is set against a larger twentieth century Polish Catholic background. This framework remains sensitive to interactivity, contextualization and possibility for change just as a religious worldview may change.⁹⁰ The tendency to situate, particularize and fragment data is checked by the dialectical elements of the hermeneutical circle. Particulars open up into larger intersubjective horizons of religious meaning supplied by the scholar.⁹¹ Or, in Ricoeur’s words, reciprocity binds the text and self-interpretation.⁹² The details of Faustina’s life are set against the larger framework of her times and tradition as a twentieth century Polish Catholic sister and against our perspective in the twentieth century. That intentional and reflective reference of thing-bound (based on history) and self-bound (based on interpretation) is the basis for the hermeneutical circle.⁹³ It is not a circle

⁹⁰ Allen, “Major Contributions,” 20.

⁹¹ Allen, “Major Contributions,” 21.

⁹² Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” 84.

⁹³ Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” 98.

between subjective meanings determined by the scholar, but it is checked by the realities of the text.⁹⁴

Lifeworld Existentials

A brief introduction here will clarify my reasons for adopting this approach. The combined methods of semiotics, phenomenology and hermeneutics proposed by van Manen is based on an orientation to lived experience (phenomenology), an interpretation of texts containing those experiences (hermeneutics) and a focus on writing (semiotics) as the base of the approach.⁹⁵ A key element in this method is the concept of the lifeworld. The concept of the lifeworld is central to both phenomenology and hermeneutics; it originated in Husserl's *Crisis of European Sciences* but it certainly did not end there. Husserl's ideas were initially influenced by hermeneutic philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey's *Lebenszusammenhang* (life context), and Martin Heidegger's *In-der-Welt-sein* (being in the world). The concept of the lifeworld was later used by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jan Patočka and Alfred Schütz among others. It is the lifeworld of Merleau-Ponty that Max van Manen uses as a model for his own phenomenological research.⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty has emphasized the feature of "lived body" in his explication of the lifeworld, and this feature is essential in van Manen's investigations.⁹⁷ Our intentional existence is lived via

⁹⁴ Scholars are not meant to project beliefs, prejudice or subjectivity *into* the text. Ultimately interpretation allows for "disclosure of new modes of being and gives to the subject a new capacity of knowing himself." Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," 107. In other words scholars reacquaint themselves with who they are and what they believe through their encounter with the *other*. Post modernists, like Foucault, also see the textuality of a text as essentially dialogic. Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 145.

⁹⁵ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 4. There is the added complication here of Faustina having experiences which, in her esteem, defy description. She attempts, through the poetics of metaphor and simile, to evocatively approximate her experiences.

⁹⁶ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 7.

⁹⁷ Heidegger's concept of ready-to-hand and present-to-hand from *Being and Time* may be considered precursors to the concept of lived body.

the body, and we know the world as embodied beings.⁹⁸ The roots of the mind are in the body and in the world experienced via the body.⁹⁹ Perception is primary when we engage with our immediate experiences through a subject-object dialogue.

The lifeworld is the subjectively experienced world of everyday life, not the objective, ideal world measured in the sciences. It is comprised of individual, social, perceptual, and practical experiences and can be imagined as a dynamic, interactive horizon which people can influence, and which influences them. This world considers memory, imagination, emotions, desires, social actions, and a host of other lived, meaningful experiences.¹⁰⁰ The lifeworld contains many objects in space and time existing relative to the subjects that perceive them; we can imagine that all things appear against the background of the lifeworld. The lifeworld holds consciousness and meaning while being inter-subjectively accessible and at the same time individually experienced.¹⁰¹

It is the lifeworld that is both the source and the object of phenomenological investigation.¹⁰² Our consciousness recognizes phenomena from the lifeworld and these phenomena serve as data.¹⁰³ Phenomenology is about “seizing hold of life and giving reflective

⁹⁸ Van Manen defines the principle of intentionality as our ‘inseparable connection’ with the world. Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 4.

⁹⁹ There is a pre-reflected physical awareness that is not contained in the transcendental thoughts of Husserl.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, David Woodruff. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Fall 2011 Edition*, s.v. "Phenomenology." Edited by Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/phenomenology/> (accessed February 21, 2012).

¹⁰¹ Our lifeworld is inter-subjectively accessible because humanity holds existential experience (living in time, living in space, living in bodies and living in relation with one another) in common, though the modalities of those experiences differ.

¹⁰² Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 53.

¹⁰³ All descriptions are necessarily interpretations because recalling the experience is itself an interpretive act.

expression to it” which can be achieved through exploration of the lifeworld.¹⁰⁴ Insight and expression are provided through examples which are a fundamental part of this method. Van Manen describes the phenomenological example as “an example composed of examples” allowing for greater insight.¹⁰⁵ In our case balance is sought between concrete and ‘theoretical’ examples, both inside and outside of Faustina’s diaries, to contribute to a greater understanding of her life. Theoretical examples refer to the examples either not derived from the life of Faustina, or not directly written by her, but still relevant to her situation.¹⁰⁶ Concrete examples refer to those examples taken directly from her writings.

Using van Manen’s approach there are four categories of experience within the lifeworld which he calls “lifeworld existentials” and that are central to this thesis.¹⁰⁷ These are four components that are present in every experience: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relations (relationality); all components, that is the spatial component, temporal component, corporeal component, and component of relationality, operate simultaneously. Although these four areas may be teased apart for the purposes of research, they exist in an integrated fashion when experienced.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 38.

¹⁰⁵ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 122.

¹⁰⁶ For instance, the example of the root is included in chapter four because it contributes to a fuller, more complete perspective on Christian attitudes towards flowers, even though Faustina does not specifically mention flower roots.

¹⁰⁷ Our lifeworld is our reality as we experience it, and as we interact with those around us. The lifeworld is the experienced world of everyday living, it is both individual and social acting as a dynamic horizon that can both influence and be influenced. Originally developed by Husserl, the notion of the lifeworld has been appropriated and modified by a number of phenomenologists including Maurice Merleau-Ponty and, much later, Max van Manen.

¹⁰⁸ These themes, claims van Manen, are not historically or culturally shaped but instead are universal. Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 106.

Van Manen's methodology, in brief, is a study of lived meaning *from* the lifeworld; it addresses what it means to be human and living in the world; it is a "search for the fullness of being," yielding a descriptive evaluation.¹⁰⁹ Experiences in the lifeworld come into focus by studying the lifeworld existentials.¹¹⁰ Van Manen calls these 'productive categories' for the process of question posing, reflection and writing.¹¹¹ Although each moment involves every existential, we are not constantly aware of our space, time, bodies and interactions with others. It is possible that Faustina did not ever explicitly consider her relationship with space or time in a detailed way, but through her writings, we have access to those details. That is precisely the strength of this method, to draw apart these elements so that they can be carefully studied in isolation, bringing us to greater awareness of Faustina's relationship with God and flowers holistically.

In this thesis, each of these existentials will provide a unique vantage point to access the floral experiences of St. Faustina. This is a four-perspective approach to the complex relationship between Faustina and God as mediated by flowers. This method structures and shapes the body of the thesis, while the structure of this thesis highlights the fourfold approach of the method.

We turn now to explore briefly each of these existentials. Beginning with lived space, it is the topic of chapter four, and can be considered the landscape that we have our existence in. It is not a passive backdrop, but can lend a "quality of meaning" to our experiences therein.¹¹² Spaces can acquire particular feelings, such as the comfort of a familiar garden. In Faustina's

¹⁰⁹ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 12-13.

¹¹⁰ Encyclopaedia of Britannica Online, s.v. "life-world," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/340330/life-world> (accessed August 29, 2012).

¹¹¹ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 102-105.

¹¹² Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 103.

diary lived space becomes the orienting backdrop of a cosmological order, where above and below take on the theological significance of good and evil, and flowers, like humans, are caught in the middle.

Lived time, as we experience it, is described in chapter five; it is subjective and differs from the measurability of clock time. It can speed up or slow down as we are enjoying or dreading the moment. People can be oriented towards a general timeframe, either towards a future event, a past occurrence, or the present moment. Faustina gained an acute awareness of the passage of time through her relationship with flowers. She appreciated each passing moment as a possible floral virtue, and in watching the life cycles of flowers, understood her death in temporal floral terms.

Lived body is described in chapter six and addresses our means of contact with the world. We all have a physical presence, a way of filling the space, interacting in the world, and being bodily present with everything that entails. In the writings of St. Faustina it becomes clear that her body is a site of much suffering and power, as she shapes herself according to the floral body, in an effort to emulate Christ. Through her body, remade as a floral offering, St. Faustina is able to offer her pain as a powerful sacrifice before God.¹¹³

Lived human relations are described in chapter seven and are encounters with ‘the other.’ Van Manen explains “In a larger sense human beings have searched in this experience of the other, the communal, the social for a sense of purpose in life, meaningfulness, grounds for living,

¹¹³ The term “power” here refers to an ability to affect a desired outcome. Faustina has the power, or ability, to rescue souls for instance.

as in the religious experience of the absolute other or God.”¹¹⁴ In Faustina’s life God is the absolute other; this chapter explores the many ways in which Faustina relates to God.

Given these categories the task remains to bring to life Faustina’s experiences by establishing patterns of existential meaning using examples and heuristic comparisons. This kind of exegetical analysis engages in a dialogical process as it uses the thinking of others as a source of inspiration and comparison. The exemplary anecdote, claims van Manen, is powerful because it leads us to reflect, involves the readers personally and transforms them.¹¹⁵ This task is facilitated through a detailed engagement with the work of Gaston Bachelard, a phenomenological philosopher who recognizes the potential energy and excitement surrounding flowers. As van Manen suggests, it is often artistic, poetic expression that reunite us with the ‘ground’ of lived experience. Literary and artistic work allow for possibilities of “human experience...in condensed and transcended form.”¹¹⁶ Bachelard’s phenomenological assessment of flowers deepens and enriches our present understanding of Faustina’s floral relationship and resonates with the meaning of Faustina’s own encounters. In his own research Bachelard works with poetic writing and “reverie” which he develops according to four elements, air, fire, water and earth. Poets, Bachelard claims, are often drawn to one of these primary elements, and express similar ideals in their writing based on shared human experiences. He has gathered a multitude of poetic examples from literature which he feels express the root reality of these elemental experiences. When referring to flowers he places them in the terrestrial realm and further identifies them as archetypes for humanity. For Bachelard archetypes are symbols present in the human psyche, they touch on the human condition and provide meaning in people’s lives.

¹¹⁴ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 105.

¹¹⁵ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 121.

¹¹⁶ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 9-10.

Flowers are touching on these existential themes and carry meaning in human life for both Faustina and Bachelard. Existential themes of life, death, suffering and hope find expression in these floral archetypes.¹¹⁷ Although van Manen suggests that phenomenology “aims at *making explicit* and *seeking universal meaning* where poetry and *literature* remain implicit and particular” through Bachelard *universal* connections are sought out in the particulars of poetry to identify *explicit* meaning.¹¹⁸ Poetry, like phenomenology, recognizes van Manen, uses an “incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling” that connects us with experience by singing, rather than speaking, of the world.¹¹⁹ It is not the extensive philosophy of Bachelard that is of interest here but his descriptive writing and his use of poetry in an evocative way. His work is used only insofar as it provides insightful, heuristic examples for the purposes of this thesis. Although Gaston Bachelard has sought out poetic examples of reverie in human literature, his writing demonstrates a deep respect for human experience as meaningful phenomenon; his work is a resource that enables deeper insight into Faustina’s experiences. Bachelard was rooted in a culture imbued with Christianity and Catholic tradition. It is not surprising, therefore, to find such commonalities with Faustina’s own experiences and reflections. Faustina’s life was saturated with Christian tradition and Catholic teachings, including the lives of saints, Christian liturgy and scripture. All of these contributed to her inner life and oriented her experiences; we cannot then describe her world without acknowledging the religion that shaped her.

Just as phenomenological inquiry demands the data of experience, lived experiences come to life through phenomenological investigation. In as much as a question is pursued in this

¹¹⁷ Bachelard claimed that flowers are archetypes, however, is not the aim of this thesis to argue that flowers are archetypal in nature.

¹¹⁸ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 19.

¹¹⁹ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 13.

thesis, a methodology is also brought to light—together they transform one another.¹²⁰ The religio-aesthetic experience of flowers in Faustina’s life informs the phenomenological approach, while the phenomenological approach determines the dataset of floral experience. This thesis is a contribution to floral research in Catholicism and the life of St. Faustina, through lenses inspired by Max van Manen’s approach.

Written Experience as Data: The Diary of Faustina Kowalska

The diary of St. Faustina has a long and somewhat complex history, which began with an unconventional request. Sister Faustina Kowalska began writing her diary in the spring of 1934 at the request of her confessor, Father Sopocko. Burdened by her lengthy confessions, he decided that it would be easier for him to *read* her accounts than to listen to them. When interviewed he stated “So that Sister Faustina’s confessions should not become too long...I asked her at confession to accuse herself on her sins only, and if she had anything else to say, to write it and give it to me to read. At first she wrote only the briefest little pages...later she wrote of her experiences in the form of a journal.”¹²¹ Faustina wrote in her native Polish with a fountain pen in a lined notebook measuring six and a half by eight inches.¹²² She had not been writing for long, only for a few months, when Father Sopocko had to leave on a short trip to Palestine. While he was there Faustina was visited by a ‘figure’ who insisted that she burn her writings. Faustina complied and, much to the surprise of Father Sopocko, by the time he had returned, she

¹²⁰ Van Manen claims that a particular method gives a certain way of investigating a question, but also that the way we express our questions depends on our method as well. Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 2.

¹²¹ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 159.

¹²² O’Dell, *Apostle*, 87.

had destroyed all of her work.¹²³ Father Sopocko insisted that this had been a temptation from the devil and requested that Faustina begin writing again to recapture what she could from her previous work. The diary was begun again in July of 1934, with Faustina piecing together what she could remember of her previous writings. At this point Faustina was still writing at the request of Father Sopocko, however this would change. On June 4th, 1937 Faustina heard a voice during Holy Mass.

Apostle of My mercy, proclaim to the whole world My unfathomable mercy. Do not be discouraged by the difficulties you encounter in proclaiming My mercy. These difficulties that affect you so painfully are needed for your sanctification and as evidence that this work is Mine. My daughter, be diligent in writing down every sentence I tell you concerning My mercy, because this is meant for a great number of souls who will profit from it.¹²⁴

From then on, Faustina would also be writing at the request of Jesus and for the benefit of other souls. She would be visited continually by Jesus and often asked to record what she saw and heard during those visits. In her diary she described Jesus as calling her a “secretary of my mercy,”¹²⁵ a “secretary of my most profound mystery”¹²⁶ and a “dearest secretary.”¹²⁷ Jesus explained to her that her words would be a comfort for believers, stating “Secretary of My most profound mystery know that your task is to write down everything that I make known to you about My mercy, for the benefit of those who by reading these things will be comforted in their souls and will have the courage to approach Me.”¹²⁸ Despite the encouragement she received

¹²³ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 160-161.

¹²⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1142.

¹²⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 965, 1160, 1695.

¹²⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1693.

¹²⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1784.

¹²⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1693.

from God, writing the diary was not an easy task for Faustina. Faustina wrote her diary in secret whenever she had a moment of time to herself, and often she wrote when she was physically ill. Having received so little formal education it was a huge accomplishment that Faustina was able to undertake this task. We turn now to some of the obstacles that Faustina faced while writing. On the most basic of levels Faustina complained about her inability to write well, having a poor quality pen, and about the secret nature of her writing.

My Jesus, You see that I do not know how to write well and, on top of that, I don't even have a good pen. And often it scratches so badly that I must put sentences together, letter by letter. And that is not all. I also have the difficulty of keeping secret from the sisters the things I write down, and so I often have to shut my notebook every few minutes and listen patiently to someone's story, and then the time set aside for writing is gone. And when I shut the notebook suddenly, the ink smears. I write with the permission of my superiors and at the command of my confessor. It is a strange thing: sometimes the writing goes quite well, but at other times, I can hardly read it myself.¹²⁹

Faustina seems full of complaints and self-doubt here. On other occasions Faustina felt weak, and wanted to rest instead of write.

Although I am feeling weak, and my nature is clamoring for rest, I feel the inspiration of grace telling me to take hold of myself and write, write for the comfort of souls, whom I love so much and with whom I will share all eternity. And I desire eternal life for them so ardently that that is why I use all my free moments, no matter how short, for writing in the way that Jesus wishes of me.¹³⁰

Jesus came to her and asked her to devote all of her free moments to writing about his goodness and mercy because this was her appointed role in life.¹³¹ She became known as his secretary of profound mercy¹³² and wrote for the benefit of other souls.¹³³ Faustina knew what

¹²⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 839.

¹³⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1471.

¹³¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1567.

¹³² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1693.

¹³³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 895.

she was meant to write about, the mercy of God, and why, for the benefit of other souls. This often meant that she stopped herself from writing about her own daily trials, especially when they were caused by the other sisters. On one occasion a fellow sister doubted that Faustina was ever ill, and claimed that the doctors had invented an illness so that she would rest. Faustina stopped herself from describing this event in more detail, writing “I do not want to write much about external matters, for they are not the reason for my writing; I want in particular to note the graces granted me by the Lord, because these are not only for me, but for many other souls as well.”¹³⁴

Even though Faustina censored herself in this way her journal would have provided her with a much needed outlet. Although her life may have appeared dull from the outside because of the set routines she endured, it was anything but dull in reality and that excitement needed expression. She possessed a rich inner life where she was powerful, and that existed in tension with her ‘dull’ outward life where she was powerless. Given the secretive nature of much of her life she could not share her experiences with many people and when she did, she was often berated for it. Faustina was forced to live with many secrets; her journal was a place for her to be honest about her life, to do the will of God, to connect with God by reliving her experiences, and to express that hidden, innermost part of her. She knew that one day the truth would be exposed, that others would see the trials she had endured, and that her suffering would be an inspiration for many souls.

Even if Faustina was a good writer with the proper tools, having ample privacy and energy, many of Faustina’s experiences were beyond words. She felt unable to express her experiences of deep connection with God. She wrote of being “enveloped,” “immersed” and

¹³⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 710.

“fused” with God in an indescribable way.¹³⁵ She explains, “I am at a loss to describe this, because in writing I am making use of the senses; but there, in that union, the senses are not active; there is a merging of God and the soul; and the life of God to which the soul is admitted is so great that the human tongue cannot express it.”¹³⁶ She seemed to be describing another dimension of experience not familiar to most.

Another obstacle Faustina faced was supernatural in origin; she knew that as much as God valued her writing, Satan hated it. She recorded “As I write these words, I hear the cry of Satan: ‘She's writing everything, she's writing everything, and because of this we are losing so much! Do not write about the goodness of God; He is just!’ And howling with fury, he vanished.”¹³⁷ Later she wrote “As I write this, I hear Satan grinding his teeth. He cannot stand God's mercy, and keeps banging things in my cell. But I feel so much of God's power within me that it does not even bother me that the enemy of our salvation gets angry, and I quietly keep on writing.”¹³⁸ Faustina did persevere against the trials before her and continued writing.

In total Faustina would write six notebooks of differing lengths, ending her writing in June of 1938 three months before her death. According to those around her, Faustina lived in extreme pain during the last few months of her life, and it is not surprising that she did not continue writing until her death. Her journals remain in good condition even today—of the four hundred and seventy seven leaves, with writing on both sides, only one leaf is missing. The

¹³⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 6, 137, 691, 735.

¹³⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 767.

¹³⁷ Kowlaksa, *Diary*, 1338.

¹³⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1583.

original diary contains blank pages, and additional publications carefully make note of these blank pages. It is likely that Faustina intended to fill them in later but did not.

In preparation of her death Faustina attached a note of instructions on her stack of journals.

Jesus. Nobody can read the notebooks and notes—Father Andrasz or Rev. Sopocko must check them first because the notes contain the secrets of my conscience. It is God's will so that all of that is given to souls for their consolation. Apart from the superiors, the sisters should not be allowed to read the notes until they have been published. Cracow, retreat, 3 April 1938, Sister Faustina.

Faustina's writings remained with her congregation after her death. Father Joseph Andrasz and Sister Ksawera Olszamowska O.L.M. penciled in page numbers in each book as there had not been any. Contrary to her request to have her confessors overlook the diary, Mother General, Michaela Moraczewska, requested that her diary be typewritten immediately. This was done poorly and the typed copy was filled with errors. One such error was that the words of Jesus had not been underlined and at times it appeared as though Faustina was speaking. As a result of this faulty translation Pope John XIII placed Faustina's diary on the index of banned books in March of 1959, where it would remain for nearly twenty years.

It was not until Archbishop Karol Wojtyla showed an interest in the diary that her written work was considered, and an inquiry was pursued. Those who knew Faustina were contacted, and the process of information began in October of 1965. Faustina's manuscript was rewritten again for the Informative Process relating to her beatification. The original was carefully used by Father Isidore Borkiewicz O.F.M. and Sister Beata Piekut O.L.M. during the Informative Process. This was then translated into French and sent to Rome under the "direction" of the Vice-promoter of the Faith, Father George Mrówczyński, and Sister Beata Piekut O.L.M. It was

received by the Postulator-General of the beatification process, Father Anthony Mruk S.J., under whom it was published.¹³⁹ The Process of Information was completed in September of 1967, and the Process of Beatification of Sister Faustina was begun in January of 1968. Meanwhile Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, who had been the archbishop of Cracow, was elevated to the See of Peter as Pope John Paul II in October of 1978. In April of that year the original documents produced by sister Faustina were reviewed, and in 1959 the Notification was withdrawn. By 1981 the diary was published in its original Polish language in Rome, and then in Poland. It is this Polish edition that has been the source of all other translations. Elzbieta Siepak explains, “Even if a translation of the ‘Diary’ is the source text of another translation, the text is always checked and compared with the edition in the source language.”¹⁴⁰

At the request of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, Adam and Danuta Pasicki, a Polish couple, translated the Polish diary into English in the 1980s; this was the first “literal translation.”¹⁴¹ From there Archbishop George Pearce S.M. read it over ensuring that the translation used the proper terms for theological concepts. Father George Kosicki, C.S.B., Gerald Farrell, M.M., Leo McCauley, S.J. and an Oblate, named Francis Bagan, O.M.I. helped in this process.¹⁴² The completed text was given to Father Seraphim Michalenko, M.I.C., director of the Divine Mercy department, and remained there with him from 1979 to 1986. He and Sister Sophia Michalenko reviewed the English translation and compared it to the original Polish. In 1987,

¹³⁹ Siepak, Sister M. Elzbieta ZMBM. *Diary*. Translated by *Iwona Franceschini*. http://www.faustyna.pl/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=279&Itemid=61&limit=1&limitstart=1 (accessed May 13, 2013).

¹⁴⁰ Siepak, Sister M. Elzbieta ZMBM. *Diary*. Translated by *Iwona Franceschini*. http://www.faustyna.pl/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=279&Itemid=61&limit=1&limitstart=1 (accessed May 13, 2013).

¹⁴¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, vii.

¹⁴² Kowalska, *Diary*, vii.

having completed this review, the text was given to the Divine Mercy Department headed by Father George Kosicki. Along with Sister Sophia Michalenko and Vincent Flynn he once again reviewed the text for clarity, readability, and English grammar.¹⁴³

Faustina's diary has been the largest and richest source of information about her life and beliefs. Since her death, thematic concordances have been written to accompany her diary,¹⁴⁴ and timelines have been created to highlight the major events in her life. Additionally, Faustina's written correspondences have been published, including prayers she wrote on holy cards, letters home, and notes to her confessors.¹⁴⁵ During the canonization process many individuals in her life were interviewed, and those interviews have been archived.¹⁴⁶ I have used all of these sources in writing biographical information about Faustina.

Secondary sources of information were used to gain the biographical details left out of Faustina's diary. The secondary material about St. Faustina has largely been written by Catholic priests or sisters, and can be classified as biographical,¹⁴⁷ devotional,¹⁴⁸ or often both.¹⁴⁹ These texts are largely written by Catholics, for Catholics. There is very little diversity, interpretation or even difference between these texts, instead they present a consistent picture of the life of

¹⁴³ Kowalska, *Diary*, viii.

¹⁴⁴ See Kosocki, George W. *Thematic Concordance to the Diary of Saint Mary Faustina Kowalska*. Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2011.

¹⁴⁵ See Mizia 2006.

¹⁴⁶ See Michalenko 1995.

¹⁴⁷ See Michalenko 1995 and Tarnawska 1989.

¹⁴⁸ See Calloway 2010, Kosicki 2011 and John Paul II 1980.

¹⁴⁹ See O'Dell 1998, Siepak 2007 and Allen 2002.

Faustina and describe how to use her work in the context of worship.¹⁵⁰ Often Faustina's prayers and devotions are placed in an appendix for easy access for devotees. Additional information about Faustina's life can be found in anthologies of saints, such as *The Lives of Saints*,¹⁵¹ *Saints of the Jubilee*,¹⁵² and *The Encyclopedia of Saints*,¹⁵³ or newspaper articles that outline her accomplishments in life.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Calloway's book *Purest of Lilies* comes the closest to being an interpretive text, it draws out the relationship between Faustina and the Virgin Mary using quotations from Faustina's diary.

¹⁵¹ Thurston, Herbert and Donald Attwater ed. *Butler's Lives of Saints*. Vol. 4, New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1963.

¹⁵² Drake, Tim. *Saints of the Jubilee*. Massachusetts: Advanced Marketing Technologie, 2002.

¹⁵³ Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. *The Encyclopedia Saints*. New York: Visionary Living Publishing, 2001.

¹⁵⁴ See Allen 2002.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY OF FLOWER USE

This section provides an overview of the enduring relationships between flowers and humanity, with a particular focus on the Christian uses of flowers. This is not a comprehensive study, but rather paints, in broad strokes, the general features of each time period.¹⁵⁵ In this endeavour I am indebted to Jack Goody whose comprehensive text *The Culture of Flowers* provided a thorough description of flower use through the ages.

Since the emergence of human beings as a species, flowers have been valued in human lives. They have been desirable for medical, aesthetic and ritualistic purposes, so much so in fact that we began to cultivate them. Documented flower cultivation dates back to the agricultural revolutions of early antiquity, starting in the Bronze Age. The first revolution was the result of improved horticultural techniques which freed up time and space for flower cultivation around 3000 B.C. onwards. A second notable revolution occurred in the nutrient rich soil between the Tigris and Euphrates where visual and written records confirmed a dramatic floral presence.¹⁵⁶ Since those early surges of flower production, flowers have been caught up in the multifarious geo-political, sociological and religious trends of humanity. We begin our exploration with the ancient Greeks, Romans and early Christians.

Flowers in Greece, Rome and Early Christianity (335 B.C. - 476 A.D.)

The popularity of flowers in the ancient European world peaked under the Greeks and Romans. Their horticulture and floriculture techniques married commercialism and aesthetics.

¹⁵⁵ The first section entitled “Flowers in Greece, Rome and Early Christianity” begins with the unification of Greece in 335 B.C and ends with the last Western Roman Emperor in 476 A.D. “Flowers in the European Middle Ages” begins in the year 477 A.D. and ends in 1453 with the fall of Constantinople. “Flowers from the Renaissance to Modernity” spans from 1454 into the present.

¹⁵⁶ Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 28ff.

Commercial flower production grew rapidly in the Alexandrian period when flowers, including some Asian varieties, were available in their many forms: fresh and out of season, artificial and soaked in perfumes, grown in gardens or woven into crowns.¹⁵⁷ Household gardens were even more common among the Romans than among the Greeks. However, flowers were seen as symbols of luxury in both societies.¹⁵⁸ This growth of flowers, suggested Goody, represented “a growth in the standard of living of the rich.”¹⁵⁹ Flowers were worn as everyday decoration and appeared as a part of seasonal festivals, assuming both secular and religious uses. Flowers were expressions of great joy, as well as great sadness, especially at Roman funerals where they were painted on the walls of tombs as a reminder of life.¹⁶⁰

In the course of Greek and Roman history there were several substantial contributions to floriculture: the presence of statuaries and topiaries, increased botanical treatises, the transition from religious to secular flower use, the introduction of new and exotic plants, and the shift in flower use from royalty to the middle class. The shift towards the middle class was a result of the accessibility of flower information, the increased wealth of citizens, and improved horticultural technology.

Despite Greek and Roman enthusiasm for flowers, there were mixed reactions towards flowers in Christianity. Christians often deemed flowers to be too closely connected with ‘pagan’ ritual and amoral behaviour; the one notable exception was in monastic communities where flower use thrived.¹⁶¹ Roman events like the festival of *Floralia* confirmed Christian judgments

¹⁵⁷ For additional information on crowns, see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (London: W. Heinemann, 1963).

¹⁵⁸ Jashemski and MacDougall, *Ancient Roman Villa Gardens*, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Goody, *Culture Flowers*, 65.

¹⁶⁰ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 66-67.

¹⁶¹ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 74.

towards flowers. The *Floralia* festival was dedicated to the Roman goddess of flowers wherein prostitutes would disrobe at the behest of spectators.¹⁶² The combination of flowers, dancing, nudity and sexual excitement evoked Christian notions of sin. Classical gardens were equally looked upon with suspicion, particularly those with statuary, which were largely regarded as “man-made and unnatural” by the early Christian community.¹⁶³ It was the Christian aim to “set aside other religions, limit luxury and to encourage charity.”¹⁶⁴ Flowers were rejected on all three counts as they were inculcated in other religions, acted as symbols of luxury, and were thought to encourage waste. Roses in particular were avoided as they were connected with Venus and became symbols of ‘voluptuousness and debauchery.’¹⁶⁵ It was generally understood by Christians that pagans engaged in sensual worship, while Christians used *logos* or reason. Flowers clearly belonged to the sensual, sensory worship of pagans. Church father John Chrysostom (347-407) explained concisely that Christians had “a worship without anything that is bodily or gross or entangled in the life of the senses.”¹⁶⁶ The bloodless sacrifice of Christians did not require the sights and smells of languishing animals, nor the floral sweetness of flowers. Nature was subordinate to the divine and to humanity according to an ideal of *Contemptus mundi*.

Flower use was explicitly discouraged by a number of church fathers. Clement of Alexandria (150-215) thought picking flowers was “robbing nature of her own.”¹⁶⁷ St. Jerome

¹⁶² Hild, “Flora,” 1191.

¹⁶³ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 79.

¹⁶⁴ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 96.

¹⁶⁵ D’Andrea, *Ancient Herbs*, 72.

¹⁶⁶ Pelikan, *Imago Dei*, 125.

¹⁶⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator*, 70.

(347-420) and St. Ambrose (340-397) were the first to condemn the placement of flowers on tombs because material offerings to God and the dead were expressly forbidden.¹⁶⁸ Flowers, claimed St. Augustine (354-430), were not sacrificial offerings, and Christians would be brought into an idolatrous relationship with God if they engaged their senses rather than their intellect.¹⁶⁹ Flowers occupied a purely ornamental role in Christian life, though even this was regulated.¹⁷⁰ Tertullian (160-225), for instance, suggested that flowers could be carried, but not worn as a crown or a chaplet on one's head.¹⁷¹ He argued that it was against nature to desire a flower for the head, as much as desiring food for the ear or sound for the nose.¹⁷² The wearing of crowns, including crowns of flowers, was an especially sensitive topic. Clement of Alexandria suggested that it was "inconsistent for us who celebrate the holy suffering of the Lord, who know that He was crowned with thorns, to crown ourselves with flowers."¹⁷³ Flowers, in this case, would serve as a mockery of the pain of Christ. The relationship between Christians and flowers was strained by all of these regulations and early Christians used flowers strictly for secular uses, or alternately, not at all in order to avoid the risk of being heretical.¹⁷⁴

Despite suspicions surrounding flowers elsewhere in Christendom, intensive horticultural experiments involving flowers did take place in monasteries. Monastic flowers were mainly

¹⁶⁸ St. Ambrose transformed the Greek idea of the afterlife, *Elysium*, into a Christian Paradisiacal rose garden before the Fall of man. Potter, *The Rose*, 78.

¹⁶⁹ Pelikan, *Imago Dei*, 104.

¹⁷⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, xxvii.

¹⁷¹ Tertullian, *Apologetic Works*, 5.3.

¹⁷² Potter, *The Rose*, 76.

¹⁷³ Clement, *Christ the Educator*, 156.

¹⁷⁴ The rise of botany, naturalistic painting, and sculpture was slow in coming, especially when they intersected with Christianity. In Muslim countries, flowers were similarly not often represented because of religious restrictions. Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 100.

cultivated for medicinal and culinary purposes, but were also used for altar decoration on holy days. St. Phocas of Sinope, the earliest known patron saint of gardening, lived in the third century near the Black Sea where he grew vegetables for the poor and flowers for himself.¹⁷⁵ St. Anthony's (251–356) monastic community had also planted a garden for its monks.¹⁷⁶ Starting from the fourth century flowers were slowly transformed into a Christian symbol, specifically a symbol of the supremacy of “head over heart.”¹⁷⁷ In the fifth century St. Benedict of Nursia (480-543) wrote “St. Benedict’s Code” wherein he addressed monastic gardens. St. Benedict suggested that since monks could not leave their enclosures, the natural world should come to them. St. Benedict tended a rose bush, *il roseto*, in Subiaco, Italy. It had an aesthetic and penitential purpose—the flower’s scent and shape delighted his senses while its thorns mortified his flesh—flowers were both his reward and punishment.¹⁷⁸

Despite the sometimes deeply ambiguous attitudes towards flowers, flowers held a prominent place in Christian miracles. In St. Augustine’s *City of God* a blind woman was reportedly healed after being given flowers that had been used in a ceremony with the relics of St. Stephen.¹⁷⁹ After that, people came to St. Stephen’s tomb with flowers, hoping for a cure from their ailments. A legend surrounding St. Valentine, a Christian physician from the third century, also featured flowers. Christians at the time faced severe persecution, and Valentine was eventually arrested and put in jail, awaiting execution. While he was imprisoned, a jailer

¹⁷⁵ St. Rose of Lima (1586 – 1617) is also the patron saint of florists and gardeners, as is St. Adelard of France (1080-1152), and St. Rose of Viterbo (1233 – 1252). Ward, *Contemplation Flowers*, 394.

¹⁷⁶ Thurston and Attwater, *Butler’s Lives of Saints*, 164.

¹⁷⁷ Potter, *The Rose*, 78. For more information see Seaton, Beverly. “Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification.” *Poetics Today* 10, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 679-701.

¹⁷⁸ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 125.

¹⁷⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, XXII, VII.

brought his blind daughter to Valentine to be treated. Valentine applied ointments to her eyes over several weeks of treatment. When it was time for him to be executed on February 14, 270 he sent the child a folded note saying “From your Valentine.” When she opened the note, she was immediately able to see the words and the dried flower that had been pressed between the creases of the page—her vision had been miraculously restored.¹⁸⁰

Flowers had been a part of the eschatological and paradise landscape at least from the third century when a priest named Satyrus described roses in heaven.¹⁸¹ Satyrus had a vision of souls separating from their bodies and being guided upwards by angels. He claimed “And while we are borne by those some four angels, there appears to us a vast space which was like a pleasure garden, having rose-trees and every kind of flower.”¹⁸² Such legends helped solidify the place of flowers in early Christian tradition, and gradually flowers were incorporated in the liturgical calendar. Paulinus of Nola (353-431) suggested that during the feast of St. Felix, flowers should be placed on the ground in front of the entrance of the church to encourage the advent of springtime.¹⁸³ Even crowns made of flowers were eventually appropriated for Christian use, including the presentation of virginity awards at marriage or death.¹⁸⁴ St. Chrysostom (347–407) proclaimed that “Garlands are wont to be worn on the heads of

¹⁸⁰ Ward, *Contemplation on Flowers*, 104. Another claim published in 1894, has author Olive Dana claiming that a sick girl cured herself by growing flowers, and then helped other people by sending those same flowers. See Olive Dana, *Under Friendly Eaves* (Princeton: Burleigh & Flynt, 1894). There are many stories of flowers being used in miraculous Christian healings.

¹⁸¹ Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 402.

¹⁸² Potter, *The Rose*, 76.

¹⁸³ See Paulinus of Nola. “*De S. Felice Nataliyum Carmen*,” in *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola*, trans. Patrick G. Walsh, v. 110-12 (New York: Newman Press, 1975).

¹⁸⁴ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 122. Eventually sacrifices and material offerings (incense, statuaries, perfume, icons, flowers) lost their popularity in Christianity, either for reasons connected to Roman luxury, or Judaic belief. Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 120.

bridegrooms, as a symbol of victory, betokening that they approach the marriage bed unconquered by pleasure.”¹⁸⁵

The Fall of Rome in the 476 led to the subsequent decline of floricultural practices in Europe. When invading tribes conquered the Roman provinces they also destroyed the wealthy Roman lifestyles that had sustained such a great floral presence. Not only did floral culture cease but flower knowledge regressed and cultivation of both flowers and vegetables waned.¹⁸⁶

Flowers in The European Middle Ages (477-1453)

Flowers were slow to enter into churches in the Middle Ages, despite monastic enthusiasm. Although flowers would eventually assume varied and meaningful roles in churches, they still held notoriously pagan connections. Priests were well attuned to threats to the Christian ‘way of life,’ and as a solution, sought to ‘Christianize’ any new practices among Christians. As a way of reclaiming flowers in the Christian fold many flowers, plants and herbs were re-Christened in the Middle Ages. During these ceremonies prayers were recited, people gathered, and new, Christian names were given to the flora.

In the middle of the ninth century Walafriid Strabo, the abbot of Reichnau, wrote the now famous collection of poems *de Cultura Hortorum*, or *Hortulus* meaning little garden. In it he described his garden as the greatest joy of cloistered life. Included were poems dedicated to his garden, where he described the practical and symbolic value of plants.¹⁸⁷ For example, Strabo wrote about Madonna lilies, making use of both their medicinal qualities as a snakebite remedy,

¹⁸⁵ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 122.

¹⁸⁶ Fortunately, during this time the Near and Far East continued to nourish their rich floral culture, preserving and growing in floral knowledge. Potter, *The Rose*, 85.

¹⁸⁷ Aside from the *Hortulus*, there are two other significant ninth century sources of information on monastic gardens; the first was from Charlemagne’s imperial garden and the second was from early garden plans for an idealized monastery. Potter, *The Rose*, 87.

as well as their symbolic linkages to the purity of the Virgin Mary. The rose could yield oil to treat headaches or fevers as well as represent martyrs of the Church.

The transformative acceptance of flowers did not come without some tension and reservation. A noteworthy struggle between an abbot and oblate in the twelfth century set the tone for the use of flowers in Catholic worship. St. Bernard (1090 – 1153), described as “the greatest spiritual force in Europe,” was the abbot of Clairvaux and mentor of the Holy See.¹⁸⁸ St. Bernard was opposed by the oblate Suger (1081-1151) who was the abbot of St. Denis, France. St. Bernard was also the advisor to the crown and the “greatest political power in France.”¹⁸⁹ He boasted self-denial and austerity in approaching the divine, while Suger rejoiced in the beauty of God. Suger argued that material splendor, like jewels and coloured glass, as well as decorative elements like flowers, should be celebrated in churches. Suger wanted to transform the everyday world into something more inspiring and spectacular, thereby evoking the divine.¹⁹⁰ Suger and St. Bernard were in dispute over which approach to the divine was correct. The highly decorated Cathedrals from this period unmistakably reveal who ultimately succeeded in this dispute—Suger. The triumph of Suger paved the way for a greater floral decorative presence in Catholic churches.¹⁹¹ It is important to note that Bernard of Clairvaux did not oppose the use of flowers in Christian life in general, but sought only their tempered use. In fact, his work on the Song of Songs regularly featured the theme of flowers. Sermon forty-seven in particular addressed the “Threefold Flower of Holiness,” where Christ as a rose must be a wild rose, one that grows

¹⁸⁸ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 149.

¹⁸⁹ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 149.

¹⁹⁰ Panofsky, *Meaning in Visual Arts*, 162.

¹⁹¹ The rose returned in full force during the Romanesque and Gothic period of the twelfth century. Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 150.

without attention or care, and has three distinct blossoms of virginity, martyrdom and good works.¹⁹²

Although plants and flowers were indisputably used for practical purposes they also maintained their symbolic significance. Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1178) wrote her book, *The Physica* (Natural Sciences) in the twelfth century, and it became a great source of plant information.¹⁹³ By that time knowledge of growing flowers had returned in full force all over Europe—royal gardens had joined the already flourishing monastic gardens. Floral privileges spread beyond the Church and aristocratic domain to the bourgeoisie, who were themselves enjoying increased wealth.¹⁹⁴ The personal use of flowers grew, soon flowers were being used to decorate houses, create garlands, and produce floral fragrances. Among emerging technologies were horticultural and floricultural techniques. Greenhouses, which had all but disappeared after the Fall of Rome, emerged again towards the end of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Already by the thirteenth century ornamental gardening had advanced with the use of nurseries, grafting techniques, seed exchanges and cuttings.

Practical gardens were grown for culinary, medical and aesthetic purposes, though the latter category was largely reserved for nobility. Flowers were not limited to outdoor usage either as plants were kept indoors in window boxes. In the winter flowers would often be brought indoors, certain cloisters even maintained winter conservatories. One account has Albertus

¹⁹² Potter, *The Rose*, 83.

¹⁹³ In addition to Hildegard of Bingen's text, a Greek Physician and botanist wrote *De Material Medica* (The Materials of Medicine), a work that was translated and gained widespread authority in the Middle Ages. It became the central text for knowledge of medicinal uses of plants. See Bingen, Hildegard of. *Hildegard von Bingen's Physica: The Complete English Translation of Her Classic Work on Health and Healing*. Translated by Priscilla Throop. Vermont: Healing Art Press, 1998; Gunther, Robert T. ed. *The Greek Herbal Dioscordes*. London and New York: Hafner, 1968.

¹⁹⁴ Wider interest in flowers meant an increase in secular gardens. Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 160. Flower gardens were enjoyed by urban and suburban peoples, who, despite being removed from a country setting, could still have their very own manicured, custom-made plot of nature. See Edward Hyams, *English Cottage Gardens* (London: Whittet, 1970). Bayard, *Sweet Herbs*, 10.

Magnus (1206-1280) boasting of his flowering plants and ripe fruit in January.¹⁹⁵ He wrote a treatise entitled *On Vegetables and Plants*, including a chapter of instructions on flower gardening.¹⁹⁶ As flowers took on ecclesiastical meaning in Christianity, three species dominated in particular: roses, violets and lilies. Red roses often represented Jesus and his bloody sacrifice on the cross, the shrinking purple violets represented humility, and the white lilies represented the purity of the Virgin Mary. Although this is one set of common symbolic interpretations, there are many more.¹⁹⁷ The clear connection between flowers and the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages is exemplified by the “Gold Rose” award. The “Golden Rose” was just that, a rose made of gold; it was a prize that had been passed from Popes to esteemed churches, royalty or even governments. The award originally used the golden keys from St. Peter’s Basilica however it was changed to a rose, representing Jesus, by at least the mid-eleventh century.¹⁹⁸

By the late fourteenth century religious rituals were openly renamed to reflect a growing floral affinity: the Ascension was renamed ‘the festival of the rose’ in Europe, where a rain of flowers symbolized the descent of the Holy Ghost.¹⁹⁹ In Italy, red roses became so integral to Pentecost that the title was changed to *Pasqua rosa*. The peony used during *Whitsuntide* (Pentecost) in Germany hereafter was known as the rose of Pentecost (*Pfingstrose*), and the

¹⁹⁵ Harvey, *Medieval Gardens*, 75.

¹⁹⁶ Harvey, *Medieval Gardens*, 6.

¹⁹⁷ The red rose often stood for *agape* (brotherly love) rather than *eros* (romantic love) in religious contexts, and at times was specifically linked with the blood of Christ. Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 129.

¹⁹⁸ Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) would claim that the rose represented the “sweet odour of Christ which should be widely diffused by His faithful followers.” See Rock, P.M.J. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 6. s.v. “Golden Rose.” New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06629a.htm> (accessed August 20, 2012).

¹⁹⁹ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 155.

coming of the Holy Spirit was represented by a shower of rose petals.²⁰⁰ In France, Germany and Italy, chaplets of roses were worn by participants of the *Corpus Christi* procession.²⁰¹

The Church fostered an association between the Virgin Mary and flowers, a connection that has taken root and is now deeply a part of Catholic tradition. In fact, since early Roman times the Virgin had been represented by flowers in an enclosed garden that symbolized her virginity; many of these images were regaining strength. May was Mary's month and frequently included floral celebrations. Flowers were re-named in her honour until Mary could almost be symbolically clothed in flowers from head to toe.²⁰² Greater Budweed, *Campanula medium*, served as Our Lady's Nightcap, *Alchemilla* was Our Lady's Mantle, and Bird's-foot Trefoil, *Lotus corniculatus*, was Our Lady's Slippers. Various other clothing, accessories and body parts were commonly depicted as Our Lady's toes, fingers, candlestick and tears; the virgin herself was also labeled as a flower.

Flowers from the Renaissance to Modernity (1454-Present)

The Renaissance is recognized as a time of 'self-conscious' renewal with a return to ancient Greek and Roman culture; it was a time of observation, enquiry and experimentation in the natural world.²⁰³ Scholars in the Renaissance were making connection after connection between classical texts and Christian doctrines, and flowers were no exception.²⁰⁴ The narcissus,

²⁰⁰ Fisher, *Flowers of the Renaissance*, 24.

²⁰¹ During the Commemoration of St. Paul in 1405 the bishop wore a chaplet of red roses. See A. Lambert, "The Ceremonial Use of Flowers," *The Nineteenth Century* 4 (May 1880): 457-77.

²⁰² Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 157. The image of the virgin as a flower in an enclosed garden was present in the artwork of ancient Israel and Rome. Art and literature of medieval Europe often saw the Virgin Mary as the enclosed garden, and sometimes she was depicted as a white, thornless rose. Crowell and Joret, *La Rose dans l'Antiquité*, 249.

²⁰³ Fisher, *Flowers and the Renaissance*, 58.

for instance, was originally connected with the Greek myth of Persephone—a Greek goddess whose annual return from the underworld was marked by the advent of spring, and whose departure hastened the return of winter. Given her cyclical resurrection every spring, and her connection with the narcissus, this flower came to represent Christ.²⁰⁵ Flowers were increasingly being portrayed in more realistic ways, the scientific names of flower gained importance so that floral references could be made across cultures. These factors were linked with an increase in botanical interest and botanical sciences.²⁰⁶

During the Renaissance Europe was struggling with a litany of issues including Christian orthodoxy and heresy, iconoclasm and icons, and the divide between Catholicism and Protestantism. The issue of flower use was part of the disagreement between Protestants and Catholics. Protestants considered floral use in church as iconoclastic whether flowers were used by other Protestants, or more commonly, by Catholics. From the twelfth century onward Catholics had filled their churches with crucifixes, paintings, gildings, candles, cloths and flowers. Plants and flowers were fully incorporated in the Catholic calendar and had gained ritual significance. Holly could be found at Christmas, palms on Palm Sunday, roses on Ascension Day, woodruff on Corpus Christi and birch during the midsummer.²⁰⁷ Flowers accompanied lives as well as deaths, being finally placed on graves in Catholic graveyards. On the other hand, Reformers followed the course of early church fathers who resisted objects and images of

²⁰⁴ Fisher, *Flowers and the Renaissance*, 47.

²⁰⁵ Fisher, *Flowers and the Renaissance*, 131.

²⁰⁶ Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics," 688.

²⁰⁷ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 191.

worship, including flowers, in places of religious significance like churches and cemeteries.²⁰⁸ In fact, the use of flowers in church was rejected entirely by Protestants and Puritans.²⁰⁹ In a move reminiscent of early Christian times, flowers came to embody wasteful luxury in Protestantism, and roses were particularly infamous.²¹⁰

Most notable in the Renaissance were artistic advances, where the depiction of flowers reflected larger attitudes of the time.²¹¹ Without embarking on a detailed examination, depictions of plant life and gardens became popular in various aesthetic mediums, including literature and paintings, not to mention architectural features like stained glass windows, or carved flowers in Cathedrals. One prominent example of this is found in the “Books of Hours.” These were devotional books originating from the fifteenth century. Books of Hours were notoriously popular and covered in floral images or with dried flowers on the borders of pages. These texts laid out prayers and observances by the hour, day, or according to the season. These flowers had symbolic meanings which played off of the meaning of the text. For instance, the flower of mourning, the columbine, might be placed next to a passage about the death of Jesus.²¹² More than simply serving a decorative function, these flowers played an integral role in discerning the nuanced meaning of the text. One book of hours from the early sixteenth century,

²⁰⁸ Flowers were included in Protestant funerals by the middle of the nineteenth century. Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 195.

²⁰⁹ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 194ff. In the nineteenth century the Puritans of America, New England especially, rejected the use of flowers. Flowers there were largely associated with luxury, high culture and paganism as they had been centuries earlier. Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 271. Their non-utilitarian nature and beauty was an “investment of time, energy and money.” Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 301. These ideologies spurred iconophobia in general and towards flowers also. Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 274.

²¹⁰ Kronenfeld, “Herbert’s ‘A Wreath,’” 29.

²¹¹ In literature William Shakespeare (d. 1616), Geoffrey Chaucer (d. 1400) and Dante Alighieri (d. 1321) waxed poetic about flowers. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* included the famous floral line of Ophelia, “I would give you some violets, but they withered all, when my father died.” (4.5.184-185).

²¹² Fisher, *Flowers*, 58.

created by Jean Bourdichon for Queen Anne of Brittany (1477-1514), included over three hundred plants that were labeled and realistically presented.²¹³

Flowers held specific spiritual meanings in Renaissance paintings, communicated through the choice of the species, positioning, and colour. For example, flower strewn grass was a mirror for the liminality between heaven and earth, as can be seen in Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea del Verrocchio's painting *The Annunciation* from the late fifteenth century.²¹⁴ By the end of the sixteenth century flowers outgrew their roles as secondary, symbolic informers in artwork and largely became the subjects of their own paintings. This in part caused them to lose their mysterious power. Artistic activity was increasingly free from church regulation and as a result floral themes became less restricted.²¹⁵ This separation increased the flexibility and growth of the flower market that was ultimately fueled by consumerism. A more pragmatic approach to gardening also led to secularized flower use.²¹⁶ As the number of flower species increased in Europe flowers became a part of the everyday life of everyday people.²¹⁷

According to Goody, in modern times, the commercial flower market increased the range of flowers available, and expanded with European trade and colonization; it responded to a more balanced distribution of wealth and the increased popularity of flowers.²¹⁸ Mercantile capitalism shifted to industrial capitalism and this allowed for expansion through supply and demand, all of

²¹³ Bayard, *Sweet Herbs*, 35; Fisher, *Flowers*, 92.

²¹⁴ Examples of this are paintings of the Annunciation or the Virgin and child. Fisher, *Flowers*, 117.

²¹⁵ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 198.

²¹⁶ In the sixteenth century Jan Breughel from Antwerp treated flowers as subjects in their own right in his paintings, not just as landscape or added symbols to a larger scene. Fisher, *Flowers*, 169.

²¹⁷ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 205. This expanding flower market largely destroyed the ideals of the extreme puritans and helped along the slow change in the Church of England. Elizabeth the First was actually addressed by her court as Flora, goddess of flowers. Fisher, *Flowers*, 42.

²¹⁸ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 213.

which ended in a market of mass consumption in Europe and then North America.²¹⁹ This expansion outweighed any criticisms of luxury or other religious objections. For French poet Charles Pierre Baudelaire (1821-1867) flowers were so omnipresent in society that they had become “evil symbols of a world he had rejected.”²²⁰

Although flowers had been caught in the center of a definite rift in Christianity, by the late nineteenth century things had begun to change, partly due to the Oxford movement.²²¹ The Oxford movement helped close the gap between Anglican and Catholic practices and beliefs, at least in the high church, by stressing a return to older Christian traditions. The separation of secular and religious life, promoted in this period, helped to mitigate the Protestant and Puritan distrust of flowers.²²² The ‘Language of Flowers’ movement of the nineteenth century helped to overcome any lingering Puritanical or Protestant objections to flowers. There was an explosion of books dedicated to the “true meaning” of flowers, and despite the idea that each flower had a set significance, there was very little consistency between books as to what each flower meant.²²³ Eastern influences around flowers blended with traditional Christian ideas; a book entitled *Flora’s Dictionary* (1832) written by Mrs. Elizabeth Wirt, attempted to reconstruct “this mystic language of the east.”²²⁴ Typical of flower books, her text appealed to the ‘simple and universal’

²¹⁹ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 210.

²²⁰ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 232.

²²¹ Reforms began in 1828-32 between Church and state, and eventually led to the inclusion of flowers in worship much to the general delight of the public. For more information on this shift see Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 303.

²²² For more information on the Oxford movement see Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 302ff.

²²³ For a list of flower species and meanings according to flower text, See Seaton, *The Language of Flowers*, 168-197.

²²⁴ See Elizabeth Washington Wirt, *Flora’s Dictionary* (Baltimore: Fielding Lucas Jr., 1832).

code of flowers, and included a list of Catholic saints and their representative flowers.²²⁵ Another book entitled *Flowers and Festivals, Directions for floral décor of churches* (1867) written by William Barrett, was intended as a Protestant handbook for church decoration. It was a popular text in its time and offered a wealth of information on how to properly use flowers in Protestant Churches. Barrett claimed that this was a matter of “how to decorate churches for God’s honor” by selecting flowers according to the liturgical season. In his text, Barrett defended the use of flowers in churches citing the support of church fathers and church tradition.²²⁶ The fact that flowers are included in church decor is a matter, he claimed, of “instinctive...human nature” such that civilized and savage people alike understood the inherent value of flowers.²²⁷ Flower culture in religious and secular spheres was also influenced by books such as the *Flore mystique* (1874), composed of quotations about flowers from the writings of St. Francis.²²⁸ The ‘flowers’ of St. Francis of Assisi were his teachings, and additionally served to link flowers with St. Francis in the popular mind.

Annual festivals, anniversaries, birthdays, weddings, secret rendezvous and dinner engagements prompted the giving and receiving of flowers en mass in Europe and America.²²⁹ Liturgical cycles of the Church, and the human cycles of birth, marriage and death were all

²²⁵ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 264.

²²⁶ Barrett, *Flowers and Festivals*, vii.

²²⁷ Barrett, *Flowers and Festivals*, 3. One passage from this book was of particular interest, in it he wrote “Sing praises to your God, ye youths, and pay your holy vows; The floor with many flowers strew, the threshold bind with boughs; Let Winter breathe a fragrance forth, like as the purple Spring; Let the young year, before the time, its floral treasures bring; And nature yield to this great day, herself an offering.” Prayers are offered to God as a way of swaying the natural seasons, and hopefully bringing springtime and its flowers a bit sooner. Barrett, *Flowers and Festival*, 7.

²²⁸ See Joseph Tissot, *Flore Mystique de Saint François de Sales* (Paris: Palmé, 1874).

²²⁹ See Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 313ff.

crowned with flowers, with a preference for fresh cut flowers over artificial ones.²³⁰ As Goody suggested “Pressures for profit...tend[ed] to thin out the symbolic aspect of the culture of flowers.”²³¹ Material worth instead of symbolic worth dominated the buyers’ perspective on flowers. The flower industry was also paired with another newly emerging market, the commercialization of death, exploding first in America in the twentieth century. Death rituals were increasingly being bought and sold, and flowers were a required part of that package.²³²

The flower would continue to grow in popular consciousness, both inside of the church and out, well into the twenty-first century. It is difficult to overestimate the contemporary use of flowers, and their presence in households, places of work and public spaces. They have become a part of European and American identity and remain so to this day.²³³ Yet, despite the ubiquity of flowers as a commercial commodity today, their significance and power remains alive in the Catholic Church. It is this energized, powerful perspective on the flower that is taken up in this thesis through St. Faustina.

²³⁰ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 316.

²³¹ Goody, *Culture of Flowers*, 281.

²³² Flowers at funerals “did not come to England or America until after the middle of the nineteenth century, and only then with the opposition of church leaders.” Mitford, *The American Way of Death*, 40, 110, 191.

²³³ Flowers are so ubiquitous that they have, at times, given rise to a lethargic nonchalance. Flowers have become both feminized, and worn out images, especially in America. Seaton, “Towards a Semiotic,” 698.

CHAPTER THREE: THE LIFE OF ST. MARY FAUSTINA KOWALSKA (1905-1938)

The following is a summary of the detailed biography of St. Faustina's life found in Appendix I. The level of contextualization provided here enables the reader to appreciate the phenomenological insights in the following sections without being encumbered by the minutiae of her life.

At first glance the life of Helena Kowalska conforms to the traditional expectations surrounding a saint. She was born to a poor European family, received little education, belonged to the Catholic Church and entered a Catholic convent; she had numerous miraculous encounters during her relatively short life. As Helena Kowalska transformed into the sacred, public figure of Saint Mary Faustina, her message of Jesus' "Divine Mercy" came to be seen by the public as defining her life and works. Aside from being a messenger of Divine Mercy, Faustina has been named the Prophet of Our Times, a Great Mystic and a Mistress of Spiritual life.²³⁴ Most notably Faustina introduced the Divine Mercy Chaplet,²³⁵ the Novena to Divine Mercy,²³⁶ the Hour of Great Mercy,²³⁷ and the Divine Feast of Mercy²³⁸ to the Catholic Church. These became popular within the Catholic Church; they continue to be practiced around the globe, in homes and

²³⁴ Siepak, *A Gift From God*, 7.

²³⁵ The Divine Mercy Chaplet was given to Faustina during a vision on September 13th, 1935. Kowalska, *Diary*, 474-476. It was a prayer that could be said using rosary beads; those who said this prayer would be rewarded with special graces. Faustina prayed this prayer constantly, especially for those near death.

²³⁶ The Novena to Divine Mercy requires reciting the chaplet each day for nine days, and is popular especially the nine days before the Divine Mercy Sunday (the Sunday after Easter). Faustina claimed that Jesus, who appeared to her in a vision, gave her nine special intentions to add to the chaplet in the novena for Divine Mercy Sunday. Kowalska, *Diary*, 1209-1229.

²³⁷ The Hour of Great Mercy is at three pm, and it is best to say the chaplet at three pm, the hour of Jesus's death. According to her diary, Jesus instructed Faustina to pray at this time for all sinners. Kowalska, *Diary*, 1320.

²³⁸ The Divine Feast of Mercy is practiced on the first Sunday after Easter. Faustina learned of this in a vision for the first time on February 22nd, 1931. Kowalska, *Diary*, 47. The image was painted in 1934 for the first time, and the first celebration was at Ostra Brama, Vilnius, at the Eastern Gate during the end of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption and Divine Mercy Sunday. Kowalska, *Diary*, 417.

Catholic churches. Her diary has been published and translated across the world, including in English, German, Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak. Knowledge of Faustina's life and message continues to spread with the use of the internet and social media technologies of today. She is the subject of a number of devotional books, blogs, online articles and has been featured in a Polish movie about her life, entitled *Faustyna* (2004).²³⁹ Today there are a number of devotional books available for sale on the subject of Faustina and her divine messages. Although Faustina's widespread presence is linked with well known spiritual contributions, there is much more to be discovered about her life. St. Faustina's extraordinary experiences are reminiscent of those recorded by medieval mystics, though they were rare when they occurred in the early twentieth century and are also rare today. Although phenomenology focuses on shared human experience, or the intersubjective character of phenomena according to van Manen, many of Faustina's experiences *are* exceptional in their rarity.²⁴⁰ Among these experiences is a long list of incredible claims of: visions of Catholic figures, divine union with God, spiritual marriage with Christ, the gift of prophesy, bilocation and visitations to purgatory, heaven and hell.

The life of Helena Kowalska has been pieced together from interviews with those who knew her, externally verified through Church and convent records, and explored through first-hand accounts recorded in her diary.²⁴¹ Both the original Polish text and an English translation

²³⁹ Faustyna is the Polish name for Faustina.

²⁴⁰ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 58.

²⁴¹ This thesis retains the capitalization and italicization of the terms and passages found in Faustina's diary.

of her diary are used in this study.²⁴² Although all of these sources contribute to a more thorough picture of Helena, they can, of course, only scratch the surface of a life filled with “indescribable” interior experiences.²⁴³ Like so many Catholic mystics before her, the written words she provided fall flat of her reality, something she herself acknowledged and regretted. Faustina held an intimate relationship with the natural world, one essential to her relationship with God. One natural feature in particular was of great importance—flowers. Like many Catholics before her, Faustina came to associate Catholic figures with flowers in allegorical and experiential ways. Allegorically she included flowers in her poetic verses, and experientially she engaged with flowers in her daily life; both kinds of encounters were recorded in her notebooks and are of interest in this thesis. Although the role of flowers in Catholicism has sometimes been overlooked by scholars, attitudes towards flowers can reflect larger trends within the religion, such as beliefs surrounding the natural world, death, or meaning in life. We turn now to an abbreviated account of the life of Faustina, to better acquaint ourselves with her personal history, beginning with Faustina’s mother, Marianna Kowalska.

The Kowalska family lived a simple, devout life in the small town of Glogowiec, Poland, named after flowering hawthorn brambles.²⁴⁴ On the 25th of August in 1905 in the heat of the summer Marianna gave birth to a child that she claimed “sanctified” her womb since it was the

²⁴² See Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in my Soul: Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska*, trans. Rev. Richard J. Drabnik (Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2010); Faustyny Kowalskiej, *Miłosierdzie Boże w Duszy Mojej* (Kraków: E. Curia Metropolitana, 1979).

²⁴³ The ‘indescribable’ experiences of Faustina’s life were described in her diary as both joyful and painful. Kowalska, *Diary*, 447, 741.

²⁴⁴ Glogowiec was in the Turek County of Łódź Province but is no longer on the Polish map; it is now encompassed by the village of Świnice Warckie. The term “Glogowiec” comes from “glog” which is a hawthorn berry, or hawthorn brambles. This shrub flowers in the spring with pink and white scented flowers. Michalenko, *The Life of Faustina*, 13.

first pregnancy to go smoothly for her, and it marked the end of her difficult births afterwards.²⁴⁵ Marianna named the infant Helena and claimed that she was special; in many respects Helena was. This unusual child would wake at night to pray instead of sleep, much to the dismay of her mother. At age five Helena told her mother of a dream or in hindsight a premonition, where she and the Mother of God walked hand in hand in a beautiful garden.²⁴⁶

Every morning the cottage was filled with the sound of *Godzinki* a Polish Catholic hymn that the father, Stanislaus, would sing without fail. Helena's mother was the heart of the home; she would cook their meals, sew their clothing, and care for the children while her father worked in the fields and kept strict discipline over his family. Helena grew into a bright, popular child who was solidly built with expressive grey-green eyes and glossy auburn hair. Her father had already taught her to read and write before she attended her meagre three terms of schooling at age twelve.²⁴⁷

Helena loved to hear and memorize stories about saints; she had developed a following of children who longed to hear her speak. Privately, she dreamed of someday living in the forest subsisting only on roots and berries like the missionaries she had read about. When Stanislaus created an outdoor shrine for Mary, affixed to the pear tree in their backyard, the entire family and surrounding neighbours came to decorate it with flowers. You can be sure that Helena was there, carrying armfuls of blossoms, and vocally praising the Mother of God with whom she had a close relationship.²⁴⁸ The Kowalska family shared a warm, albeit modest, life that was

²⁴⁵ Siepak, *Gift*, 11; Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 14.

²⁴⁶ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 16.

²⁴⁷ The front, or the front lines where direct fighting occurs, went by the voivodeship of Łódź.

²⁴⁸ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 23.

altogether common. Aside from the war-torn state of Poland beyond the borders of the farm, the only extraordinary thing to happen to the Kowalska family was to have this ‘special’ daughter who would grow up to become a saint.

Helena loved children and they loved her. When she left home at age fifteen to work as a maid and nanny for the large Goryszewska family in Aleksandrów, the job should have been a good fit. Instead, she felt as though she had taken her focus off of Jesus, and was engaging in worldly living. Still, she remained with the Goryszewska family for roughly a year before a sign came that ended her doubts. One day while doing chores outside she peered up from her work and saw that the courtyard had caught on fire; the flames were all around her. Terrified she screamed *Ogien! Ogien!* (Fire! Fire!) to alert the entire family that was still inside the home. Her shrieking brought everyone out of the house but to their surprise there was no fire and there had never been. Helena had been seeing the bright lights of God for years, but never so intensely than at that moment. Though she tried to continue working as a maid, after that night she desired nothing more than to enter a convent and devote her life to God.²⁴⁹ Her parents however were unconvinced: they flatly refused to give her permission to join a convent and Helena reluctantly obeyed. Left with no other option, Helena was resigned to embrace a worldly life, one that included attending dances with her friends. One evening, all of this changed when she received what she considered to be an unmistakable call. With her hair likely braided in her trademark copper plait, and wearing a pink cotton dress with frills on one side, Helena attended a dance with her friends at Wenecja Park near Łódź. Amidst the music and dancing, she received, in no uncertain terms, a striking vision of Jesus asking her “How long shall I put up with you and how long will you keep putting me off?” The message was clear—she would need to devote herself

²⁴⁹ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 34; O’Dell, *Apostle*, 31.

entirely to God.²⁵⁰ After receiving the vision she immediately travelled to Warsaw, despite not having her parents' permission. In Warsaw, in an imposing brick building, she met Mother Michael Moraczewska and was accepted as a novice into the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy convent.²⁵¹ The next months of Helena's life were a time of great anticipatory joy; she imagined herself spending the rest of her days in prayer and communion with God. The congregation she had chosen focused on the imitation of Christ's mercy, and had a special devotion to Mary. These features suited Helena's faith quite nicely; however it was also an *active* community which meant that the sisters were helping the community through charitable works. They helped the poor, and especially women in need, by feeding and keeping them safe. Though the hard work of peeling vegetables and scrubbing floors was not foreign to Helena, she had expected a life of continual prayer, not housekeeping. Disappointed, she nearly left the convent shortly after she had arrived, but a vision from Jesus persuaded her to stay.

It would be years before Helena would become Sister Mary Faustina (1926) and years again before she would take her final vows (1933). It would be a difficult road for Faustina who suffered health problems almost immediately after joining the convent, problems that stayed with her continuously until her death. Although Faustina's life was filled with pain, it was a suffering she had accepted, even chosen. Faustina had had a vision of the life that awaited her, and being outright horrified, she "fainted at the sight of it."²⁵² She contemplated the suffering before her and then freely *chose* to accept it. Though much of this suffering was physical, a great deal of it

²⁵⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 9-10.

²⁵¹ Novitiate refers to a preparatory time of novices before taking final vows in the convent.

²⁵² Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 32. Helena did not have much contact with her family after entering the convent. She wrote to her parents asking them to attend the Clothing ceremony however they received the letter too late and did not attend. They did attend her first vows two years later but were not present at her death as she did not wish to burden them with the news of her illness or the financial expense of the trip itself.

came from those around her who treated her unkindly. All of the charm that Faustina had once possessed around others seemed to disappear.

Wherever she was posted she was persecuted by her fellow sisters and even superiors whose complaints against her ranged from laziness to demonic possession. She accepted these critiques as trials from God. Far worse than this, she often experienced feelings of abandonment from God. Without having any real spiritual guidance she did not understand the phenomenon of the dark night of the soul.²⁵³ She explained “The soul is engulfed in a horrible night. It sees within itself only sin. It feels terrible. It sees itself completely abandoned by God. It feels itself to be the object of His hatred. It is but one step away from despair.”²⁵⁴ Faustina went to the misty pits of fire where souls suffered in purgatory, she saw dark, demonic figures lurking in the corners of her room, and felt the slow annihilation of self. Despite these extraordinary adversities, of which there were many, she did receive extraordinary comfort—she was visited by Jesus in the form of a child and by the pregnant Virgin Mary. Faustina dedicated herself as a victim soul, giving up her life and will to the will of God for the salvation of others.

On a cold winter evening in 1931 at the convent in Plock when Faustina had just settled into her cell for the night, an unexpected visitor appeared—Jesus stood before her clothed in white. He had struck an impressive pose, one hand was touching his chest, his other hand was raised in a blessing and from underneath his garment came two rays of light one red, and one pale. He addressed Faustina and said “Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the

²⁵³ The term "dark night of the soul" comes from a treatise written by Saint John of the Cross, and is used to describe a spiritual crisis in the Christian life. For those undergoing this process, they experience a sense of extreme abandonment and a loss of the ability to pray, or to carry out spiritual activities. It ends with a great closeness with God and often union with God. See Saint John of the Cross. *Dark Night of the Soul*. Edited and translated by Reinhardt Kurt Frank. New York: Fungar Publication Co., 1957.

²⁵⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 97.

signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world.”²⁵⁵ At that moment Sister Faustina realized that it was up to her to fulfil this request, and it filled her with great trepidation.

Faustina struggled with this wish for a long time. After consulting with her confessor, Father Sopocko, without success, she began to make enquiries about sisters with artistic abilities. Not only could she find no one suitable, but her queries caused even more rumours about her amongst the others. As a last resort she began sketching, with a charcoal pencil, the image she remembered. This failed miserably and so Faustina persisted in asking her confessor for help once more. This time he agreed—he would try to help her. He arranged to have the image painted by a friend of his. Though Father Sopocko was doubtful of this young sister at first, he would grow to become a great advocate for her. After many weeks of meetings with the painter Faustina wept with bitterness when she finally saw the image, because it was not as beautiful as she remembered in her vision. Still, it had been done; she had fulfilled the wishes of Jesus. This was a short lived satisfaction for, once the image was completed, Jesus visited her again and informed her that the painting needed to be hung for three days at Ostra Brama on the second Sunday after Easter; this would become the feast of Divine Mercy. If the initial task seemed difficult, this seemed almost impossible. Yet, as in the case of the painting, Faustina sought out help from her confessor. It so happened that Father Sopocko was invited to speak at an event, a celebration of the closing of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption of the World at Ostra Brama on that very date. He asked that the image be put up as decoration in the church window and his request was granted by the archbishop. The painting was to be hung just as Faustina had asked

²⁵⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 47.

and its origins would remain a secret.²⁵⁶ That autumn Faustina had a series of visions about Divine Mercy. She saw Jesus' light appear over the world, and bless the globe. As Father Sopocho spoke at Ostra Brama "the image came alive and the rays pierced the hearts of the people gathered there."²⁵⁷ Today the image of Divine Mercy can be found in Catholic churches, convents and homes across the world numbering in the millions.

All of this was accomplished before she had even taken her final vows. In the springtime of 1933 in the convent in Cracow Faustina was prepared to die to the world and be born again as a sister of Our Lady of Mercy. Draped in a black funeral pall, her entire body pressed flat against the cold church floor, Faustina pronounced her final vows. Bells chimed for the life she left behind, and the new life that awaited her. Faustina's first assignment was as a gardener in Vilnius, a vocation she quickly excelled at despite its physical challenges. She had been brought back to the soil of her childhood and into the company of flowers whose presence carried such great weight in her diaries. Van Manen explains that "Through meditations, conversations, day dreams, inspirations and other interpretive acts we assign meaning to the phenomena of lived life."²⁵⁸ For Faustina, so many of those meditative activities and conversations with Jesus were inspired by, and focused around, the presence of flowers.

The following year, in the spring of 1934, Faustina's rich inner life had so grown that her trusted confessor, Father Sopocho, requested that she write down all of her divine encounters. Armed with a fountain pen and a ledger-style lined notebook about eight inches in size, Faustina

²⁵⁶ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 96.

²⁵⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 417.

²⁵⁸ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 37.

carefully marked each page with the sign of the cross.²⁵⁹ She filled the pages with her visions, visitations, and poetic devotions that took on a distinctly floral tone. Through the summer and into the fall it became clear that Sister Faustina was not well: X-rays of Faustina's lungs revealed advanced tuberculosis. The disease was rampant in Poland and highly feared, only adding to the isolation that Faustina already felt. In Faustina's case her tuberculosis would never be cured; it would spread to her intestines, emaciate her body, and slowly kill her. Dr. Silberg, a pulmonary specialist and director of a sanatorium, believed in the sanctity of Faustina and was stunned by the intensity of the suffering that she was able to endure without complaint. Faustina's superiors responded to news of her condition by providing her with extra food, but no less work.²⁶⁰ Only Dr. Silberg seemed to appreciate the strong connection between Faustina's spiritual suffering and her physical state. He was careful to balance her physical and spiritual needs, making concessions for her to attend mass or take communion while she was in his care in the sanatorium.²⁶¹

On a fine summer day in June of 1935 Faustina was walking in the garden in Vilnius when she heard a voice telling her that she would leave her congregation and go on to establish another. This was the last major request made upon her, though it would go unfulfilled. Shocked at first Faustina would go on to entreat, implore and even beg her convent superiors, her confessors, and the archbishop to let her fulfil this mission. She was met with great resistance and suffered inwardly as the visions and requests persisted. The darkness that Faustina had experienced returned once more and she felt abandoned and hated by God. Not for the first time she was threatened by demonic agents appearing as 'ugly monsters' who bid her to stay with her

²⁵⁹ O'Dell, *Apostle*, 87.

²⁶⁰ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 262.

²⁶¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1634; Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 268.

congregation. As time wore on Faustina grew more frustrated, urged by Jesus to act on one hand, and by her confessors not to on the other. At best she was doubted, at worse, she was berated by superiors who insisted on the demonic origin of her visions. Despite these obstacles, in November of that year Faustina began to compose a detailed rule for the new congregation that valued simplicity, intercession and prayer.²⁶² She had another vision of a small church and convent, with an iron gate covered by a dark curtain inwardly housing twelve cells; Father Sopocko was the resident priest.²⁶³ Although Father Sopocko tried to guide Faustina and help to establish this congregation, the congregation did not succeed until after her death. Faustina would remain a part of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy until she died.

The last two years of Sister Faustina's life have been described as "a slow death."²⁶⁴ Her illness began to overtake her life more absolutely and the struggles within her seemed to physically deplete her strength. In addition, she began to experience the pains of invisible stigmata. Her hands, feet and side felt pierced though there were no visible marks, and she continued to suffer silently and invisibly. Faustina was bounced back and forth between rest homes and convents, performing what light work she could. The memory of one rest home in particular stayed with her; it was a small cottage in Derdy that she described as "truly like from a fairy-tale."²⁶⁵ It was surrounded by a forest and was a place of serenity and tranquillity, she

²⁶² Later Faustina described the Congregation of Divine Mercy as part of the church "like a beehive in a magnificent garden, hidden and meek. The sisters will work like bees to feed their neighbors' souls with honey, while the wax will flame for the glory of God." Kowalska, *Diary*, 664.

²⁶³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 563.

²⁶⁴ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 247.

²⁶⁵ Mizia, *Letters*, 33.

explained “everything [there] contributes to recollection of the spirit; the forest birds intermit this silence and, with their twittering, they praise their Creator. I see God in everything.”²⁶⁶

Even when her surroundings seemed ‘ordinary’ and she was confined to her bed, Faustina continued to have profound spiritual experiences, including visions of both heaven and hell. Though she had been fond of visiting the sick, her body no longer permitted her to move, and so her spirit set out to be with the dying while her body remained in bed. “For the spirit, space does not exist” Faustina explained.²⁶⁷ During her time in bed, Sister Faustina continued to write about the mercy of God. She recorded her strivings towards sanctity, very similar to the “little way” described by St. Thérèse of Lisieux, to whom she had great devotion. Like St. Thérèse, Faustina emphasized the role of littleness and of love, and recognized the importance of being a flower for Jesus. She desired to be silent, hidden and to tend to other souls that were striving for God.²⁶⁸

Faustina knew that her time on earth was short and struggled against feelings of ill will towards her sisters. She was thirsty but given nothing to drink, at times she was cold and yet her room was not heated; she tried to be patient and forgiving but received only bitterness and gall in return. She was able to see all of the phases of her life as she had experienced them: childhood, youth, vocation, apostolic work and her numerous sufferings; she felt already crucified with Jesus. One of the mothers remarked of her “She had so much peace and unusual charm, this sick one. And how she changed! Where before she was frustrated and agitated about this work of Divine Mercy, in the end, she took everything calmly, relying completely on God’s will.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Mizia, *Letters*, 33.

²⁶⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 835.

²⁶⁸ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 337-338.

²⁶⁹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 270.

Towards the very end some of the sisters began to come to her for advice, or to hear her speak on the nature of obedience and chosen souls. Faustina was additionally tempted by Satan up to the very end of her life. Though she felt darkness around her she was assured that the hour of her death would be a happy one. Until she had suffered enough, according to God's divine plan, she would not die, though sometimes her suffering was so intense that she lost consciousness.

On the 5th of October in 1938, Sister Faustina announced that the Lord was taking her that day. She asked for an injection to ease the incredible pain that she felt, but later rejected it and chose to suffer for God instead. At 10:45 that evening the sister tending to Faustina saw that she was close to the end and rushed out of the room to find Mother Superior. When they returned they found that Faustina had quietly passed away.

Sister Faustina's funeral took place two days later on October 7th during the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. It was said that almost immediately after her death she acquired an unearthly beauty.²⁷⁰ Her body was buried in the convent cemetery which itself was in the convent garden. It was fitting that Faustina would be laid to rest in her favourite spot, where she had spent so much of her life.²⁷¹ After her death Faustina would become widely known for bringing one important message to the world: the message of Divine Mercy, but as this narrative has shown, she also possessed a rich inner life and experienced a great many other miraculous visions.

²⁷⁰ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 271.

²⁷¹ Faustina's body remained in that convent garden and cemetery for twenty eight years. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 379. For a more detailed coverage of St. Faustina's life, please see Appendix I. The Life and Times of St. Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938).

SECTION TWO: LEIFWORLD EXISTENTIALS OF SPACE, TIME, BODY AND RELATIONALITY

CHAPTER FOUR: FLOWERS IN SPACE

O my most sweet Master, good Jesus, I give You my heart. You shape and mold it after Your liking. O fathomless love, I open the calyx of my heart to You, like a rosebud to the freshness of dew. To You alone, my Betrothed, is known the fragrance of the flower of my heart. Let the fragrance of my sacrifice be pleasing to You. O Immortal God, my everlasting delight, already here on earth You are my heaven. May every beat of my heart be a new hymn of praise to You, O Holy Trinity! Had I as many hearts as there are drops of water in the ocean or grains of sand in the whole world, I would offer them all to You, O my Love, O Treasure of my heart! Whomever I shall meet in my life, no matter who they may be, I want to draw them all to love You, O my Jesus, my Beauty, my Repose, my sole Master, Judge, Savior and Spouse, all in one; I know that one title will modify the other—I have entrusted everything to Your mercy.²⁷²

This diary entry is a window into the life of Sister Faustina. While it demonstrates how every experience involves a combination of space, time, body, and relationships, it can also be read to reveal space as an existential. Faustina embraces various forms of space to express her deep emotional connection with God. Her conceptualizations of space take on natural forms—drops of water forming an entire ocean, or grains of sand forming the earth from the very small to the cosmic scale. The internal dimension offers up an inside space, an enclosed space. The image of the flower transforms that enclosed space into inner, intimate space. Certain flowers, like roses, possess a space at their center that is hidden by their encircling petals. Faustina looks to these inner floral recesses as models for herself, as a protected, secretive vessel of God. She opens those interior recesses to Jesus just as a flower opens itself to dew; both are spatially constructed to receive. She simultaneously appreciates the huge expanses of natural space in the world, juxtaposed against the intimate spaces of her body. From this passage it is clear that, for

²⁷² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1064.

Faustina, God is present in the intricate secrecies of a human heart that opens onto the vast expanses of nature. Van Manen suggests that “In the flow of life, consciousness breathes meaning in a to and fro movement: a constant heaving between the inner and the outer, made concrete.”²⁷³ In Faustina’s life, she breathes in the spatial reality of God through flowers both through rich inner descriptions, and her exterior life in the garden.

Introduction: Space and the Flower in the Writings of St. Faustina

The experience of space is complex and multifaceted, finding alternate expression in a multitude of approaches.²⁷⁴ To live as a human being is to live in space but space is *uniquely* experienced in the lives of every individual. Although there are clearly many possible avenues for spatial exploration in Faustina’s life, this chapter focuses on the point of intersection between space and flowers in the life of St. Faustina, as recorded in her diary.²⁷⁵ The question then, is in what way did Faustina spatially engage with flowers and how did these interactions relate back to God? In addressing this question this chapter is divided into three different parts. The first section, “Orientation,” identifies persistent patterns in how St. Faustina orients herself, as a devout Catholic, in three dimensional space and the place of flowers in that space. The second section, “Experience,” looks at Faustina’s spatial interactions with flowers set against a wider Catholic context. Although Faustina lived in the early twentieth century and was a Polish

²⁷³ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 36.

²⁷⁴ A number of spatial theorists, as well as scholars with spatial interests, are mentioned in this section, however none of their philosophies are meant to describe Faustina’s experiences, only to enrich our understanding of her own particular perspective. These authors include, but are not limited to, Joan Branham, Donald Capps, Carmel Bendon Davis, Mircea Eliade and Arata Isozaki and Mark Taylor. Please see the bibliography for additional information.

²⁷⁵ For a more complete treatment of Christian mystics and the experience of space please see Carmel Bendon Davis *Mysticism and Space: Space and Spatiality in the Works of Richard Rolle, the Cloud of Unknowing Author, and Julian of Norwich* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

Catholic, many of her experiences represent far reaching Catholic traditions. A brief conclusion summarizes the significant findings of this chapter.

Orientation in Space

A Catholic Spatial Cosmology: The Ascent into Heaven and Descent into Hell

*Landscapes of the soul...are infinite like space and time (whose) appearance gives rise within us, to a new sense, one that is superior to all others.*²⁷⁶

Faustina's spatial relationship with flowers fits into a larger cosmological schema that begins with an orientation of space itself. Even a cursory reading of the quote from her diary, presented at the head of this chapter, reveals the space lived by Faustina is not neutral, it is highly structured by a series of oppositions—enclosed spaces and open spaces for example. In her daily life Faustina negotiated the space of her convent with its living quarters, chapels, recreational areas and garden, much like any other sister. As she knelt in the chapel, laid down on her bed, walked through the many halls and sat in the garden—she encountered space in a variety of ordinary ways. But, her intimate relationship with God led her into a different experience of that space. She claimed that the mundane spaces of her life were filled with manifestations of divinity, and that she was not always constrained by the corporality of her body but found freedom of movement through out of body experiences.²⁷⁷ We turn now to an orientation of Faustina's lived space, including enclosed space, open spaces, inner spaces, outer spaces, high spaces, low spaces, 'good' spaces, and 'evil' spaces.

The concept of enclosed floral secrecy appears often in Faustina's writing. Specifically, she craves the intimacy of God against the horrors of the world, and she expresses these feelings

²⁷⁶ Hofmannsthal, "L'Année de L'Âme," 152-153.

²⁷⁷ When Faustina was ill, and her body was stationary in bed, her spirit was free to visit the sick and dying in another room. See Kowalska, *Diary*, 835.

using the language of flowers. Faustina feels most safe when she imagines herself folded in a blossom that is God. She explains “I want to hide myself in Your Most Merciful Heart as a dewdrop does in a flower blossom. Enclose me in this blossom against the frost of the world. No one can conceive the happiness which my heart enjoys in its solitude, alone with God.”²⁷⁸ The hidden secrecy of a floral bud, the protection of folded petals, and the isolation of existing inside of a divine flower, are among the highest desires of Faustina. When she imagines the divine protection of God she does so using the image of a flower because they possess this intimate, heartwarming, protective space. This is of course an interesting particularity, as flowers are typically known to be both very fragile and transitive. In her life and reverie Faustina has transformed the flower into a strong, eternal and expressive presence. The tightly folded flower bud still only dreams of blossoming, it remains pristine and filled with potential. The bud and blossom of a flower possess such intimacy, such potential, that it creates a felt space that calls out for habitation. Sister Faustina responded to this intimate call in her life. She longed for that intimate, enclosed, coveted space which flowers could provide. The shape of a flower is constructed for secrecy: the enclosed seed and folded bud both give an “intuitive sense of a hiding places”²⁷⁹ and “of gentle closing...and gentle opening.”²⁸⁰ There exist images, claims Bachelard, which demand to be lived in.²⁸¹ We can recall in our lives, suggests Bachelard, “moments of confined, simple, shut-in space...heartwarming space.”²⁸² Faustina wants to enter

²⁷⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1395.

²⁷⁹ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 81.

²⁸⁰ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 83.

²⁸¹ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 47.

²⁸² Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 10. Put more morbidly, “Every secret has its little casket” just as every flower is itself a vessel for secrets. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 85.

into the confined spaces of flowers, and ultimately to create that space inside of herself by becoming a flower.

In reading her diaries it becomes clear that Sister Faustina engages with orientations of space where loftiness and light are good, and darkness and depth are bad. Her language and experiences reflect this dualism. For Faustina, like so many, God has a throne and sits high up in heaven.²⁸³ It is also not uncommon, in her diary, as in the wider Catholic tradition, to find references to God as the sun.²⁸⁴ Faustina explains that with God as sun his rays are able to bless all of humanity on the earth below. In her very first diary entry Faustina confirms this sun-status by stating “You bless whoever approaches Your rays, And a soul all black will turn into snow.”²⁸⁵ In her visions, Jesus, Mary, saints and angels have all been bathed in a white light coming from above; these figures are present on high and descend to the earth to make contact. On the opposite pole Faustina also encountered the darkness and depths associated with evil. She was visited by demonic agents from below, in the form of black dogs and black figures.²⁸⁶ In a vision, she described a “horrible precipice...the abyss of hell.”²⁸⁷ Later, as she reported being led into hell, her experiences reinforced these cosmological orientations. By her account, hell was a physical space, a chasm, whose entry required a descent, it was described as a space filled with numerous tortures and the deeper one descends, the more intense the tortures become.²⁸⁸

The epitome of depth corresponds with the most painful and vile of tortures. Just as the peak of

²⁸³ Faustina recorded an experience where she was “carried by spirit” into heaven, where she was before the throne of God. Kowalska, *Diary*, 84. There are over forty references to ‘the throne of God’ in Faustina’s diary.

²⁸⁴ There are numerous such references to God as sun in Faustina’s diary, for example see Kowalska, *Diary*, 72.

²⁸⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1.

²⁸⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 320; Kowalska, *Diary*, 323.

²⁸⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 153.

²⁸⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 741.

heaven hosts the seat of God, so the very bottom of hell is a hiding spot for Satan.²⁸⁹ Faustina explained “Today, I was led by an Angel to the chasms of hell. It is a place of great torture; how awesomely large and extensive it is! Each soul undergoes terrible and indescribable sufferings, related to the manner in which they have sinned. There are caverns and pits of torture where one form of agony differs from another.”²⁹⁰ For Faustina, clearly, there is a great *spatial* division between goodness and light, and evil and darkness. From the highest of high, to the lowest of low, divine figures and their respective moral categories are organized in light and dark spaces, on peaks or in caverns. Likewise, the sensations of rising and falling have similar connotations as bodies move through space.²⁹¹ In its basic form, space for Faustina is stretched along a vertical line with moral extremes at each pole.²⁹² This was not a unique position, but rather a commonly held belief that Faustina had so effectively articulated. The floral theme intervenes again, this time as a marker of light and goodness: heaven is a garden where flowers are symbols or metaphors of virtues and divine manifestations.

Catholic cosmology does not exist in a closed system; it has been changed by scientific discoveries. Western cosmology, for over a millennium, had been based on the Ptolemaic model

²⁸⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 378. This dualistic hierarchy has deep roots and is found in a great many of the religions and cultures of the world. Often the body is linked with that dark, earthy, physical side of life while the soul is linked with lightness and the heavens above. This binary opposition has been considered by structuralists and feminists who have identified a trend of women being associated with darkness and earth, and men with lightness and heavenly pursuits; this gendered divide is not apparent in Faustina’s writing.

²⁹⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 741.

²⁹¹ The “Fall” itself was the physical fall of angels from heaven to earth, and a falling from grace in Adam, a descent into moral degradation.

²⁹² Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty spoke of verticality in his book *The Visible and the Invisible*. He advocated for a “rediscovery of vertical Being” as a means of approaching soul and body, and also, the visible and invisible. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 268. This rediscovery amounts to an awakening of the vertical field, for “What is upright is the existence threatened by weight, that leaves the plane of objective being, but not without dragging with it all the adversity and favours it brought there.” Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 325. We weigh ourselves down by those burdens which we carry with us. For him it is a question of “creating a new type of intelligibility, intelligibility through the world and Being as they are—‘vertical’ and not horizontal.” Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 268.

which held an earth-centered orbital view. This was later replaced by the Copernican model whose heliocentrism remains influential today. The new hierarchical evolutionary model encroached on fixed Catholic models of divine creation, which were reputedly immutable and unchanging.²⁹³ Throughout these changes the dualism between spirit and matter endured; this dualism was central to Faustina's worldview. What is light and 'good' tends to come from above, while what is dark and 'bad' tends to come from below. In Christian terms darkness, pain, sin and evil are associated with the ground where snakes wriggle on their bellies weighed down by their ancient sinfulness.²⁹⁴ Righteousness, lightness, joy and life fill the airy sky where doves fly and Christians find their heavenly reward.²⁹⁵ Human existence on earth is a liminal mode, made between good and evil at the midway point of all of these and so Christians must decide, claims Faustina, through their actions and convictions which of these 'spaces' will await them.²⁹⁶

Experiences of Space

Verticality: Upward Striving and Downward Pull

We proceed now to more in-depth examples of the spatial reality of Faustina Kowalska from her diary, beginning with the concept of verticality.

²⁹³ Although there are more subtle nuances to be understood between light and darkness, this basic orientation is extremely widespread, and is exemplified in the three-decker universe. The medieval "three-decker universe" reflects the dualism of light and goodness above, the earth in between, and darkness and evil below.

²⁹⁴ Genesis 3:14-15.

²⁹⁵ Genesis 8-11. Faustina also alludes to a connection with doves, and heaven. She wrote in her diary "During Holy Mass, I saw three white doves soaring from the altar toward heaven." Kowalska, *Diary*, 748.

²⁹⁶ This dualism is not an absolute system without exception. Given the created nature of the world in Catholicism, humanity exists and has its being on the ground, not all that is on earth is completely negative. In visions of Catholic holy figures, lightness and height are often found together, as are darkness and depth, as is the case in the writings of Faustina.

Faustina confesses to feeling a downward pull into the terrestrial—and opposes it with the image of a high mountain or a towering tree. Even in the spiritual expressions of gravity there is a penchant for spatial orientation matched with the physical features of the planet, connecting natural and spiritual topography. High regions are of the spirit, while lower regions are of baseness filled with self-love. Later, when Faustina experienced her dark night of the soul, she again links the state of her soul with topographical features. “The soul finds itself poised on the summit of a lofty mountain on the very brink of a precipice...It raises its eyes to heaven, but is convinced that this is not for her—for her all is lost. It falls deeper and deeper from darkness to darkness, and it seems to it that it has lost forever the God it used to love so dearly.”²⁹⁷ The poetic nature of this writing enables it to convey deep sentiments. Van Manen explains that although writing “abstracts our experience of the world” especially in allegorical or symbolic writings, “it also concretizes our understanding of the world” in that it can paint a more vivid picture of intended meaning.²⁹⁸ We discover here that nature has fallen into *alignment* with a divine plan, such that in Faustina’s mind, mountains are the closest we can stand to heaven, and precipices of darkness are the closest to hell. The opposite of heights, depths, are capable not of redemption but of great destruction. Faustina describes that destructive depth in yet another analogy of nature, that of being at sea. “The slightest storm would drown me, Engulfing my boat in the swirling depths, If You yourself did not watch over me, O God, At each instant and moment of my life...Dread and terror is all about me.”²⁹⁹ What is noticeable is the *depth* of the ocean as an endless circling downward pull. The depth of the ocean is a place without light or God. Conversely at a position of height, the spiritual takes precedence over the physical,

²⁹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 97-98.

²⁹⁸ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 128.

²⁹⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1322.

Faustina explains “My flight will not come to an end until I rest in Him forever. When we fly very high, all the vapors, mists and clouds are beneath our feet, and our whole carnal being is necessarily subject to the spirit.”³⁰⁰

When describing verticality, Bachelard often cites solid materials from nature, like the tree, because they are capable of *supporting* verticality. It is the tall, strong, vertical tree that represents a movement upwards. Bachelard quotes from *La Fontaine* concerning the oak tree “Whose head was neighbor to the heavens, And whose feet touched the realm of the dead.”³⁰¹ Through this tree the entire cosmos has been solidly anchored in place, linking heaven and hell, good and evil, even the living and the dead.³⁰² Faustina picks up the same thread of verticality represented by oak trees; these are pillars of strength and goodness as well as solitary souls suffering for God.

With humility, but also with courage, they [good Christians] stand firmly in the face of all the storms that beat upon them. Like high-towering oaks, they are unmoved. And in this there is just this one secret: that it's from God that they draw this strength, and everything whatsoever they have need of, they have for themselves and for others. They not only carry their own burden, but also know how to take on, and are capable of taking on, the burdens of others. They are pillars of light along God's ways; they live in light themselves and shed light upon others. They themselves live on the heights, and know how to show the way to lesser ones and help them attain those heights.³⁰³

The Catholic sensibility to verticality is derived from biblical cosmology. The concept of *Adamas* as the original human is conceptually located between earth and sky, coming originally

³⁰⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 234. The dualism between body and spirit is another prevalent, divisive element in Catholicism where the spirit is the superior, heightened element of human life. Today balance is sought between the two however they existed as distinct entities for Faustina just as they did in early Catholicism. Although the ideas of height and sun are captured in the image of the flower, the image of flying into the heat more precisely articulates this desire to achieve height.

³⁰¹ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 221.

³⁰² Mircea Eliade is well known for linking the tree with the *axis mundi*, or the cosmic axis or world pillar as a connection between the earth and sky. For an analysis of this see Eliade, Mircea. *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961).

³⁰³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 838.

from the loam, growing upwards towards the heavens. The Catholic condition, as well as the human condition, is one of terrestrial origin and concern; it is the struggle of mankind to live upright, to resist the downward pull and heighten upwards.³⁰⁴ Gaston Bachelard acknowledges that “The positive dynamism of verticality is so clear that we can formulate this aphorism ‘what does not rise, falls. Human being qua human being cannot live horizontally.’”³⁰⁵ The image of being dragged down, set against the image of rising upwards, has clear moral corollaries. The significance of human verticality has interested philosophers and poets throughout human history.³⁰⁶ Even outside of religious spheres there has been a strong pull around the verticality of humans who neither crawl on the ground nor fly through the air.³⁰⁷ Bachelard expresses this orientation more literally in the following excerpt from *Air and Dreams*.

The anguish of the terrestrial being who, during his troubled nights, struggles against the pit, actively digs his pit, and works with an axe and shovel, or with his hands and his teeth, in the depths of that imaginary mine where so many suffer their infernal nightmares. We will measure the importance of a courage associated with attitude and stature, courage to live in opposition to weight—to live “vertically.”³⁰⁸

Bachelard’s fallen state can be imagined in Catholic terms where humans are embedded in a dark, dimensionless pit with only the endless present moment of toiling in blackness, digging

³⁰⁴ As in Western speech, the New International version of the bible uses the term “upright” to describe a person of great moral worth. Job, for instance, is considered to be “upright” as he is a good person (Job 1:1).

³⁰⁵ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 11.

³⁰⁶ Erwin Strauss posits that having an “upright posture” amounts to a psychological position. To be upright is accompanied by an attitude or *Einstellung*, such that verticality is a way of being. Some ritual patterns also play on the theme of verticality, including the religious practices of bowing one’s head, kneeling or lifting one’s arms in prayer. For more information see Erwin Strauss, *Phenomenological Psychology*, trans. Erling Eng (New York: Basic Books, 1960).

³⁰⁷ One might point to the upward progression of the *Homo erectus*, as described by evolutionary biologists, as central to the whole project of verticality and humanity.

³⁰⁸ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 15.

inside of the earth and constantly being pulled down by the gravity of sin.³⁰⁹ The struggle to remain erect is the struggle to be righteous and morally upright. Returning to Faustina, she is intimately familiar with this scenario, and understands perfectly what it is to fear the sinful, downward pull of the earth. She recorded the following in her diary.

I fervently beg the Lord to strengthen my faith, so that in my drab, everyday life I will not be guided by human dispositions, but by those of the spirit. Oh, how everything drags man towards the earth! But lively faith maintains the soul in the higher regions and assigns self-love its proper place... the lowest one.³¹⁰

The vertical orientation of space exemplified or manifested by terrestrial nature is important because it finds corollaries in the discussion of floral manifestation. Above and below, light and darkness, good and evil have been paired in both the natural world and Faustina's own experiences, informing the larger space that she exists in.

Given this pull downwards, and struggle upwards, what can be said of the spatial arrangement of flowers in Faustina's life? How do flowers address the verticality of man struggling in a terrestrial pit, or the yearning upwards of an oak, while negotiating their own orientation of above and below? A simple scan of the horizon reveals that flowers jut skywards; they visibly exist along a vertical axis. Their energy bursts upwards in shooting green stems that unfurl leaves topped with buds, petals, and then colourful, blossoming flowers. French philosopher George Bataille describes this as the "immense movement from earth to sky" in which flowers are lost in a "general thrust from high to low."³¹¹ Despite their often smallish size, flowers *can* be an obvious break in the horizon because we are drawn to them, either because of

³⁰⁹ Faustina was acutely aware of what awaited unfaithful souls and understood that redemption was always possible. Through confession, repentance and intercessory prayer, lost souls could be saved. Knowing the depths of the pain that awaited lost souls, and knowing the ease with which sinners can turn to Jesus for absolution, Faustina was determined to save as many people as she could during her short lifetime.

³¹⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 210.

³¹¹ Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 13.

their colour, delicate form, or attractive fragrance. Below the ground, directionality continues, with their roots creeping in the mud, searching for moisture, for sustenance and deeper darkness. Here the metaphor breaks down, because roots are essential to flowers whereas there is no place for darkness in Faustina's bright, Christian life.

The Ascending Flower and Descending Root

Faustina exhibits a definite preference for talking about the flower and its petals as opposed to the root. She mentions the term root, or *korzeń*, only twice in her diary and these two references appear fairly close together. In the first case she states passionately "O humility, strike deep roots in my whole being."³¹² She then writes "In the meditation on the goal of man, I understood that this truth is deeply rooted in my soul, and that my deeds are therefore the more perfect. I know why I was created. All creatures taken together cannot take the place, for me, of my Creator. I know that God is my ultimate goal and so, in whatever I undertake, I take God into account."³¹³ In this case, she continues to emphasize that roots can penetrate human depths, such that, as an image, they can demonstrate how important truth is to her. Truth is "deeply rooted" in her soul, just as she wishes humility to be.

Faustina never mentions the roots of flowers, trees, or of any other vegetation in her diaries however these observations about the root are largely based on an understanding of the ground, which she does speak about. The ground, for Faustina, is often horrible and disgusting. The ground is, in reality and in her imagination, a place where bodies are buried and violated by the creeping, crawling things that live there. In imagining her own death, Faustina wrote "My body was lowered into the grave, and I said to my soul, 'See what has become of your body, a

³¹² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1306.

³¹³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1329.

heap of dirt teeming with vermin—that is your inheritance.”³¹⁴ While life seeks to move up towards the light, things go down into the dark ground to die. These images can create very real, visceral, negative reactions, which sun soaked petals typically would not. However strange, humanity’s rooted darkness has found expression in the root of the flower. As Karl Rahner stated “Our dark root is sunk in matter and it is not easy to loosen it from thence.”³¹⁵ Faustina recorded an experience of the darkness of mud in May of 1935 when she was woken from sleep by a very young Jesus; in fact, he was only a small child. She witnessed a disturbing scene in the dark earth.

I saw the souls of little children and those of older ones, about nine years of age, emerging from...a muddy abyss. The souls were foul and disgusting, resembling the most terrible monsters and decaying corpses. But the corpses were living and gave loud testimony against the dying soul. And the soul I saw dying was a soul full of the world's applause and honors, the end of which are emptiness and sin.³¹⁶

This was an abyss of spiritual darkness, of evils, of rotting corpses, all situated in mud. Judging from this vision, spiritual sufferings can and do happen in bottomless, muddy ground. Mud carried all of the negative connotations of the dark secrecy of the ground, of the dirtiness which is so irksome, and of death. The home of the root, this muddy abyss, is what makes it additionally problematic. Its counterpart is the sun-soaked flower and so comparatively the root seems odd looking and misshapen in the dark earth. How can roots seem appealing when they are compared to the colourful, patterned petals above?

In these images, Faustina remains close to the Catholic tradition. According to the Catholic tradition the movement from low to high represents a yearning for light and life, a searching for all that is bright and ‘good.’ Conversely the movement from high to low represents

³¹⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1343.

³¹⁵ Rahner, *Greek Myths*, 198.

³¹⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 425.

regression, moral failing, and a return to darkness away from all things good and light. It is this polarity of the root and flower that fascinates and has potential theological implications. Mystery has surrounded the root since early times just as there is mystery in the rooted depths of a human soul.³¹⁷ For St. Augustine there was perhaps something occult in the root; he emphasizes that the root is hidden while only the fruit is visible, “*In occult est radix, fructus videri possunt, radix videri non potest,*” meaning that from the root of a person, hidden parts rise up and reveal the soul.³¹⁸ Doomed flesh and battling spirit are saved through God who offers us redemption; we are a special case of root. Around the same time period as St. Augustine, Gregory the Great wrote

By this root we may understand the nature of man, that nature that is the essential part of him. Even as a root goes in the ground and gradually begins to die, so it is with man, who, according to the nature of his flesh, resolves himself at last into ashes. The root becomes dust, and the beauty of man’s body suffers corruption. But the fragrance of the living water causes the root to revive, and similarly the human body is recreated when the Holy Ghost Descends.³¹⁹

The root of a human being and the root of flora are similar in that both are deeply hidden but represent the core of the thing. Gregory uses the root as a vehicle for theological meaning by turning it into a representation of a person’s body.

While Faustina does not focus on the notion of the root, she refers often to the ground or soil in which roots are necessarily located. According to Bachelard “a root is always a

³¹⁷ Rahner, *Greek Myths*, 181. Bachelard paints the image of a root as a “subterranean, inverted tree” such that it mirrors “aerial reality with a subterranean image.” Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination*, 84. There is something unnatural about this inversion, whereby the tips of the tree or flower might be the roots, touching the sky. Bachelard explains, “A tree growing upside down, whose roots, like a delicate foliage, tremble in the subterranean winds while its branches take root firmly in the blue sky.” Bachelard, *Poetic Imagination*, 85.

³¹⁸ Rahner, *Greek Myth*, 181.

³¹⁹ Rahner, *Greek Myth*, 238.

discovery.”³²⁰ A root is not something to be outright seen, and when it is seen, it is twisted, seemingly disfigured. By nature the root is meant to be buried beneath the ground. There is something visually startling and grotesque about the root, Bachelard claims, such that the root corresponds to a buried, unconscious archetype. The root is dynamic, existing between air and earth, spreading in two directions, “bearing to heaven the juices of earth” and also as “a root going to work among the dead, for the dead.”³²¹ This resembles the impression of the oak tree whose leaves are in heaven, and whose roots exist in the realm of the dead. In Catholic terms the root, as a part of the flowering plant, is a powerful image capable of connecting us with images of heaven (garden paradise of light) and hell (deep, dark abyss in the earth).

Of the two poles of the flower, it is the root that is most often debased in Catholicism. The rooted area is one of lowness, darkness, baseness, earthly passions, bodily sins and spiritual darkness. Bataille describes the association between the baseness of the ground and the baseness of humanity as an “abstraction... strange [and] absurd.”³²² We liken the dirty secrecy of the root to our own dirty, hidden secrets. He describes this villainized “fantastic vision of roots swarming under the surface of the soil, nauseating and naked like vermin” as bizarre and unconvincing.³²³ This imaginative rendering is precisely what attracts morbid curiosity from philosophers and the warnings of theologians. When flowers are chosen they are plucked, that is, they are plucked from the ground leaving behind their dirty bottoms. This plucking leaves their roots intact to “wallow in the ground, loving rottenness just as leaves love light.”³²⁴ The root is the opposite of

³²⁰ Bachelard, *Poetic Imagination*, 84.

³²¹ Bachelard, *Poetic Imagination*, 84-85.

³²² Bataille, *Visions*, 14.

³²³ Bataille, *Visions*, 13.

³²⁴ Bataille, *Visions*, 13.

the sun seeking flower, it encapsulates rottenness. The root and the flower belong to this larger dualism that persists in the Catholic world. Although Faustina leaves the idea of the root essentially untouched, she does associate it with depth, and has clear feelings about the ground from whence it came. The *absence* of the root in her writings also speaks to the primary importance of the flower. Where the root can be understood as dark and dirty, crawling and creeping, the flower is aesthetically beautiful, clean, upright and even *Christian*. Faustina refers to Jesus as a flower, and often the Virgin Mary as a Snow White Lily, a flower without stain.³²⁵ The clean flower and its fragrant petals are fit to represent divinity, but never the dirty root. In this way Faustina enjoys the idealized flower, a perfect flower without a root.

Flowers as Space

*Intimacy needs the heart of a nest.*³²⁶

Having considered different modalities of space, and flowers, it becomes apparent that flowers are not just objects in space. Flowers are *a kind of space*, an active modality of space, and a passageway or meeting point. It is possible for flowers to communicate divine mysteries, to facilitate communication with God and for Faustina, to provide a safe space.³²⁷ Flowers facilitate ‘opening’ for Faustina through their own delicate arrangement of space. Sister Faustina opened her intimate self to the space of God using flowers all while being outwardly hidden from those around her. She affirmed that Jesus loves a hidden soul, and that “a hidden flower is the most fragrant” for God. She strove to be that hidden flower and aimed to make her soul a place

³²⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1735. The Virgin Mary has also been described as a rose without thorn *rosa sine spina*. Fisher, *Flowers of the Renaissance*, 22. She has also been called the mystical Rose or *rosa mystica*, as well as *rosa pudoris* or the rose of modesty. Potter, *The Rose*, 86, 81.

³²⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 65.

³²⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke was a twentieth century poet who suggested that “Through every human being, unique space, intimate space, opens up to the world.” Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 202.

of rest for Jesus.³²⁸ These ideas of hiddenness, interiority and rest attest to a desire for shelter from the outside world through flowers and God. The flower can be a point of access; we may then open ourselves up to its secrecy, to the vulnerability of a flower and to knowledge of God. Faustina was especially eager to engage with God as a flower and to be known to him alone.³²⁹

This quiet contemplation between flower and human can open up space in unique ways. “Two kinds of space,” claims Bachelard, “the space of intimacy and world space—blend. When human solitude deepens, then the two immensities touch and become identical.”³³⁰ For Faustina, this is the space of *God*, meeting with the space of her *soul*. The intimate space of the flower and the space of the world can come together through divine union with God.³³¹ Faustina exclaimed “Oh, how great is Your beauty, Jesus my Spouse! Living Flower enclosing life-giving dew for a thirsting soul! My soul is drowned in You. You alone are the object of my desires and strivings. Unite me as closely as possible to Yourself, to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. Let me live and die in You.”³³² God here is the eternal Living Flower, whose dew is sustaining. Faustina wants to be inside of that flower, and inside of that space, for the entirety of her life and into her death. Faustina desires God as a Living Flower in an intimate, spatially closed way; this space, however small and enclosed, is not limiting. There is something inspiring and expansive about the space of a flower. Bachelard acknowledged this: “The whole sky is contained within the space of a rose. The world lives within a fragrance. The intensity of an inner beauty condenses the beauties

³²⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 275.

³²⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 239.

³³⁰ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 203.

³³¹ Divine union is a merging of a human being with God, and is ineffable in that mystics have difficulty describing, in precise or satisfactory terms, what the experience was like for them. St. Faustina describes her experiences as intense and beyond joyful.

³³² Kowalska, *Diary*, 501.

of an entire universe.”³³³ This expansion of floral space is a common theme within the work of Bachelard, and is also seen in the works of Rilke, quoted here by Bachelard, “These roses: They can barely stand by themselves; many, swollen to the point of bursting, overflow with inner space into days which enclose an ever vaster fullness, until the entire summer becomes a chamber; a chamber within a dream.”³³⁴ Here the rose has morphed into a melding of space, time and fluid consciousness; the inner space of a flower is generous to the point of overflowing. In the Christian tradition Dante Alighieri similarly used the rose in his work *Divine Comedy*. In Dante’s thirtieth canto of Paradise he introduces the enormous, eternal rose that is home to the faithful, a heaven of repose and of divine love.³³⁵ Dante’s rose was heaven itself, a pure white rose with great size and fragrance. How can such immense, eternal places be conceived through the flower? Bachelard explains that “a universe is born from an expanding image” just as the rose expands to accommodate what we imagine it to be.³³⁶ The rose has been entrusted as heaven; for some Christians it has been the most beautiful means available to convey the sense of wholeness and eternal bliss. Bachelard explains that this sentiment has been echoed in Rilke, who waxes poetic about the fate of roses and the world within the flower. Rilke describes the “sweetly intimate body in the heart of the rose: what skies are mirrored within the inner lakes of these open roses.”³³⁷ Through the flower “the world of the soul” opens up, and the flower “bears

³³³ Bachelard, *Poetic Imagination*, 92.

³³⁴ Rilke, “Intérieur de la Rose,” 14.

³³⁵ Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, cantico III. The idea that fragrance is capable of praising God holds a longstanding tradition within Christianity, among other religions, and also plays a major role in Faustina’s relationship with God.

³³⁶ Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, 176.

³³⁷ Rilke, “Intérieur de la Rose,” 14.

witness to a soul which is discovering its world.”³³⁸ Faustina feels God opening to her and accepting her; she claims “I want to hide myself in Your Most Merciful Heart as a dewdrop does in a flower blossom. Enclose me in this blossom against the frost of the world. No one can conceive the happiness which my heart enjoys in its solitude, alone with God.”³³⁹ The inner recesses of a flower are the heart of God, and Faustina is the dew, enclosed and protected from the world. The flower becomes an access point to additional forms of space. For Faustina, contemplating the space of a single flower can open up the space of her soul and bring her closer to God. She describes the intimate space of her soul like a garden where she is for God alone, such that God is the source of nourishment. Her soul opens to God, blossoming and expanding into a garden.³⁴⁰ What does it mean for Faustina to gaze so intently at a flower as to lose herself inside its depth, and find God?

While dealing with flowers, Faustina is negotiating complex, multilayered arrangements of space. The larger cosmology she exists in values heights over depth and light over darkness; her own experiences have reinforced these spatial dichotomies. Flowers are understood in this spatial context in a positive way because they reach upwards and towards God and light; the metaphor of ‘God as sun,’ helps shape this perspective. Space within the flower opens into the intimate space shared by St. Faustina and God; they use this floral privacy to bond and find rest in one another.

A floral presence in space can range from intimate to mundane, blossoming in a person’s garden, or soul, as well as in their potato pots. As a child, Helena was often prevented from going to church on Sunday because her family was too poor to afford respectable clothes for all

³³⁸ Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, 15.

³³⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1395.

³⁴⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 605.

of the children; as a result she and her sisters took turns wearing the ‘good dress’ to go to church. Helena found her own way to become close to God in the garden of her home. When she was not able to attend church she would hide herself away to pray, and read devotional material on her own. As she grew older many forms of devotional space were made available to her however she continued to have a penchant for praying in the garden. There, she felt that she could be alone and converse with God. She describes heading to the garden so that she could “converse with God alone.”³⁴¹ This led to her receiving many visions in garden spaces. The flowers that literally surrounded her during her devotional time obviously made an impression on Helena—her relationship with God was layered with floral meaning. The inner space of flowers came to reflect her exterior surroundings: her soul had become a garden for the presence of God. Faustina sat in the garden to commune with God, while God communed with Faustina in the garden of her soul. She emphasizes the point, stating “under the influence of His rays, my soul has become covered with verdure, flowers, and fruit, and has become a beautiful garden for His repose.”³⁴² She feels herself to be a hidden pleasure garden for God, whose fragrance is pleasing and whose presence is restful. She writes “Jesus loves hidden souls. A hidden flower is the most fragrant. I must strive to make the interior of my soul a resting place for the Heart of Jesus.”³⁴³ She attempts to remake her interior self into a garden of rest for God, just as the garden has been a place of rest for her. These desires are not one sided, Faustina recorded the words of God in her diary saying “You, who are the dispenser of My mercy, tell all the world about My goodness, and thus you will comfort My Heart. I will tell you most when you converse with Me in the depths of

³⁴¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 400.

³⁴² Kowalska, *Diary*, 605.

³⁴³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 275.

your heart. Here, no one can disturb My actions. Here, I rest as in a garden enclosed.”³⁴⁴ God and Faustina are enclosed, rested and protected in each other’s floral spaces; both find rest in each other. This is a reciprocal relationship of rest, protection and a hidden floral intimacy.

The spatio-floral connection in Faustina’s life stems from a larger Catholic tradition where flowers have been markers of holy space and the sacredness of sites is manifest in the spontaneous blossoming of beautiful flowers.³⁴⁵ The following are examples from the Middle Ages of “miraculous” blossoming, ending with a final analogous example from Faustina’s life. According to legends circulating in the twelfth century, the Virgin Mary journeyed to Egypt but because the travel was long and difficult she needed to rest along the way. In each of the spots where young Mary paused for rest, roses sprung up.³⁴⁶ Flowers, as perfectly natural agents, have been transformed into signposts of both rest and God’s presence. These roses miraculously grew in these sacred spaces of Marian repose, acting as beautiful proof of what had taken place there. Roses were deemed fit to demarcate these holy spaces of rest then, as they are today. Flowers are commonly placed on the gravesites of loved ones and can serve as markers of sacred space. Another medieval story about the Assumption of the Virgin Mary has become widespread. It was said that when Mary ascended to heaven, the apostle (Doubting) Thomas could not believe what had happened. He went to Mary’s tomb to see if her body was really absent. When he opened the tomb he found only roses and lilies.³⁴⁷ In a closed, dark space, marked for death and rest alone,

³⁴⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 580-581.

³⁴⁵ Krymow, *Mary’s Flowers*, 21-22. The word sacred is commonly used in Faustina’s diary, and retained in this thesis to denote something that is set apart, holy, or significant in a way related to the divine.

³⁴⁶ Zlotnik, Ann. “Mary’s Flowers.” The Marian Library. <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/flowers.html> (accessed January 15, 2012).

³⁴⁷ Zlotnik, Ann. “Mary’s Flowers.” The Marian Library. <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/flowers.html> (accessed January 15, 2012). This is a legend that has also been physically preserved. The St. Casimir Church in

Thomas found light and colour in floral life. The miraculous site of Mary's empty tomb was made even more striking through the presence of flowers. Flowers were a sign of God, a sign of life, and a sign of the ascension of Mary.

Similarly in *The Golden Legend*, a book from the Middle Ages on the lives of saints, it was recorded that when the apostles came to take Mary's body away "Anon she was environed with flowers of roses, that was the company of martyrs, and with lilies of the valley, that was the company of angels, of confessors and virgins."³⁴⁸ In a place meant for death flowers were specific signals of not just life, but of life eternal. The choice of flowers revealed the state of the deceased—the roses meant she was a martyr, and the lilies that she was a virgin. Through flowers in these spaces there has come faith and wonder. Flowers have sprouted from abstract spaces, such as sites of rest, and death, and have been interpreted as clear signs from God. Another popular legend tells the story of a German monk who was called by God to enter the brotherhood. Although he used to construct floral chaplets for Mary every day, as a monk he had little leisure time, and was unable to make them. The monk, dissatisfied, wanted to abandon his position and return to chaplet making. Before he could do so, God spoke to him. He was told that reciting the Ave Maria replaced the chaplets of roses. The monk was satisfied with this explanation and remained with his order. Later, as he was making a journey by horse, he stopped along the way to pray in the woods. As he did, a thief lay in wait. As the monk prayed, the thief saw that his prayers were visibly turning into roses, emerging from the monk's mouth. Next to him was the figure of a woman, bathed in light, drawing these roses from his mouth, and constructing them into a chaplet. The thief emerged from his hiding spot and told the monk about

Buffalo, New York features a stained glass window of Doubting Thomas finding only the empty tomb filled with flowers.

³⁴⁸ Caxton, *The Golden Legend*, 238.

what he had seen, the thief was so moved that he converted to Christianity.³⁴⁹ Even though the physical flower chaplet was an admirable gift, flower chaplets could also be created *spiritually*. There were spiritual versions of chaplet flowers, created through good works and words. This story is typical of what is seen in the Middle Ages, where through prayer one could provide gifts, including flowers, to Catholic figures in heaven.³⁵⁰ Although the details are different, the same theme of sacred or miraculous flowers materializing in space persists. These accounts help to situate us in the ongoing Catholic relationship with flowers.

Flowers materializing in space, as a divine intervention, are found in the life of Sister Faustina. In her case, hard work is turned into a floral miracle. Sister Faustina was burdened with the difficult task of draining potatoes from boiling water in the kitchen in Vilnius. The pots were exceedingly large and heavy, and given her weakened physical state it seemed an impossible task. After asking her Superior for help, she was told only that it would get easier in time. For a nun growing increasingly weaker, this seemed unlikely, and the more she struggled with these pots, the more water ended up on the floor. She decided to pray to God for his help in this matter. The next time she was meant to drain the potatoes she had great confidence, she rushed over to the stove, picked up the pot and carried it with ease. As she was draining the hot water she looked down and there in the steaming pot, instead of the potatoes, were bunches of beautiful red roses, so beautiful that they were “beyond description.” She heard a voice claiming “I change such hard work of yours into bouquets of most beautiful flowers, and their perfume rises up to My throne.”³⁵¹ Her faith and her hard work were dedicated to God and were gifts to him. Like

³⁴⁹ Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose*, 103.

³⁵⁰ With enough prayers, one could make such an offering to the Virgin, and she, in heaven, could receive the gift. Some gifts for the Virgin Mary included flowers, clothing, jewelry, and even a temple.

³⁵¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 65.

the monk reciting the Aves Maria, her devotion produced flowers; here it was a simple kitchen pot turned into a devotional space by a miracle. Any image or any object could have appeared, but it was the *flower* that was chosen for this miracle, signifying the pleasure of God. No one else around her in the kitchen knew what Faustina has just seen, but it became for her a compelling memory that solidified the connection between God and flowers in her life.

From these examples it is clear that the miracle of roses experienced by Faustina fits within a larger Catholic tradition where flowers are agents of miracles, and signify sacred space. The places where Mary rested were sacred by virtue of her holiness, her empty tomb was the sacred space of her assumption, the monk's lips were the site of devotional prayer, and Faustina's faith and confidence in God was manifest in the blossom-filled pot. These spaces became filled with flowers to signify the significance of that space, and what had transpired there. In all cases the flower has assumed a function of separating or marking space. The physical presence of flowers with their vibrant colours and obvious fragrances alter spaces with their presence, and separate it from other spaces. This is a powerful division which can transform the way we appreciate a floral presence.

The Presence of Flowers in Space

Everyday flowers, not of the miraculous variety, can also transform spaces. Just as young Helena Kowalska marked Mary's altar with flowers next to the pear tree in her backyard, so was her gravesite later marked with flowers. Both of these are cases of demarcating holy spaces of prayer and rest, marking each of these as 'special' simply through care and remembrance. The flowers that young Helena placed on Mary's shrine were altered, they were no longer just wildflowers; they had been purposefully picked and dedicated to Mary. The flowers signified a special place, and themselves became a part of that 'specialness' or holiness. Similarly, the use

of flowers in Catholic worship and ritual transforms the flower *and* the space of the Church. The wild rose of the field is not the same object as the wild rose severed from its roots, strewn before Catholic altars or laid on descending caskets. The empty church is not the same as the church filled with fading, or fragrant floral life. To decorate a chapel with flowers, as Sister Faustina was apt to do, was to include these flowers in the devotional process.³⁵² Flowers, by being appropriated into Catholic space, are understood in a larger Catholic context and the flower is made holy by association in this way.

Philip Fisher claims, in *Making and Effacing Art*, that if you “Take the crucifix out of the cathedral, you take the cathedral out of the crucifix.”³⁵³ The reverse case proves to be just as effective. The aura of sacrality, imbued in every aspect of demarcated Catholic space, alters what inhabits it, and flowers *are* changed in that space. This change is linked with the “audiences’s reception and perception”³⁵⁴ where flowers exist in relation with holy objects and are perceived to have absorbed some of that sacrality.³⁵⁵ For example, flowers gathered by Sister Faustina, were placed around the image of Divine Mercy in its first public appearance during the Jubilee of the Redemption of the World.³⁵⁶ There is a “reciprocal power to define and give meaning to the space” expressed by these floral arrangements.³⁵⁷ The image gives meaning to the flowers, it signifies them as worthy of attention, and the flowers give meaning to the image, as

³⁵² Kowalska, *Diary*, 71.

³⁵³ Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art*, 19.

³⁵⁴ Branham, “Sacrality and Aura,” 38.

³⁵⁵ In the same way that Heidegger has suggested that everything exists relationally, as a piece in a part of a larger system, understood as a part of that system, flowers are perceived as having a new way of being as a part of the sacred. For flowers contextualized in artwork, see Elizabeth Haig, *Floral Symbolism of the Great Masters* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1913).

³⁵⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 89.

³⁵⁷ Branham, “Sacrality and Aura,” 33.

worthy of decoration. There is a shifting here “from the static and locative possession of the object itself [the painting] to the object in conjunction with its context [a floral-decorated image hung at Ostra Brama during the Jubilee], and finally to the critical custody and presence of the viewer [expectant Catholics]” at Ostra Brama.³⁵⁸ The painting as an object is decorated with flowers and hung at the gate during this special time, both painting and flowers together are communicating to the viewer. All who witnessed that image back in April of 1935 witnessed it wreathed in flowers; it was a visual communication and connection between a devotional image and the flower. Flowers became a part of that visual message, and a part of the meaning being translated to onlookers of the image.

Flowers have been appropriated into mythological roles as sacred markers of past, present and future, they have become a part of Church tradition through decoration and miracles, and have evolved into what I have called a “floral theology.” This refers to the Catholic treatment of flowers and their perceived theological significance.³⁵⁹ Heidegger points out that objects are re-contextualized by different webs of assignment-relations.³⁶⁰ An object takes on meaning according to the context it is a part of, and as that context changes, so does a particular object. As Walter Benjamin has suggested, it is the “fabric of tradition” which makes the difference, both Faustina and the image she created belong to a larger Catholic tradition of floral decoration, and floral miracles. The perceived meaning of an object can change based on “spatial and temporal perceptions” of the surroundings.³⁶¹ The perceived meaning of a flower can

³⁵⁸ Branham, “Sacrality and Aura,” 39.

³⁵⁹ The term floral theology is intended to mean a set of Catholic theological beliefs which also involve flowers, either as part of their explanation or as integral to their understanding. For example, the purity of the Virgin Mary, mirrored by the pure white of the Madonna Lily, is part of a floral theology.

³⁶⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 156.

³⁶¹ Branham, “Sacrality and Aura,” 33.

change based on its presence at a baptismal fount, a funeral casket, or as part of an altar display. The flower becomes imbued with the sacrality and gravity of a moment by virtue of its presence in that space. Flowers, because they are so multifarious, can assume these various roles without contradiction, but in each case some of the sacrality becomes imparted to them. Joan Branham describes the ‘desacrilization’ and ‘reconstitution’ present in modernity, where through loss of context, meaning is lost.³⁶² In this particular case the trend moves in the opposite direction, as displacement turns to sacralization. The flower, by being brought into a space that is considered to be holy, is imparted with some of that sacrality.

Flowers can, by virtue of their presence, mark a site as significant. Simply through their presence they may indicate some care, thoughtfulness or intentionality. In the Catholic context, they have been brought into sacred spaces, like at Ostra Brama, and become a part of that sacred landscape by virtue of their presence. The place of flowers in miracles, like Faustina’s miracle of the roses, only adds to their credibility as markers of sacrality. Flowers unquestionably took on a sacred role in the life of Faustina, and it is that sacrality that has been the most significant for her.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church has held onto the powerful image of the flower, which remains vibrant in the minds of its practitioners. For Faustina, as for Christian tradition, flowers have been spatially aligned with the dualisms of light, height, goodness and heaven juxtaposed against darkness, depth, evil and hell. As organisms reaching upwards towards the light it is clear that flowers represent what is good in the world. Faustina understood flowers as reaching towards,

³⁶² Branham, “Sacrality and Aura,” 33. Branham is referring here to inanimate objects however the point functions for deracinated flowers as well, which are dying and approaching stillness if they are not already inanimate.

and blossoming for, God; they are even nourished by his divine rays quite literally when God is understood as the sun. The floral striving for light mirrors the human struggles for verticality or uprightness. Faustina resisted the downward pull of the earth and its physicality; she preferred to exist on a higher, spiritual, airy plane.

Flowers remain a significant feature of the faith by resting at the center of miraculous spatial realities. In Faustina's life the ordinary potato pot is made extraordinary through the miracle of roses. The power of the flower rests in its symbolic strength as a miraculous sign from God, as a harbinger of divine realities to come, and as a source of personal joy; Faustina's roses fulfilled all three of these. Many Catholics use flowers to meditate on sacred spaces and events in those spaces just as Faustina has reclaimed the vibrancy of flowers in her lived space.

In the life of Faustina, as in the larger Catholic Church, flowers exist not only in mundane spaces but have been recontextualized as sacred entities. They have grown beyond their biological function to become part of mythic Catholic history—they have assumed a new context as elements woven in a fabric of tradition. Flowers are caught up in larger streams of emotion, tradition, theology and Catholic perspectives. They exist within the religio-culture of Catholicism, and help shape Catholic understanding of the faith. It is the interpretive power of believers which decide how flowers add a dimension of meaning to churches, and how churches add dimensions of meaning to flowers. For Faustina, who has communed with flowers from childhood to adulthood, flowers once existed in spaces outside of her and then were internalized until her very soul had become an enclosed garden for the repose of God.³⁶³ She transitioned from worshipping God in the presence of flowers, to worshipping God through the aid of flowers. Flowers were no longer exterior to her, but had become an interior feature—she relished

³⁶³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 580-581.

the enclosed, secretive nature of the flower, and *being* a hidden flower. The intimate spaces within a flower inspire Faustina to intimately, secretly, engage with God. She uses the enclosed floral space as a way to visualize her relationship with God, a secret, protected, comforting relationship, and to communicate with him. She moves between hiding in the flower of God, and becoming a hidden garden for God. In the first case she is entering into the flower's protected space, and then possessing that secret, comforting space within. In Faustina's life flowers were integral to her spatial orientation and connection with God as she identified floral spaces outside of herself, within herself, and also within God.

CHAPTER FIVE: FLOWERS IN TIME

O my most sweet Master, good Jesus, I give You my heart. You shape and mold it after Your liking. O fathomless love, I open the calyx of my heart to You, like a rosebud to the freshness of dew. To You alone, my Betrothed, is known the fragrance of the flower of my heart. Let the fragrance of my sacrifice be pleasing to You. O Immortal God, my everlasting delight, already here on earth You are my heaven. May every beat of my heart be a new hymn of praise to You, O Holy Trinity! Had I as many hearts as there are drops of water in the ocean or grains of sand in the whole world, I would offer them all to You, O my Love, O Treasure of my heart! Whomever I shall meet in my life, no matter who they may be, I want to draw them all to love You, O my Jesus, my Beauty, my Repose, my sole Master, Judge, Savior and Spouse, all in one; I know that one title will modify the other—I have entrusted everything to Your mercy.³⁶⁴

Faustina is acutely sensitive to the temporal nature of her existence; the quote above is revisited with the intention of focusing on *time*. It demonstrates Faustina's perception of time, with a dynamic present alongside a yearning for the eternal future. Just as the freshness of dew comes at a pristine moment in time, so is the moment to moment beating of her heart captured here. Faustina's time is measured in heartbeats, and with every beat, there comes the desire to praise God. She is a continual sacrifice, producing floral scents that waft above from moment to moment. God is an *everlasting* delight, his title is permanent; he is ever Judge and Spouse to Faustina. Faustina appreciates that she presently resides on earth, but that there is a heaven that awaits her, and through God, she can have a foretaste of that heaven in the here and now. Looking to the future, she promises to bring souls to Jesus as she encounters them on earth. The permanency of God is contrasted by the moment to moment temporality of her beating heart, the uncertainty of meeting new souls is contrasted by continual certainty from God, and the immediacy of the earth is contrasted by the imminence of heaven. Ultimately, Faustina understands time in the context of her relationship with God, and the ongoing stages of her floral, sacrificial presence.

³⁶⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1064.

Introduction: Time and Flowers in the Writings of St. Faustina

Time, like space, is experienced subjectively, yet often described objectively. In the contemporary world time is measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, years or seasons, however there are moments in time that, when experienced, elude such precise measurement and find their own internal temporality. Very joyful moments may pass by quickly, while difficult times seem to unfold slowly. On another level, Catholicism follows a teleological, linear view of time whereby historical events are purposefully leading to an ultimate end—the second coming of Christ and end of the world. Flowers can be a unique tool in appreciating time. The choreographed movements of floral life are easily imagined as a microcosm of all of existence. A flower can *be* the whole world as a fresh blossoming existence of light and life. When the flower first opens, all of life can be imagined to awaken with it. From the first unfolding leaf in the morning inevitably comes the first folding of the flower in the evening. Most flowers (like humans) follow a diurnal rhythm. From their opening at dawn to their closing at dusk, observing floral life brings greater familiarity with nature’s cycles and allows for self-insight into one’s life. The flower is a slow moving entity responding to its own cycles of wakefulness and sleep.³⁶⁵ Subtle changes of folding and unfolding, stretching and growing can amount to the very unfurling of life.³⁶⁶ Unlike the tree that is ancient and seemingly immortal, the flower is much more transitive, and as such closer to the human life. The regular death of the perennial flower and the resurrection of the annual flower calm us in its slow moving, predictable ways. These predictable cycles resonate with Faustina’s life.

³⁶⁵ Night-blooming flowers are among the minority and not mentioned by Faustina; this thesis focuses on the majority of flowers which blossom in the sunlight.

³⁶⁶ Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist, planned a “flower clock” composed of blossoms that would open and close at different times of the day, revealing the hour. See Linnaeus, Carolus. *Linnaeus's Philosophia Botanica*. Translated by Stephen Freer. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

This chapter asks how Faustina temporally engages with flowers, and how these interactions relate back to God. “Orientation in Time,” situates the reader in Faustina’s perception of time. Already, in the quote above from her diary, we encounter several different temporal dimensions that can be elucidated further from the internal time of a flower to larger expanses of time in sacred, mythological gardens. “Experiences in Time,” presents examples of these existential intersections of flowers and time in Faustina’s life, ending with a consideration of flowers and death. One final example from the gardens of Japan exemplifies the union between time and space in human experience using Faustina as a model.

Orientation in Time

Gardens in Time: The Gardens of Eden, Paradise and Gethsemane

*The poetic garden dominates all the gardens of the earth such that they are grander and more tragic.*³⁶⁷

Gardens throughout Christian history have been remade in the likeness of Christian ideals, gardens and flowers have existed outside of ordinary space and time, outside of ordinary history to become a part of Christian tradition. In fact, gardens have served as powerful teleological markers in Catholic narrative. This is significant because Faustina has adopted some of these markers, and experienced them in her own life. The very first human environment, imagined by Christians, and before them by their predecessors, was a garden—the Garden of Eden. The flower had a home in this idyllic environment at the beginning of everything; thinking back onto the most perfect, sinless time imaginable, the image of a flower is present. The floral presence on earth today, in churches and gardens, can be understood as shadows of that time and also as forerunners of a more perfect garden to come. Often in Catholic tradition the garden of

³⁶⁷ Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, 154-155.

Paradise is thought to be waiting at the end of all time. Catholics look back to the Garden of Eden, and look forward to the Paradisical Garden all while being sustained by the current, temporal gardens of earth.

Although the bible makes no specific mention of flowers in the Garden of Eden, flowers have popularly been associated with that original garden. The Garden of Eden was a place without sin, and medieval Christians have reflected on what this may have meant for flowers. A medieval legend addresses the beautiful, vulnerable state of roses before the advent of sin. Before the Fall of mankind roses grew without thorns in the Garden of Eden; the descent of humanity was linked with the “thorning” of roses.

Before man’s fall the rose was born,
St. Ambrose says, without the thorn.
But for man’s fault then was the thorn
Without the fragrant rose-bud born;
But ne’er the rose without the thorn.³⁶⁸

The damaging effects of sin corrupted the floral body, marking it with the violence of thorns, which stand as a sign of the fallen state of nature. The absence of thorns also marks a holy, sinless period. Eve, like Eden, was changed by the Fall and it took another woman, Mary, to set things right. The idea of Mary as a thornless rose corresponds to her sinlessness. An interesting fifth century Biblical epic, *Carmen Paschale* by the Latin Poet Sedulius, features Mary in this way.

As blooms among the thorns the lovely rose, herself without a thorn,
The glory of the bush whose crown she is,
So, springing from the root of Eve, Mary the new Maiden
Atoned for the sin of that first Maiden long ago.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ Herrick, “The Rose,” 287. Robert Herrick was a seventeenth century English poet, who published this verse in 1648.

³⁶⁹ See Sedulius. *Sedulius Opera Omnia*. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1967; Potter, *The Rose*, 80.

Clearly, roses have been used as stark markers of sinless and sinful people, and places. Here, Mary is the sinless, thornless rose that exists among sinful, thorned people, coming herself from a legacy of the sinful Eve.

Thorns have been attributed with important theological roles linked with pain and salvation. In Catholic tradition, as well as in Faustina's writing,³⁷⁰ we explicitly see the flower and thorn together, with the thorn representing a hardship or obstacle to be overcome.³⁷¹ Thorns are perhaps most recognized as crowning of the Son of God during the Passion. According to scripture, thorns are said to be of the instruments of torture used during the crucifixion of Christ, and the crown of thorns is standard today as a symbol of the Passion. Even more to the point the floral category of 'wild pinks' in Germany were renamed *Nagelblume* or 'nailflower' because of their shape, and were thought to symbolize the nails used to crucify Christ.³⁷² This renaming is a re-forging, giving power through a name, such that these flowers hold a piece of the mystery of the Passion. Flowers have become caught up in the cyclical reoccurrence of the Passion, now symbolized by the thorn. The *Nagelblume* was meant to bear the weight of the crucifixion nails. Thorns persisted in time, as did the knowledge of the crown of thorns as a holy crown of suffering. Faustina has intimate knowledge of thorns as instruments of torture and of the crown of thorns in particular. Faustina took on the crown of thorns, and her body suffered from them,

³⁷⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1735; Mizia, *Letters*, 181.

³⁷¹ There are instances in Faustina's diary when the thorn is used without directly referring to a flower and in these cases it cannot be assumed that this thorn belongs to a flower. Still, the connection between thorns and flowers has been made in Faustina's mind, and in the larger Catholic consciousness. For this reason we also consider the case of thorns in Faustina's work, even when not explicitly linked with flowers.

³⁷² These flowers were a new flower of the Renaissance, not seen in medieval gardens, and so this is a later symbol. Fisher, *Flowers of the Renaissance*, 65-68.

though they left no mark.³⁷³ Faustina felt this crown of thorns on five separate occasions during her life at the convent and recorded her experiences in her diary. She recalled “I suddenly felt the terrible pain of a crown of thorns on my head. It lasted for quite a long time.”³⁷⁴ The thorn remains an instrument of torture in Faustina’s life, and gives her cause to reflect on the earthly nature of suffering. Faustina has extended this idea to include suffering into salvation. The thorn provides an instructive and therefore meaningful suffering in imitation of Christ. This event in the past, the Passion, is realized in Faustina’s present, through the presence of thorns in her life. Faustina links thorns with flowers and suffering in her writing—referring to the “virgin flower” she explained

Although the virgin's path is strewn with thorns,
And her life bristles with many a cross,
Who is as brave as she?
Nothing will break her; she is invincible.³⁷⁵

Thorns are an obstacle in the life of the good Christian; they represent a challenge to overcome just as Christ did. Faustina tells us that if one wishes to be “Jesus’ flower” it will require a walk along a path of thorns, the same path that Jesus walked.³⁷⁶

If you wish to be Jesus’ flower,
Set out on a path of thorns,
Jesus followed it first for you,
So that you could live forever with the angels in heaven.³⁷⁷

³⁷³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 41, 70, 291, 348-349, 759, 1399, 1619.

³⁷⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 290.

³⁷⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1735.

³⁷⁶ Faustina also used the phrase a “thorn in someone’s side” in a letter written to Father Sopocho in February of 1938. The thorn referred to sufferings caused by personal sanctity; these are for her ‘thorns of life.’ Kowalska, *Diary* 153, 1653, 1735. Mizia, *Letters*, 107

³⁷⁷ This was a Christmas wish to Sister Beniamina, written by Sister Faustina in 1937. Mizia, *Letters*, 181.

This passage emphasizes the past when Jesus walked the path, the present in a wish to be Jesus' flower, and also the future through a reference to the angels in heaven. All forms of temporality are united here using the imagery of the flower. For Faustina, no other symbol could encompass the Christian message of obedience, even in suffering, more perfectly than the flower. Suffering is to be expected when you follow Jesus: to be Jesus' flower thorns need to be overcome, they produce a short lived pain but also an eternal reward. Thorns become an additional layered symbol of what it means to exist on a sinful earth, they are said to have originated from sin, but can also be used as agents of meaningful suffering patterned after the suffering of Christ. In the walk with Christ, Christians learn to negotiate the roles of flowers and of thorns, to behave as Jesus did, and treat flowers in an appropriate way. The flower is a model for human life, making it possible to conceive of obstacles and goals in floral terms.

After the Garden of Eden and the thorning of the world, humanity is given a distant Paradise to look forward to where flowers maintain their perfection once more. Paradise is the most complete and lasting happiness imagined by Christians and has often been envisioned as a garden of flowers. A number of notable Catholics have attested to this floral presence in Paradise, like St. Cecilia, a saint from the third century. St. Cecilia was a Roman martyr who preserved her virginity for God, even after being married to her husband, Valerian. She was visited by an angel who said to her "Guard these [floral] crowns with spotless hearts and pure bodies because I have brought them to you from God's paradise, and they will never fade or lose their fragrance, nor ever be seen by any except those who love chastity."³⁷⁸ Flowers present in Paradise are eternally fragrant, beautiful, and accessible even on earth through this divine messenger. God's paradise is filled with beautiful, never fading flowers. St. Dorothy, another

³⁷⁸ Potter, *The Rose*, 76-77.

virginal martyr from the fourth century, was sentenced to be executed. On the way to her execution a young lawyer named Theophilus mocked St. Dorothy by asking for the fruits of her paradise garden. Just before Dorothy's death, an angel was said to have visited Theophilus and delivered to him three apples and three roses as evidence of the Paradise garden.³⁷⁹ It was a *real* garden as was made evident from the tangible fruits produced; it was also a garden that existed in the present for saints who can already enjoy its pleasures.

The question of paradise becomes especially important for martyrs who undergo great suffering before their heavenly reward. What is this heaven like, that is so sought after and suffered for? In early martyrology, martyrs were believed to reside at a "*paradisal locus amoenus*" or a paradise garden.³⁸⁰ St. Cyprian, living in 258 A.D., and St. Jerome living around 400 A.D., praised roses and named them as a reward that martyrs would find in Heaven.³⁸¹ St. Cyprian encouraged Christians to die for their faith and win the "red crown of roses." Since then the red rose has always been a martyrs' symbol.³⁸² The image of Paradise as a garden finds support in the visions of mystics. St. Faustina contributed her own visions of this garden tradition; she recorded it in her diary as follows.

One day, I saw two roads. One was broad, covered with sand and flowers, full of joy, music and all sorts of pleasures. People walked along it, dancing and enjoying themselves. They reached the end without realizing it. And at the end of the road there was a horrible precipice; that is, the abyss of hell. The souls fell blindly into

³⁷⁹ Potter, *The Rose*, 77. St. Dorothy is featured with her basket in *The Paradise Garden* (1420) painted by an unknown Master painter.

³⁸⁰ Miller, "Blue Flower," 232.

³⁸¹ See Jean Gordon, *The Pageant of the Rose* (New York: Studio Publications, 1953); Charles Joret, *La Rose dans L'Antiquité et au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1892).

³⁸² Beam, and Sipress, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 121. St. Thérèse of Lisieux is often pictured with flowers as is St. Elizabeth of Hungary, the former was known as the little flower of Jesus, and the latter experienced a miracle of bread turning into roses.

it; as they walked, so they fell. And their number was so great that it was impossible to count them. And I saw the other road, or rather, a path, for it was narrow and strewn with thorns and rocks; and the people who walked along it had tears in their eyes, and all kinds of suffering befell them. Some fell down upon the rocks, but stood up immediately and went on. At the end of the road there was a magnificent garden filled with all sorts of happiness, and all these souls entered there. At the very first instant they forgot all their sufferings.³⁸³

Those walking the easy, sinful path enjoyed the *temporal* flowers of the earth, while those who suffered would enter into an *immortal* garden of floral beauty. While earthly flowers represent passing pleasures, those flowers pictured in heaven point to a life of eternal, pleasurable beauty.³⁸⁴ The floral image is great enough to encompass positive and negative temporal aspects of Catholicism: passing as well as lasting pleasures. Flowers are present in both of these cases, tying together heaven and earth in very different ways. What does it mean that Catholics like Faustina envision both luxury and licentiousness using the image of flowers? The floral symbol is strong enough, and flexible enough, to accommodate a range of theological emphases, while the flower's thorns remains an agent of meaningful suffering. The interpretation of the earthly flower differs, even within the works of Sister Faustina; such is the flexibility of the flower.

Our last garden, Gethsemane, does not bring closeness through joy like the Garden of Eden or Paradise. Instead, this garden brings intimacy through great spiritual and physical suffering. The Garden of Gethsemane was a site of great torment for Christ, and he has invited Faustina to partake of that struggle. Gethsemane also became a general expression of darkness

³⁸³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 153.

³⁸⁴ It was a short leap to using gardens as tools of moral instruction, passed down from human and divine renderings, as commonly seen in the twelfth century. See Ellen Kosmer, "Gardens of Virtue in the Middle Ages." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978): 302-307. The twelfth century manuscript of *hortus conclusus* also describes an allegorical garden containing rivers, trees, virtues, beatitudes, and church members, all coming out from the central Christ figure. These kinds of theological ideas spreading from the garden, such as the "garden of virtues" take differing forms. The human soul might be looked upon as a garden filled with plants (virtue) or weeds (vice). This is reminiscent of the Parable of the sower told by Jesus. The *Somme le roi* triggers the virtue garden imagery according to Kosmer. In the *Somme*, the good individual is the garden, God is the gardener, Christ the sun and the Holy Spirit is an assistant gardener who plants virtues. Kosmer, "Gardens of Virtue," 302-303.

for her; she refers to a “soul...in the shadows of Gethsemane” as a soul undergoing a great trial.³⁸⁵ She has been transported in time to experience that garden of pain. Faustina accompanied Jesus into the Garden of Gethesame, and there she suffered with him again. This ancient garden space becomes the site torment for Faustina, who has chosen to face the darkness there.

I spent the whole night with Jesus in Gethsemane. From my breast there escaped one continuous moan. A natural dying will be much easier, because then one is in agony and will die; while here, one is in agony, but cannot die. O Jesus, I never thought such suffering could exist. Nothingness: that is the reality...But the darkness does not recede, and my spirit plunges into even greater agony. And at that moment, such terrible torment overwhelmed me that now I am amazed at myself that I did not breathe my last, but this was for only a brief instant.³⁸⁶

Gethsemane exists as a liminal space between life and death as a site of meaning, producing a worthy suffering. Despite all of the bitterness, the soul that suffers “is not sad” claims Faustina, because she is ascending to Jesus through the pain of the garden.³⁸⁷ This garden had become, for Faustina, a place to be closer with Christ through a shared suffering.

Flowers are central to Catholic understandings of time because they are a component of temporally localized gardens of yesterday (Eden), today (Gethsemane) and an eternal tomorrow (Paradise). Like Christians, flowers will also be there at the end of time, existing in an eternal Paradisiacal Garden.³⁸⁸ Humanity rests suspended between two legendary gardens of bliss, one

³⁸⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 995.

³⁸⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1558.

³⁸⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 995.

³⁸⁸ A late twelfth century manuscript called the *Speculum Virginum* further elaborates on the mystical flowers present in Paradise. See Arthur Watson, *The Speculum Virginum* (Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1928).

realized (Eden) and one yet to come (Paradise). The thorny gardens of earth are likewise suspended in time between these states, one longed to return to, one longed to achieve.

Gardens can become, like the flower itself, more than a living entity. It can be a point of speculation which holds and uniquely presents the mysteries of temporal life and beyond. Gardens have long been a defining factor in Catholic eschatology, specifically in what heaven will be like. For a taste of life at the end of all time Catholics need simply to enter an earthly garden and imagine. The flower provides more than an intellectual linkage between the past and the future, it provides an affective presence capable of acting as both inspiration and role model, as demonstrated below.

Experiences of Time

The Predictable Movements of the Flower in Time

*Flowers are without hope. Because hope is tomorrow and flowers have no tomorrow.*³⁸⁹

Reminiscent of human life, flowers pass through regular temporal cycles that are dependant on light. Flowers transition through stages of developmental growth as they bud, blossom and then fade. They progress through stages of the day, from morning to noon and night. Finally they are also subject to seasons of the year, from springtime to winter. All of these rhythms point to the dynamic quality Faustina recognizes in the flower as created beings that, like her, exist in time.

Time and space are embodied seamlessly in the flower, where slow moving petals trace the passage of time. Flowers are visual markers of time—as time passes, their floral spaces expand, making their progression explicitly visual. Petals unfold and unfurl, expanding in space,

³⁸⁹ See Antonio Porchia, *Voces Reunidas*, trans. W.S. Merwin (Buenos Aires: Alción Edición, 2006).

until they are ready to close tightly, compactly, again. Flowers mimic our own living and dying on a scale that is easier to appreciate because of their shorter lifespan. Through them time acquires a face; time can be localized and identified in the flower which lives and dies obviously. This embodied floral time has “its own great, peaceful rhythm” whose instructive peace can attach itself to us.³⁹⁰ We may measure ourselves against the flowers, as Bachelard suggests.

We really dream of the power of the bud...[when] we go into the garden or walk along a hedge every morning to look at a bud, the same bud, and... measure a day's activity by it. And when a flower is about to open, when the apple tree is about to produce light, its very own pink and white light, then we will really know that a single tree is a whole world.³⁹¹

In monitoring the progression of the bud, we are marking the movement of time. A flower blossoms in time just as its beauty grows in time, realizing its powerful potential. Flowers exist in their own time and light such that they, or the blossoming tree, may itself seem to be a microcosm of the greater world.

In St. Faustina's diary, we can see how, in watching a flower, Faustina is observing the passage of time, and through the flower she appreciates what it is to age and die. She describes the joy of being “like a wild flower under the feet of Jesus, wilting slowly and delighting His divine heart” with one's fragrance.³⁹² This slow wilting is akin to the slow death that she is all too familiar with. Flowers teach her how to die beautifully and with purpose, wafting their delicate aroma as they go. Faustina often speaks of her floral fragrance being released for God

³⁹⁰ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 224. There are thus flowers which accompany us through life, changing a little in nature as we change. Through flowers, claims Bachelard, there is a, “particular kind of reverie. Vegetable reverie is the slowest, most tranquil, most restful of all reveries...The vegetable world faithfully retains the memories of happy reveries. It gives them new life every spring. And, in exchange, it seems that our reverie gives it greater growth, more beautiful flowers, human flowers.” Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 203.

³⁹¹ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 224.

³⁹² Pior, *Letters*, 154.

alone, and here she has found a way to visualize her slow death and devotion to God. Flowers remain silent but their passage in life is profound, especially when they become symbolic of our own passage, and we borrow cues from flowers to teach us how to die gracefully, as Faustina has done.

Flowers Budding, Blossoming and Fading

For Faustina, flowers served as an allegory for human temporality; like flowers we are subject to time, capable of budding, blossoming, and eventually fading. The life cycle of a flower is paired with Faustina's own perspective, such that their progress through time assumes additional religious meaning. The initial stage of floral growth is one of budding, and correlatively, Faustina often uses the form of a rosebud to describe herself in relation to God. Her heart, she claims, opens like a rosebud, and rests like a rosebud at the feet of Jesus.³⁹³ The rosebud is modest and hidden in itself, existing at the initial, early stages of growth, as if representing spiritual immaturity and humility. Buds, however, will not always remain closed. Faustina's flowers are allowed to open themselves fully to blossom in God. To blossom in God is to fully engage, to hold nothing back and to open completely. Faustina describes this in her diary as she says "I want to blossom for my Lord and Maker, to forget about myself, to empty myself totally for the sake of immortal souls—this is my delight."³⁹⁴ Faustina has desired to *become* the blossoming flower; she aspires to that visible, yet hidden, display. Similarly, in her good works Faustina "weaves thousands of garlands" and knows that they will all "blossom."³⁹⁵ Her good works will come to fruition; they will grow in their blossoming and find visible

³⁹³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1064; Kowalska, *Diary*, 239.

³⁹⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 224.

³⁹⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 4.

recognition. Faustina is working against the feelings she has of nothingness, and feeling herself to be emptied. By blossoming in God she is acquiring a fullness of self. Faustina, in the process of blossoming, achieves fullness contrary to the nothingness she often experiences. Through God, and the flower, Faustina's life is filled with meaning. Faustina asserts that only God can fill her soul, and turn it from a barren desert to a lush garden.³⁹⁶ The flower, from bud to blossom, is an expression of spiritual growth in time. Faustina experiences her own times of great joy through devotion,³⁹⁷ extreme suffering in spiritual darkness,³⁹⁸ and love in divine union with God³⁹⁹ all the while being accompanied by flowers.

Human seasons of youthful spring, growing summer, maturing fall and aging winter become apparent by observing the flower. Flowers cycle and recycle themselves in honest and observable ways. "No contradiction exists," suggests Bachelard, "in the vegetable world. Their rhythms are sure and predictable, their lives are organic and honest, flowers do not deceive, they expand and grow until it is time to die their own deaths, which they do."⁴⁰⁰ The floral life is a simpler version of our own because it is visible in its entirety, we can watch thousands grow and die in our lifetime. Floral movements are curious in that they are too slow to witness, unlike human movement. Their lives, however, pass quickly, such that we can observe the stages of their development and death within a season. The image of the flower can root us, situating us firmly on earth, bringing us face to face with the slowness of the earth and our own inevitable

³⁹⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 605.

³⁹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1105.

³⁹⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1120.

³⁹⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 142.

⁴⁰⁰ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 224. Flowers often seem to inspire meditation in Faustina's life, Bachelard concurs that "There are literary images that involve us in vague, silent reflections. Then we become aware that a deep silence is incorporated into the image itself." Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 251. The profound nature of the reverie is apparent in Faustina's life as expressed through her writings.

return to the earth. Slow moving images, like flowers, are linked with the gravest of life's moments, these are times of extreme joy (births), grief (death) or love (marriage).

Faustina associates the temporary nature of our time on earth with flowers; just like the flower, we are not here for very long. Faustina exclaimed in her poem to the virgin flower "O virgin, lovely flower, You will not remain much longer in this world...The very blaze of the noon-day sun, Dims, and darkens in the presence of a virgin heart."⁴⁰¹ We can learn much about our own mortality by appreciating the immediate and temporal presence of flowers in their natural habitat. Life wears one down like a hot sun, until we too are "wilting" in the presence of Jesus, claims Faustina.⁴⁰² The passage of time, so obviously written on the floral body, finds corollaries with Bachelard's theory of time taking on a "material reality."⁴⁰³ Through established rhythms, physical realities can become temporal realities. The example of *lithochronos* is a case in point where temporality is based on a "stone's hardness [and], can only be defined as the active time of work."⁴⁰⁴ The slowness of working time corresponds to the hardness of the material, where the pace of the work marks the time that has passed. The flower can be understood in a similar vein; its physical reality is also its temporal reality. Flowers transform from seeds, buds, shoots, leaves, blossoms and finally they wilt; in this progression the floral body physically manifests the progression of a life in time. As a rough corollary, floral height grows as a function of time, until it peaks with a fully grown stem, and then declines as the stalk bends and withers, forming a bell curve. Flowers are demonstrating the possibility of a vertical

⁴⁰¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1735. Although scholars have written about the connection between sexuality and flowers, it is a connection that Faustina does not explore in her writing and so cannot be pursued in this thesis.

⁴⁰² Pior, *Letters*, 154.

⁴⁰³ Bachelard, *Earth and Will*, 16.

⁴⁰⁴ Bachelard defines *Lithochronos* as "A temporality whose dialectic is defined by the effort of the laborer and the resistance of the rock, it operates as a kind of natural and bracing rhythm." Bachelard, *Earth and Will*, 16.

witnessing of time. In Faustina's life flowers have moved even outside and beyond ordinary time for she had models of gardens in Christian history.

Flowers Progressing through Stages of the Day

Flowers pass through the hours and stages of a day in the same way a person might. They rouse in the morning by stretching open their petals, they carry out their sunsoaked day, and curl up to sleep in the evening. The most cherished moment of the floral day is the morning.

The Lord said to me, I am delighted with your love. Your sincere love is as pleasing to My Heart as the fragrance of a rosebud at morningtide, before the sun has taken the dew from it. The freshness of your heart captivates Me; that is why I unite Myself with you more closely than with any other creature.⁴⁰⁵

According to Faustina, God reported that the morning is a time of floral freshness because the dew, deposited the night before, has not yet been dried by the sun. Faustina's heart encompasses that dewy, morning freshness, and captivates God.⁴⁰⁶ She emphasizes this point again, "I open the calyx of my heart to You, like a rosebud to the freshness of dew."⁴⁰⁷ The temporality of the flower, freshest in the morning as it is steeped in dew, is a time of great closeness and joy for God and Faustina alike. As Faustina records her hymns of praise, she makes the request

Come, hills and valleys, sighing woods and thickets,
Come, lovely flowers of morningtide;
Let your unique scent
Adore and glorify God's mercy.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1546.

⁴⁰⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1546.

⁴⁰⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1064.

⁴⁰⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1750.

The flowers are lovely in the morningtide and their scent is best captured at that time. This is a time of freshness, of closeness, of opening to God.⁴⁰⁹ The flowers here are also a part of creation at large; they are listed along with hills and valleys, and those woods and thickets which seem to be personified in their sighing. The flower is unique and prized for its morning scent, which is an adoration and glorification of God's mercy. The intense heat of the noonday sun on the other hand is difficult for flowers to bear.

O virgin, lovely flower, You will not remain much longer in this world.
Oh, how beautiful your loveliness, My pure bride!
The very blaze of the noon-day sun Dims, and darkens in the presence of a virgin
heart.⁴¹⁰

Just as a flower struggles with the strong heat at noon, so the same language expresses the troubles of the virginal flower, whose heart is darkened by adversity. Where once the sun represented the warming rays of God, now it is the cruel, desiccating end to a flower's life where brightness turns to darkness through intense heat. These temporal floral stages of morning and noon have moral corollaries for Faustina, whereby the morning is a time of fresh devotion and noon a time of trial.

The Seasonal Stages of the Flower

Just as a particular time of day best encapsulates the pinnacle of floral perfection, so does a particular season. The morning is the freshest part of the day after a long sleep and the spring is prized as a season of great awakening for floral life after a long winter. The calendar season of spring finds a corollary with the liturgical season of Eastertide.⁴¹¹ More than simply new

⁴⁰⁹ Although Morningtide is also a type of flower in English, the polish term *rannej porze* means morning time.

⁴¹⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1735.

⁴¹¹ See Schmidt, Leigh Eric. "The Easter Parade: Piety, Fashion, and Display." In *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 135-164.

beginnings in nature, it represents a time of new life for Christians, in the resurrection of Jesus and through him all of humanity. Flowers follow these seasonal patterns, and can take on added meaning in the Catholic imagination.

In her discussion of springtime Faustina reveals her intimate connection with the rhythms of the natural world, and the role of flowers in the spring of the year. She recorded in a letter to Father Sopocho on May 6th of 1937 “And now as to myself, I am enjoying good health. I work in the garden. It looks beautiful, particularly at this time of year when all trees are in bloom. This lifts my soul to God.”⁴¹² The springtime is a time of uplifted spirits, of recognizing joy in nature, and of lifting that joy to God. Another passage, markedly different, was recorded on May 5th just a day earlier, while her soul was still in spiritual darkness.

When I went out into the garden, I saw how everything was breathing the joy of spring. The trees, adorned with flowers, gave off an intoxicating odour. Everything was throbbing with joy, and the birds were singing and chirping their adoration of God and said to me, "Rejoice and be happy, Sister Faustina"; but my soul remains in torment and darkness. My soul is so sensitive to the rustle of grace [that] it knows how to talk with all created things and with everything that surrounds me, and I know why God has adorned the earth in this way...But my heart cannot be joyful because my Beloved has hidden Himself from me, and I will not rest until I find Him.⁴¹³

Spring is not just a change effected by weather conditions, occurring on a predetermined calendric date.⁴¹⁴ Faustina recognizes the springtime as inherently joyful and as a time when nature is capable of *experiencing* joy. Nature emits a dynamic, contagious, throbbing feeling of being thoroughly alive. The expected human response, which Faustina is unable to achieve, is to

⁴¹² This was recorded in a letter by Sister Faustina to Father Sopocho, dated May 6th, 1937. Mizia, *Letters*, 95.

⁴¹³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1120.

⁴¹⁴ The phenomenological project, claims van Manen, has sources which allow us to “see our limits and to transcend the limits of our interpretive sensibilities,” it is precisely this kind of transcendence that enables us to see springtime transformed into a dynamic quality of the earth. Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 76.

reciprocate that joy. Spring delights the senses with intoxicating fragrances, with beautiful music and with visually pleasing floral adornments. This is not a coincidence, for according to Faustina, God does this intentionally. God has “adorned the earth” in this way, and Faustina knows why. These things stem from the grace of God for human enjoyment as a gift accessible to all.

The Temporal Cycles of Floral Life

Faustina reveals another gift—she is able to “talk with all created things” because she is so attuned to the natural world.⁴¹⁵ Flowers then are a natural means for her to reach God as they participate in his grace as she does. Faustina recorded another instance of communing with nature, this time it was in a letter to Father Sopocko, written while she was at the rest home in Derdy.

Our small house in Derdy is truly like from a fairy-tale. It is surrounded by a forest, and there are no other houses in the vicinity. It is peaceful and quiet, Everything contributes to recollection of spirit; the forest birds intermit this silence and, with their twittering, they praise their Creator. I see God in everything that surrounds me!⁴¹⁶

Faustina is sensitive to the natural world, and easily capable of finding God in it. The birds do not simply twitter, they twitter in praise of the God who created them. According to Faustina’s writings, spring is a time of nature awakening and of praising God. These passages are strongly reminiscent of another saint who closely communed with the natural world: St. Francis of Assisi. He was also a lover of nature and much like St. Faustina appreciated the natural world as a creation from God, responsive and capable of communication. Furthermore, he also considered

⁴¹⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1120.

⁴¹⁶ Sister Faustina wrote this in a letter to Father Sopocko in May of 1936. Mizia, *Letters*, 33.

it nature's job to praise God through song. The following excerpt comes from *Flowers of St. Francis* Chapter XVI.

My little sisters the birds, ye owe much to God, your Creator, and ye ought to sing his praise at all times and in all places, because he has given you liberty to fly about into all places; and though ye neither spin nor sew, he has given you a twofold and a threefold clothing for yourselves and for your offspring... Beware, my little sisters, of the sin of ingratitude, and study always to give praise to God.⁴¹⁷

Birds are capable of praising God and are expected to do so frequently and with thankfulness. St. Francis goes so far as to call these birds his sisters. Though St. Francis preached to the *birds*, the birds preached to St. Faustina—they bid her happiness and did so by name! The birds were singing in adoration of God, they *spoke* to Faustina and in their chirping bid her happiness. Both Faustina and Francis look to the natural world in the context of *created* beauty—they use it as a way of communing with God, and appreciating God's creations as autonomous. Nature is interactive because it can communicate messages from God, messages of joy and of new life. The flower fits into this interactive schema where God is revealed in nature, and Faustina is sensitive enough to hear it, especially in the springtime.⁴¹⁸

Becoming a Flower and a Garden

Faustina is aware of herself as a temporal being, a being in time, in possession of moments, hours, and days. The floral processes of life are anything but static, particularly in the

⁴¹⁷ Francis of Assisi, *Early Documents*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 2006)
<http://crkn.nlx.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/xtf/view?docId=francis/francis.00.xml;chunk.id=div.francis.pmpreface.1;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.francis.pmpreface.1;brand=default> (accessed October 16, 2012).

⁴¹⁸ In the same way that Faustina's inner calm can be expressed by the peaceful sunshine of the springtime, the daily trials Faustina faces can take on the natural language of storms and wind. Faustina uses the images of raging storms, frightful [lightening] bolts (Kowalska, *Diary*, 761), thunderstorms and strong winds (Kowalska, *Diary*, 1150) to describe the turmoil she experiences daily in her soul but writes, the greatest storms "do not disturb the depths of my peace; the will of God dwells in my conscience" (Kowalska, *Diary*, 952).

springtime, they are dynamically interactive. Faustina recognizes how flowers unfold through time, just as they visibly unfold in her life. The following passage highlights the connection in Faustina's life between temporality, floral life, and serving God.

O Supreme Good, I want to love You as no one on earth has ever loved You before! I want to adore You with every moment of my life and unite my will closely to Your holy will. My life is not drab or monotonous, but it is varied like a garden of fragrant flowers, so that I don't know which flower to pick first, the lily of suffering or the rose of love of neighbor or the violet of humility. I will not enumerate these treasures in which my every day abounds. It is a great thing to know how to make use of the present moment.⁴¹⁹

The tone of this passage is very much time-centered. Faustina experiences a series of flowers in a series of moments as a series of virtues all while focusing on the present moment. Her life is made of these moments where each one can be used to its greatest potential by serving God. Faustina has come to associate flower species with particular virtues, for these floral sacrifices are gifts and fill her days with varied meaning. Faustina's flowers are treasures to be cherished, moment by moment.

Even amidst her hardship and strife, Faustina's misery is transformed in God. Like a desert coming to life and blooming, God has transformed barrenness and pain into abundance and joy.

The Lord has inclined himself to my misery like a ray of the sun upon a barren and rocky desert. And yet, under the influence of His rays, my soul has become covered with verdure, flowers, and fruit, and has become a beautiful garden for His repose.⁴²⁰

Faustina recognizes that she is in this process of *becoming*; she is evolving under the influence of God. While she is rooted in time, she is also deeply connected with flowers, and through flowers,

⁴¹⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 296.

⁴²⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 605.

her own transformation unfolds in time. Her soul, through contact with the rays of God, has *become* a beautiful garden.

Faustina expressed a desire to *be* a wild flower, one that is “always turning to the sun.”⁴²¹ She engages with a daily process of purity and love, one that persists without stagnation, and in turn she wishes for the “fragrance and freshness of the flower of [her] heart” to be preserved only for God.⁴²²

Holy and Omnipotent God, at this moment of immense grace by which You are uniting me with Yourself forever, I, mere nothingness, with the utmost gratitude, cast myself at Your feet like a tiny, unknown flower and, each day, the fragrance of that flower of love will ascend to Your throne.⁴²³

Following this theme, she stated “O you small, everyday sacrifices, you are to me like wild flowers which I strew over the feet of my beloved Jesus. I sometimes compare these trifles to the heroic virtues, and that is because their enduring nature demands heroism.”⁴²⁴ Flowers possess this enduring, heroic nature. It is not enough to make a decision to sacrifice, it must happen daily, continually. Faustina commits herself to sacrifice for God every single day, and strives to endure through time, like these heroic, enduring flowers. Each day a fresh flower is cast anew and these flowers, as sacrifices, marry the passage of time. Against the backdrop of an eternal union is juxtaposed the daily life of Faustina, one whose sacrifices are expressed, and who emits a fragrance to the throne of God. She is reminiscent of a delicate flower in transition—this is a difficult position to negotiate, as she is consciously aware of each moment and the continuity that awaits her after death.

⁴²¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 306.

⁴²² Kowalska, *Diary*, 306.

⁴²³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 240.

⁴²⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 208.

Life, Death, Sacrifice and Flowers

Faustina often yearned for her time on earth to end, and felt drawn towards death because of the intensity of her love for God and also the intensity of the suffering that she endured.⁴²⁵ Often she existed in a state that was neither living nor dead. More than simply wishing for death, she lived as one not quite alive. She described the state of her soul saying “It dies and withers; it dies a death without death; that is to say, it cannot die.”⁴²⁶ This inability to feel alive impacted the way she understood her time on earth. She wanted to sacrifice herself daily, as a continual sacrifice of self for God. She desired to be in this state as “one alive and yet not living” like a pure wildflower.⁴²⁷ Interestingly, it is the *flower* which best represents the position between life and death for Faustina, existing as alive and yet not living, occupying a position of liminality between worlds.⁴²⁸ Time was always an important feature of Faustina’s life, she was acutely aware that she had a limited presence on earth, and that she needed to maximize her use of every moment. Faustina was in the precarious position, like every human being, of existing in a flux of time and space. Her particular situation made her liminality and state of transition very pronounced. She was being remade in God continually as a sacrificial being, dying unto herself as an offering to Jesus. The process of becoming a daily sacrifice for God, and ultimately dying unto herself was closely tied with her floral understanding of herself.

⁴²⁵ For more information on suffering in the Catholic context see Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁴²⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 101.

⁴²⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 306.

⁴²⁸ Why Faustina understands the wildflower as between life and death is unknown; she does not explain herself further. The idea does pick up on a dualism of wild versus cultured flowers, living and dead, as well as severed flowers versus growing flowers.

Faustina's passage through life finds complexity in that she continues to imagine herself after death. She describes death as a stage of the soul, stating "I understood how closely the three stages of a soul's life are bound together; that is to say, life on earth, in purgatory and in heaven."⁴²⁹ Her actions on earth have rippling consequences. On the other hand, she is fixated on the present moment in time, which will determine the rest of her existence. She confirms "My spirit burns in active love. I waste no time in dreaming. I take every moment singly as it comes, for this is within my power. The past does not belong to me; the future is not mine; with all my soul I try to make use of the present moment."⁴³⁰ Hannah Arendt, the political theorist, referred to the present as the "Most futile and slippery of tenses. It is not more than the clash of a past, which is no more, with a future, which is approaching and not yet. Man lives in this in-between."⁴³¹ For Faustina the present may be fleeting and momentary, but it is a powerful moment none the less. There is a dynamic quality in Faustina's life, where the present is all important. Faustina is consciously situated in the present and writes about this in reference to her varied garden of virtues, "It is a great thing to know how to make use of the present moment."⁴³² Every moment holds great potential for goodness; it is this possibility which structures our existence and our relationship with time.⁴³³ Faustina resolved to live as fully as possible, for as

⁴²⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 594.

⁴³⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 351.

⁴³¹ Arendt continues on to say "What he calls the present is a lifelong fight against the dead weight of the past driving him forward with hope, and the fear of a future whose certainty is only death." Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 205. In Faustina's life that certainty is in meaning and life after death.

⁴³² Kowalska, *Diary*, 296.

⁴³³ As a Being-towards-death we are incapable of seeing ourselves as a whole, incapable of incorporating that final element of death into the larger picture. Though we are present in our dying, we are, by definition, never present at our own death. This is because "Death defines existence through non-existence," a possibility that we as *beings* cannot realize. It is "Dasein's-no-longer-being-able-to-be-there." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 116-117. Faustina breaks these rules, as a mystic who experiences temporality on a sliding scale, she may in fact be present at her death as a resurrected being.

long as she was permitted. For her, this meant meaningful suffering for God.⁴³⁴ Though stated differently, Faustina embraces all of these attitudes of the present in her life. She keenly recognizes the importance of presence in the present. She lives in an in-between space of life and death, heaven, purgatory and earth. In this orientation on earth, Faustina is always on the verge and never complete just as everyone is caught in the present moment of suspension. Further complicating matters, an additional weight had been placed on Faustina. More than just having a keen awareness of these “stages of the soul” Faustina was given another burden. God spoke to Faustina and confirmed “Through your prayers, you shall mediate between heaven and earth.”⁴³⁵ Faustina was actively connecting these two realms of existence. She is suspended, forming a bridge, linking these through her prayers. Her responsibility was towards prayer and obedience, but also in staying the hand of God. According to her diary, God said to her “Through love You will reconcile earth with heaven, you will soften the just anger of God, and you will plead for mercy for the world.”⁴³⁶ Prayer and love may seem a light burden, but Faustina understood how powerful her role was, as her actions determined the future for many. According to her diary, God had told Faustina how pleasurable and sweet her sacrifices were and how powerful they were as well; “there is great power in it” she is told.⁴³⁷ Faustina recognizes that small, ordinary actions performed out of love have the potential to become “powerful before God.”⁴³⁸ Faustina was clearly called, and understood herself, to be a powerful intercessory being. She understood

⁴³⁴ Bachelard speaks of taking “advantage of the *detemporalization* of the states of great reverie. In these states the contradiction between being and non-being fades away.” Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, 111. This description of great reverie approaches the experiences of divine union in Faustina’s life, where she is teetering on the edge of nothingness of self. Bachelard similarly recognizes, in his theories of time, that we live from instant to instant, and the present is always our temporal reality.

⁴³⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 438.

⁴³⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 531.

⁴³⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 904.

⁴³⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 889.

herself as a flower, existing on earth and angled towards a future Paradisical garden. It was the role of St. Faustina, like the flower, to unite the present with the future and earth with heaven.⁴³⁹

Faustina is emitting that floral scent in her life, as she proceeds unto a slow death. She is joyful at the thought of her own body as wilting and fragrant at the feet of Jesus.

Overcoming Temporality

Overcoming temporal reality has occurred in different ways in the thought of Faustina, by identifying flowers as a part of paradise, by identifying Jesus and Mary as eternal flowers of beauty and by identifying the holiness of a floral fragrance. Although the flowers on earth are indeed subject to these tragic-comic proportions of wilting and fading, looking at them with Faustina's perspective allows for reflection on a more timeless ideal. The beauty of earthly flowers attests to the persisting beauty of the afterlife.

Like so many Catholics and saints before her, Faustina has *overcome* the temporality of flowers by replacing them in the world of Catholic traditions. The Virgin Mary, eternal and forever pure, is envisioned as a snow-white lily for Sister Faustina. Of all the choices of comparison, this is the most fitting for the Mother of God.⁴⁴⁰ Flowers are made eternal in such a pairing just as Mary is eternal. The snapshot of the pure lily remains pristine and suspended in eternal beauty—Mary is never a faded or wilted lily. Jesus has become a “never fading” flower, a “living flower” capable of sustaining souls.⁴⁴¹ Faustina is feeding her soul from the flower of Jesus. Amidst this culture of certain death and floral withering, there stands Jesus, infinite and

⁴³⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 117-118.

⁴⁴⁰ Faustina most often used the title “Mother of God” or *Matka Boża* to refer to the Virgin Mary, it occurs sixty-six times in her diary. In Poland, the Virgin Mary was often called “The Queen of Poland” however this title does not appear in Faustina's diary.

⁴⁴¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1575; Kowalska, *Diary*, 501.

constant. The eternal, divine flower has become the ultimate role model, transformed into something ‘supra-natural’ and divine, the very son of God. The face of the flower can reflect back fragility, sacrifice, mortality, or point to that eternal, ever living flower—Jesus. Faustina can trust in that impossible ideal, of a flower outside of destructive time, to sustain her in her current, temporal existence. Even the fading scent of a flower, fated to waft and disappear, has become lasting, eternal even. Faustina describes this in her diary “I lay my heart at Your feet, like a rosebud. May its fragrance delight Your Divine Heart, now and for eternity.”⁴⁴² Faustina has identified her very heart, her very essence, as a rosebud, but one whose scent will persist for God forever. The most precious offering she can put before God is herself, but not in human form, instead embodied as a floral offering. As an eternal flower garden, or flower, she is not subject to the decay of time, or the inevitable sleep of winter. Her soul becomes a garden in eternal bloom and her scent everlasting.

Jesus is the exception to the terrible rule of nature. Jesus, even as a flower, is not subject to death and not subject to decay. Faustina has re-discovered Jesus as “the never-fading Flower of humanity.”⁴⁴³ The same holds true of Mary as the pure lily, existing only in a state of perfection, forever white and pure. The same can be said of the flowers of Paradise that will never feel the effects of death.

This temporal orientation has provided a sense of the layers of time that Faustina is negotiating in her life. She can plainly see her own life through the growth of a flower, and seeks to mirror flowers in their devotion to God. The mythic gardens of Catholic history are very much alive to her, through her dreams, visions and acute suffering. As her own journey progresses

⁴⁴² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1756.

⁴⁴³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1575.

from budding, to blossoming, to fading, Faustina appreciates what it is to pass through the heat of the noon day sun and to enjoy the freshness of spring. As Faustina ‘becomes’ a powerful victim soul in her own life, she is also a floral offering, and views her time in that way.

Flowers have moved outside of ordinary space and time in Catholicism. Their isolation stems from their extraordinary origins; they have become, in the lives of saints, miraculous signs of God’s intervention on earth. To defeat the terror of time echoes Harries, “one must be willing to pay the price of reality.”⁴⁴⁴ Flowers are able to overcome the stubbornness of temporality and mortality.⁴⁴⁵ Faustina is just one of many Catholics who have made this connection between time and flowers obvious.

While St. Faustina appreciates the flowers of Paradise, and the self as an eternal flower, there are other ways of experiencing flowers outside of ordinary time. Catholics have, over the ages, borne witness to flowers overcoming temporality. The following examples will make this clearer. In the fifteenth century there lived an Italian woman named Rita, who would become St. Rita of Cassica. During her last winter on earth she was confined to her bed due to illness. A few months before her death Rita was visited by her cousin, and asked if there was anything she wanted. Rita thought about it, and asked that she be allowed to smell the roses from her parent’s garden. It was January, well into the winter, and no roses were in bloom. Despite this impossibility her cousin set off to search her parent’s garden. There, just as predicted, she found a single red rose and a ripe fig. She brought these to Rita who recognized them as a miraculous

⁴⁴⁴ In Christian history moments are necessarily threaded through time, radiating from one another. Harries, “Terror of Time,” 64.

⁴⁴⁵ The idea of growing flowers out of season captures the imagination. Albertus Magnus, Count of Bollstadt, wrote an encyclopedia in 1260 that included a treatise on vegetables and plants. He was said to have created a garden that flowered in midwinter, the mechanics of which were unexplained, but it was clear that it was “of no great utility or fruitfulness but designed for pleasure.” Fisher, *Flowers*, 13-14.

sign.⁴⁴⁶ Of all of the worldly comforts available, it is significant that Rita chose the familiar rose. Floral growing time was flexible for Rita because she knew that with God, anything was possible. Rita's prayer was answered though it seemed temporally impossible. God overcame the natural growing season and fragility of roses to offer up a rose for Rita before her death. Catholic tradition has included similar stories of miraculous blooms for centuries; one from the fifteenth century has gained widespread popularity in particular. Juan Diego, a Mexican widower, was walking to church on the 9th of December in 1531. He saw a young woman on the hill surrounded by light—it was the Virgin Mary. She spoke to him, and she asked that a shrine be built in her honour. The Virgin Mary provided for Diego a tangible sign of their meeting—red roses from Castile Spain were growing on that hill in December. Diego took the roses to present to the bishop as proof of the meeting. When he opened his cloak, the roses fell forth, and an imprint of the Virgin appeared on the cloth. As Mary had requested, a shrine was built in that spot. What could demonstrate the presence of the divine more effectively than roses growing in the middle of winter? Flowers blossoming outside of their natural time, stunning against the cold, wintry world, were all the proof that Juan Diego needed.⁴⁴⁷ The natural course of roses, their life in the spring and death in the winter, can be superseded by Christian divinity. Floral life and presence, it seems, are subject to divine will and can be appropriated for divine causes. Although there are obvious differences between these accounts of St. Rita and Juan Diego, it is the similarities that are of interest here. In both cases it is the element of time that has made the

⁴⁴⁶ Fisher, *Flowers*, 155.

⁴⁴⁷ A similar theme had been recorded in a German carol, *Winterblümelein*, or the little winter flower. It describes the miraculous blooming of a rose in the winter. An English version from the 1800s states, "From noble root new sprung/With thornless branch extended/ A rose doth bear a flower/ All in the cold midwinter/ And at the midnight hour." Ward, *Contemplation Flowers*, 182.

growth of red roses into a miraculous event. Earthly time has been superseded to enable these miracles.

The natural cycles of the plant and the theological realities of Catholicism have come together in more ‘ordinary’ or consistent ways as well. The Catholic calendar became marked with blossoms and their theological corollaries. For instance, May is the month of Pentecost where the Holy Spirit is said to have descended on Jesus and his disciples in tongues of fire. Those tongues of fire have come to be represented by showers of flowers, and because lilies are available in May, the Holy Spirit has come to be a shower of lilies, or more specifically the Lily of the Valley, *Convallaria majalis*.⁴⁴⁸ Another example, *Lychnis coronaria*, commonly known as the Crown Pink, is dedicated to St. John the Baptist because it blooms on his feast day on June 24th. Looking at the flower, it appears flame coloured, and so joined with the nature of St. John, the flower is claimed to be a “light to them which sit in darkness.”⁴⁴⁹ Sister Faustina accepted flowers as a part of a timeless season. They connected her with the present as she communed with God, the future of a floral Paradise, as well as her childhood gardens of the past. These temporal themes stretch the gamut of human experiences of time as well as being present at the end of earthly time—death. The lives of flowers, however remarkable, are just as interesting at their deaths. It is to this topic, the death of the flower, that we turn to next.

Death and the Flower

Mortality in the plant world fills the meditations and reflections of humanity. We have found comfort, intrigue and gravity in these floral beings who realize their lives and deaths so obviously. Although flowers move slowly, they die a death we can and do witness over and over

⁴⁴⁸ Ward, *Contemplation Flowers*, 250.

⁴⁴⁹ Ward, *Contemplation Flowers*, 255.

again. In our lifetime, thousands of flowers may cycle through. Reaching back to early Christianity and up to contemporary Catholic culture today, flowers exist in connection with illness, death and (re)birth. Faustina has used flowers as models of a good life, and also of a good death. A discussion of death necessitates some consideration of the body, though the focus remains on time.

There is a temporal gap between the here and now of earth and the heaven that sits on the horizon. The flower, closely tied with the earth, represents a double agent: it appears in heaven *and* on earth, linking the two together. Faustina is familiar with the gardens of her childhood in the past, the gardens of her present in the convent, and the gardens of her future in Paradise. Historian Patricia Cox Miller claims that sensuous relics were meant to “span the vertical gap” between earth and heaven “erasing the spiritual distinction between here and there.”⁴⁵⁰ A relic is powerful; it can transport, transform, and make miraculous things happen. The flower can be understood less as a sensuous relic, and more as a living bridge performing the same temporally transformative function. Just as the bodies of saints displace ordinary space and time, bringing “the first touch of the Resurrection...into the present”⁴⁵¹ so too can flowers transport us from an earthly garden to a Paradisical Garden, as an *Uebertragung* moving us outside and beyond ourselves into another reality.⁴⁵² Faustina witnessed flowers of earth, and flowers of heaven, and knew that flowers would be a continual presence during all of her existence. Both kinds of flowers, those experienced in the garden and those witnessed in visions, drew her to God in every moment. For Faustina, her existence is a continual feature of her being; she knows that she

⁴⁵⁰ Miller, “Blue Flower,” 233.

⁴⁵¹ Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, 78.

⁴⁵² The German word *Uebertragung* translates to mean “carrying over,” as in a transmission or transference.

will be with God in heaven after her death, and that there will be flowers forever. This shift of time and space is the key to understanding the temporal significance of flowers. More than just bringing heaven and earth closer together through garden visions, flowers bring together time and space, as well as life and death. As discussed above the body of the flower seems to viscerally and visually trace time in space. Furthermore, although flowers are very much alive and used to celebrate new life, they are also often featured at scenes of death. The flower embraces these multifaceted, theologically laden roles.

Biblical sources stress the impending mortality of the flower alongside a human's short lived existence. Flowers were chosen as instructive examples to demonstrate the temporal features of human life, set against the backdrop of an eternal life to come.⁴⁵³ As the First Epistle of Peter states, "Thus, All human life on the earth is like grass, and all human glory is like a flower in a field. The grass dries up and its flower falls off."⁴⁵⁴ All of our most beautiful achievements on earth are as flowers, glorious but finite—they too will end.

Despite Faustina's faith in continual life there is a very real dimension to human and floral death that can be witnessed in the decay of bodies. It is the inevitable fate of the flower to be plucked and to wither alongside humanity. Conversely, it is often the human end to die alongside flowers. Although it is not uncommon for flowers to be presented at births, they are *expected* to accompany people into illness, death and onto gravesites. Essentially the flower follows us, even into our own death. Cut flowers are often placed on gravesites—they are beautiful and already fated to death. They may remind us of the ongoing life after death, or even of the flowers waiting in Paradise. In Norwich, in 1144, a twelve year old boy named William

⁴⁵³ The book of Isaiah confirms, "All flesh is grass; all its loyalty is like the flowers of the field. The grass dries up and the flower withers when the LORD's breath blows on it. Surely the people are grass" (Isaiah 40:5-7 CEB).

⁴⁵⁴ 1 Peter 1:24.

was believed to have been martyred during the season of Eastertide. A rosebush had been grown by monks at Norwich Cathedral and transplanted to his grave; it was a reminder of William's holiness and what was waiting for him in heaven. Much later, in 1150, the rosebush was reported to be blooming miraculously in the cold of the November.⁴⁵⁵

Being present around times of death means that the flower bears witness to some of the deepest moments of human existence, those charged with emotional meaning. For those who choose to reflect on these flowers, it may seem that they are able to soak up emotional energy and reflect it back to us. Unlike other organisms whose bodies we swiftly dispose of, the sustained decay of flowers is visually common. The earthly flower has been cast in a role that it cannot fill; it is too beautiful to last and too fragile to carry on comforting. Funeral flowers die atop of human bodies, providing spontaneous bursts of colourful beauty before they finally wilt and decompose, much like the short contribution of a human life. Flowers remind us of the fragility of life and the universal end of what lies beneath. Death begets death on the flower covered gravesite. The dying flower sits neglected on table tops and bedroom dressers, rotting on forgotten gravesites and in untended gardens. St. Faustina's own grave would be showered with flowers at the time of her death and even today as people pray for her intercession; after a lifetime of giving, the flowers she so loved would finally become offerings to her.

The organic nature of flowers, as with humans, necessarily means their decay after death. It is this visible connection with time which is so obvious and fascinating. Flowers, suggests Bataille, experience "a garish withering;" he notes that "all trace of their ethereal elegance rots away, and the flower will relapse abruptly into its original squalor."⁴⁵⁶ Even something as

⁴⁵⁵ Hillaby, Joe. "The Ritual-Child-Murder Accusation: Its Dissemination and Harold of Gloucester." <http://www.jhse.org/book/export/article/20920> (accessed January 6, 2013).

beautiful as the flower is subject to the destructive decay of time. The death of the flower disappoints us so acutely because their beauty is so hideously disfigured. By intimately linking flowers with our own lives, the death of the flower reminds us of what is to come, and the disfigurement we all must endure in death. Faustina was also aware of this end when she described a “heap of dirt teeming with vermin.”⁴⁵⁷ This dirt is not the earth giving loam from whence Adam came, this ground is the cold ground, the burial ground, receiving *back* and not giving forth. Faustina wryly confirms that this is the end we are all reduced to—dirt. It is no wonder then that flowers have been poetically said to “hurry as fast as they can up into the light to bloom and die.”⁴⁵⁸ Unlike leaves, suggest Bataille, who age gracefully and find preserved beauty even in a slow, dry, aging, flowers die an absurd death, they “wither like old and overly made up dowagers, and they die ridiculously on stems that seemed to carry them to the clouds.”⁴⁵⁹ It becomes easy to scorn the withered flower, whose purpose was comfort and love, and whose ugliness has become so apparent. Beauty is the pedestal of the flower, it is the height from which it falls and turns to dirt. Beauty is the flower’s connection to a timeless ideal, it is a hint of a perfect paradise to come. *Ordinary* flowers cannot hold onto this ideal and therefore disappoint us. Bataille explains “The most admirable flower for that reason would not be represented...as the faded expression of an angelic ideal, but, on the contrary, as an indecent and glaring sacrilege.”⁴⁶⁰ The sacrilege is the violation of our hope because our object of beauty has been hideously transformed so absolutely. Bataille claims that “It is impossible to exaggerate the

⁴⁵⁶ Bataille, *Visions*, 12.

⁴⁵⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1343.

⁴⁵⁸ Strindberg, *Le Songe*, 6.

⁴⁵⁹ Bataille, *Visions*, 12.

⁴⁶⁰ Bataille, *Visions*, 13.

tragicomic oppositions indicated in the course of this death-drama, endlessly played out between earth and sky.”⁴⁶¹ This point of decay is where verticality sinks into the horizontal, light and life wither as they approach death; they succumb and join the dark earth. The flower as a symbol of eternal love now firmly belongs to death—time marks wounds all over the aging floral body. Petals dramatically fade and shrivel, leaves dry up and fall, and stems lose their rigidity and lean. Faustina identifies the sad end of the flower—to lose its colour and vigor, and to fade away completely. As she suggests, flowers cannot face the heat of the noonday sun, and ultimately fall victim. It is not just the death of the flower, but the death of all things we can see. *Beautiful* objects are capable of bringing together time with eternity.⁴⁶² Natural flowers, because they are subject to decay, cannot realize this timeless ideal of beauty. The flower, to be an aesthetic ideal, cannot exist as a living form, experienced in real time and space.⁴⁶³ In order to achieve this ideal, flowers need to become “self contained” and removed from ordinary reality—Faustina has done just that.

In reading Faustina’s diary we find that flowers can be companions in life, and like good Christians, rescued from death. Bataille sees no such divine intervention and continues his thought, “It is evident that one can only paraphrase this laughable duel...*love smells like death*.”⁴⁶⁴ In Catholicism this has been transformed. Through the love of God and divine intervention *death* smells like *flowers*. For Catholics, a very holy death is not always

⁴⁶¹ Bataille, *Visions*, 12-13.

⁴⁶² Harries, “Terror of Time,” 63.

⁴⁶³ Nietzsche makes reference to the “spirit of revenge...the will’s ill will against time...as a source of self-alienation” this is a self-alienation evoked by being confronted with the end of the self. Harries suggests that “The dream of the engineer or the artist as god, able to deliver us from the terror of time, is a dream born of pride” or more simply understood, it is the wish to continue. Harries, “Terror of Time,” 69.

⁴⁶⁴ Bataille, *Visions*, 12-13

accompanied by the scent of decay, but sometimes by a beautiful floral fragrance. As explained in chapter six, the bodies of some Catholics are not only exempt from decay, but will emit glorious, floral scents upon their death because they are incorruptible. In Catholicism death *can* smell like flowers.

Human beings, claimed Nietzsche, are in the “primal negativity of becoming” which necessarily entails finitude, temporality and non-substantiality. We internalize this spatial, temporal flux in a “positive-negative interplay” that is required in the formation of meaning.⁴⁶⁵ Faustina is familiar with this interplay, as her positive presence of self struggles against the void of annihilation. She struggles to hold onto herself in the void of darkness, and ultimately she loses herself as a human being, and is remade as sacrificial floral offering. She describes herself as “mere nothingness” who casts herself at the feet of Jesus “like a tiny, unknown flower.”⁴⁶⁶ Faustina uses flowers to identify the nothingness, the in-between state she feels herself to exist in. Faustina’s negativity is paired with the finitude of time. She stated in her diary “I must refer everything to God and, in my own eyes, recognize myself for what I am: utter misery and nothingness. In suffering, I must be patient and quiet, knowing that everything passes in time.”⁴⁶⁷ Existentially, the self includes the breadth of what it is to be human including passions, ambitions, fears and anxieties—all in flux, confronting “change, limits and negative forces” that pass through time.⁴⁶⁸ There is nothing ever stable or solid about the human being as we are always subject to the changing currents of time.

⁴⁶⁵ Hatab, “Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning,” 91.

⁴⁶⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 240.

⁴⁶⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 253. As an interesting aside, Bachelard claims that only nothingness is continual, and all else exists in a series of moments, Faustina definitely understands her experiences as a series of moments.

⁴⁶⁸ Hatab, “Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning,” 103.

Though we stray from the garden in Vilnius, the following provides a demonstrative example by which to appreciate Faustina. The winding path of time, space and flowers rests on a final example of gardens from the temple complex *Myoshin-ji* in Kyoto, Japan. The two key concepts of interest here are the gardens as a ‘living religion’ and a merging of space and time called MA; St. Faustina’s experiences of divine union exemplify both of these.

To experience the gardens of *Myoshin-ji* is to have an experience of a ‘living religion.’⁴⁶⁹ To live a religion is to engage with it using all of the human self. The experience of this lived religion requires a unity of body, of space, and of time all set against a garden backdrop; the floral environment provides unity to these elements. An embodied human being can engage with this garden spatially and temporally by moving through it, as a way of expressing their religion. To walk in the garden is to *live* one’s religion. Experiencing *Myoshin-ji* amounts to a experiencing temporal space. “Space time” is a corporeal event always in transition and connected to bodily movement.⁴⁷⁰ Mark Taylor explores the work of artist Richard Serra who wrote of his experiences in these Japanese gardens. Serra described the “primary characteristic of the...stone gardens [as] the ambulatory paths around and through them [which] were circular. The geometry of the sites prompted walking in arcs.”⁴⁷¹ The physical act of walking in arcs becomes a religious expression, existing in time and space. The full experience of the garden, claims Serra, can only be gained by constant looking and by attempting to integrate the parts with the shape of the whole—by traversing the garden. Taylor explains that this is a matter of peripatetic perception, involving the “entire body in all of its spatial and temporal complexity. There is no space without time and no time without space, because the experience is a complex

⁴⁶⁹ See Borup, Jørn. *Japanese Rinzai Zen Buddhism: Myōshinji, A Living Religion*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

⁴⁷⁰ Though this thesis treats space and time separately, they are integrated in Faustina’s life, and all human life.

⁴⁷¹ Serra, *Writings, Interviews*, 29.

weaving of space and time.”⁴⁷² As you move forward in space you are moving forward in time, winding along paths of space-time, you are engaging yourself and your faith. This example touches on many key themes that we have been exploring.

The experience of the garden, as a living religion, is the experience of the present moment—one is always alert to the steps that follow, tracing time and space together in the newness of the floral path. In the *Myoshin-ji* gardens of Japan the merging of space and time is called MA. In Japan, explains architect Arata Isozaki, space and time were never conceived separately, they existed in the context of one another. Time existed in relation to movement, and space existed alongside of time. Isozaki continues on to say that “space was perceived as identical with the events or phenomena occurring in it; that is, space was recognized only in its relation to time flow.”⁴⁷³ This kind of embodied understanding becomes apparent in a garden space which can connect these elements together. Moving through a garden maze is an excellent way to feel and conceptualize the fluid integration of space and time as lived religion, just as Faustina’s own experiences unite space and time through a deep connection with flowers and God. Here in the West, philosopher Mark Taylor has tackled the meaning of MA. He describes it as “an event that occurs in an interval, space time is a spacing that is a timing and a timing that is a spacing.”⁴⁷⁴ We can understand their connection in that MA intimates time into space by “exposing the space of the time.”⁴⁷⁵ The same idea can be understood in the visible unfolding of time in a blossoming flower. The lives of flowers are visible as they grow in temporal cycles, in this way space and time can unfold together. French philosopher Derrida describes the

⁴⁷² Taylor, *Economies of Faith*, 221.

⁴⁷³ Isozaki, *MA: Space-Time*, 13.

⁴⁷⁴ Taylor, *Economies of Faith*, 221.

⁴⁷⁵ Taylor, *Economies of Faith*, 221.

“becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time,” as mirrors of one another.⁴⁷⁶ This can be experienced by watching the flower unfold, or as St. Faustina does, by becoming the flower. MA exists as an interval, an awareness of form and non-form coming together; the space of MA occurs as a site of transition which governs our lives.⁴⁷⁷ Faustina is forever in transition, her journey to become closer to God is a daily sacrifice, and she uses flowers in each of these transient steps. This pause of MA, the experience of the present in the garden, is really the suspended life of all of humanity. Faustina exists in that present, pre-reflective state, suspended, separate, then united with God and oriented towards the circular path that is life itself.

Faustina is ‘living her religion’ and experiencing the interval of MA in her divine union with God. The garden makes time made palpable by integrating it with space, and making the whole experience feel extraordinary. For Faustina, it is the walkway of life, the moment of form and formlessness united in space and time, and localized in the moments just beyond our grasp. Faustina describes the state of mystic union where she loses all sense of self by losing herself in God. She described the following experience of union in the garden.

God's presence penetrated me and, in an instant, all my nothingness was drowned in God; and at the same moment I felt, or rather discerned, the Three Divine Persons dwelling in me. And I had such great peace in my soul that I myself was surprised that I could have had so many misgivings.⁴⁷⁸

St. Faustina merged with God, realizing her own nothingness. She was pushed to the edge of nothingness, and struggled with the limitations of her humanity. She also describes losing herself “unceasingly” in God, and being drawn so “strongly and powerfully” that she lost

⁴⁷⁶ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 8.

⁴⁷⁷ Taylor, *Economies of Faith*, 220.

⁴⁷⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 175.

awareness of being on earth.⁴⁷⁹ Put in other terms, Faustina has control of her form in an Apollonian way—a quietly inspired self that is delimited by the boundaries of her individuality. In encountering the abyss she is consumed in Dionysian intoxication, dissolving those boundaries and limits. Faustina slips away in rapture, until her sense of self is swallowed up such that she is, “an abyss of nothingness and...[could] return to nothingness in a moment.”⁴⁸⁰ In Faustina’s life a mystic pause of in-between space has been facilitated by divine union with God, which in turn was facilitated by the presence of flowers. Faustina is able to blossom in the rays that are God, to lose awareness of her space, her time, and herself as she enters this state. Though this middle space of form and formlessness is highlighted in an obvious way in mystic union, it also occurs in everyday moments of being. Each moment is potentially extending from current form into the formlessness. That middle space is the space of the present moment of time; it is a liminal state of space-time, where for Christians, eternity hangs in the balance.

Conclusion

Faustina does not rely solely on floral miracles, so abundant in Catholic history, to understand the connection between floral and human lives. Flowers are everyday models of both life and death for her, demonstrating how to live fully and how to overcome the finality of death.

Through the flower Faustina has embraced the temporal nothingness that consumes her life and the darkness and pain that have remade her into a sacrificial being. Through flowers, the joyful lessons and painful teachings of the preciousness and endlessness of time are made apparent. On an everyday level, flowers can be palpable reminders of the passage of time.

⁴⁷⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 142.

⁴⁸⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 256.

Faustina paid careful attention to the stages of floral development, such that they became models for her own life. The flowers of St. Faustina maintain a dynamic quality and they are for her markers of an important present. Faustina's experience of flowers is not stagnant, neither in stages of development, nor in moments of the day, nor the seasons that they pass through. Faustina herself transitioned from a bud to a blossoming flower before Jesus, and imagined herself as wilting slowly in this life at the feet of God. It is clear that flowers are freshest on a morning in the springtime, and in that freshness they capture the present as a precious moment of time.

Flowers have taught Faustina how to live as a sacrifice for Christ, and also how to die for him. As a sacrifice before God, Faustina existed in a liminal position between worlds, and used the wildflower to represent herself as one "alive yet not living." By contrast to the everyday fading flower, Jesus became the eternal, unfading flower of humanity. As Faustina journeys through a temporal world there are always flowers accompanying her, giving form to her feelings of transiency or permanence.

Flowers have had an important role to play in Catholic space-time. Looking at the flower in Catholic history, one witnesses their bodies and roots transformed through a sinful past, their beauty speaking to an eternal reward in the future all while existing with us in the terrestrial present. Flowers have been significant teleological markers in the Catholic consciousness of time. Gardens are at the beginning and the end of a 'good Christian existence,' and can serve powerful meditative roles in between. Flowers on earth have been marked by the Passion of Christ, turned bloody and thorned, and caught up in larger themes of salvation and meaning. They serve as connecting intermediaries between these epic moments in Christian history from

the Garden of Eden where it all began, to the agonies of Gethsemane, and the final garden—Paradise.

Time and space unfold together in the flower, and Faustina experiences them holistically through divine union. As they merge and disappear, flowers are her models of being in the midst of fluidity; they are a constant companion and channel of praise. Faustina exists in a moment of transition, in a liminal state; existing between low and high, past and future, straining towards heaven but existing only on earth. In her floral experiences, Faustina claimed to “yearn upwards” towards God, “blossom in His rays” and finally to “wilt” for Jesus, following the lifecycle of the flower. She has the power to connect heaven and earth. As Meister Eckhart says “The soul is created to be at a place between time and eternity. With the lowest senses, within time, it works the things of time; with its strength towards the above it understands and feels a time of eternal matters.”⁴⁸¹ This liminal tension inherent in being human is exemplified in Faustina’s life and relationship with flowers.

⁴⁸¹ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 77.

CHAPTER SIX: FLOWERS AND THE BODY

O my most sweet Master, good Jesus, I give You my heart. You shape and mold it after Your liking. O fathomless love, I open the calyx of my heart to You, like a rosebud to the freshness of dew. To You alone, my Betrothed, is known the fragrance of the flower of my heart. Let the fragrance of my sacrifice be pleasing to You. O Immortal God, my everlasting delight, already here on earth You are my heaven. May every beat of my heart be a new hymn of praise to You, O Holy Trinity! Had I as many hearts as there are drops of water in the ocean or grains of sand in the whole world, I would offer them all to You, O my Love, O Treasure of my heart! Whomever I shall meet in my life, no matter who they may be, I want to draw them all to love You, O my Jesus, my Beauty, my Repose, my sole Master, Judge, Savior and Spouse, all in one; I know that one title will modify the other—I have entrusted everything to Your mercy.⁴⁸²

This passage is revisited in the context of the body, looking at Faustina's body as a floral offering to God and as a site of devotion; that devotion was so intense and complete that it transformed her understanding of her body into a flower sacrificed before God. Faustina's physical self-awareness became a floral awareness; she used her body in service of God as she expected a flower would. Her heart, the core of her body, was re-made into the innermost center of a flower so that where the rest of humanity has ventricles, she imagines herself to have a calyx.⁴⁸³ The very beating of her heart has become a dedicated offering of praise—all of Faustina is given over to God. Faustina openly gives of herself until she is molded into a rosebud before the dew of Jesus. As a floral entity, Faustina's most prominent and prized physical feature is her floral fragrance, dispensed for God's pleasure as a private offering. Ultimately, Faustina's body serves God as would a humble flower.

⁴⁸² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1064.

⁴⁸³ The polish term used is *kielich*, which translates to mean cup, bell or calyx. In each case, it is an interior, closed space being described.

Introduction: The Body and the Flower in the Writings of St. Faustina

Human experiences are necessarily embodied experiences. This section focuses on the embodied floral life of St. Faustina Kowalska. To envision space and time as separate is to artificially isolate otherwise integrated experiences. In this section the focus rests on the body, and more particularly, the body of the flower as conceived by Faustina, and the body of Faustina understood as a flower.⁴⁸⁴

How do flowers attract us? What lures us to invite flowers into our homes, to take root in our lives, and day after day, to grow into our being? Bachelard describes an ‘elasticity’ of images, where an image expands and contracts around individual imaginations, such that flowers have begun to “possess us entirely.”⁴⁸⁵ The flower has stretched in its elasticity to fit the reality of Faustina. Faustina engages in a journey that progresses away from her human bodily identity and towards an immolated, sacrificed floral body. She does this by stretching the limits of the floral body, conceptually expanding it to fit her own body, and to fit the supernatural forms of Catholic divinity. It was not enough to stand *with* flowers, Faustina desired to stand *as* a flower. Nor was it enough for flowers to be beautiful, they needed to be divinely beautiful; they needed finally, to be divine.⁴⁸⁶

Exploring Faustina’s transformation into a ‘floral being’ is central to an understanding of her life. The numerous references she makes towards herself as a flower point to something more than creativity; Faustina is *embodying* the flowers which surround her in a communicative way.

⁴⁸⁴ The body of Sister Faustina was a tragic site marked with visible and invisible sufferings and is a rich site of study. For additional information on the bodies of female Catholic saints and a more pronounced gendered reading, please see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

⁴⁸⁵ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xviii.

⁴⁸⁶ For further information on Flower Personification See Seaton, “Towards a Semiotics,” 679-701.

She feels her body in the way she imagines a flower would feel its body. She began to refer to herself and her actions using floral terminology such that her Catholic beliefs, the floral body, and her own body have been permanently fused. These floral understandings have shaped the way Faustina exists in her relationship with God, Jesus and the Virgin Mary. This section traces the relationships and events that encouraged this transformation.

The question is, how did Faustina engage with floral corporeality and her own corporeality, and how did these interactions relate back to God? “Orientation in the Body,” demonstrates how Faustina orients her body and the floral body in relation to God. It explores the presence of pain, sacrifice, purity and fragrance as features of Faustina’s body. “Experience of the Body” looks at the colours, fragrances and meditations on flowers, then moves on to explore Faustina’s body as a blossoming, floral offering.

Orientation in the Body

The Body as Pain

One of the dominant experiences in Faustina’s life, according to her diary and as confirmed by the people around her, is the experience of pain, both physical and spiritual in nature. Faustina was ill for the majority of her life and was often unable to perform her duties in her congregation. Her body was mostly weak and exhausted; it was so often a source of pain and almost never a source of pleasure. Initially, Faustina regarded her body as a source of temptation; she wanted to maintain her physical purity for God. Eventually, she conquered that side of herself, and began to relate to her body as a sacrificial offering of suffering.

Faustina hid her pain, or the extent of her pain, from those around her as much as possible. When it did become obvious that she was suffering she often received criticism and harsh

judgement from her fellow sisters. Ultimately, she understood these kinds of reactions as being tests sent from God.⁴⁸⁷ Because her suffering was such a large part of who she was, it is hardly possible to understand sister Faustina without understanding that suffering. In her diary the most direct floral metaphor of her pain is that of the crushed violet.

I will hide from people's eyes whatever good I am able to do so that God himself may be my reward. I will be like a tiny violet hidden in the grass, which does not hurt the foot that treads on it, but diffuses its fragrance and, forgetting itself completely, tries to please the person who has crushed it underfoot. This is very difficult for human nature, but God's grace comes to one's aid.⁴⁸⁸

As the violet, Faustina forgives whoever steps on her; she accepts suffering with great humility and that suffering becomes an opportunity to grow closer to God. The scent she releases when crushed underfoot further establishes this suffering as a gift to God. In another passage Faustina takes up the themes of suffering, sacrifice, and being crushed using the image of wheat.

I am like a sacrificial host in Your hand, O Divine Mediator,
And I burn on the altar of holocaust,
Crushed and ground by suffering like grains of wheat,
And all this for the sake of Your glory, for the salvation of souls.⁴⁸⁹

Again, Faustina imagines herself as a something tiny, this time as a sacrificial host and grains of wheat. Instead of diffusing her fragrance as a broken violet, she becomes a burning host on the altar of God, crushed and ground by her suffering. She acknowledges her role as a sacrificial offering and the importance of her suffering in each case. Faustina uses the rosebud to link bodily pain with sacrificial offerings, and the fragrance of flowers as a sacrificial offering for God.

⁴⁸⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1268, 1454, 1648.

⁴⁸⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 255.

⁴⁸⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1629.

Love, it is for love of You, O Most Holy Trinity, that I offer myself to You as an oblation of praise, as a holocaust of total self-immolation. And through this self-immolation, I desire the exaltation of Your Name, O Lord. I cast myself as a little rosebud at Your feet, O Lord, and may the fragrance of this flower be known to You alone.⁴⁹⁰

In these three passages we see the same themes of littleness, sacrifice and scent. The violet, host, grain of wheat and rosebud are all small and occupy lowly positions—the violet is underfoot and the rosebud is positioned at the feet of God. As sacrifices, the wheat and rosebud are a holocaust, or a burnt offering to God. The fragrance of the rosebud, like the scent of the violet, is a private offering to God. Despite the differences of images, similar ideas are expressed in each case.

Purification is another feature of Faustina’s suffering and sacrifice. She often uses the imagery of fire to describe her purification; God responds in turn with the same language.

I went before the Blessed Sacrament and, like the greatest and most miserable of wretches, I begged for His mercy that He might heal and purify my poor soul. Then I heard these words, *My daughter, all your miseries have been consumed in the flame of My love, like a little twig thrown into a roaring fire.*⁴⁹¹

God uses the language of fire and flame to describe the purification of her soul. Still, Faustina maintains an outwardly silent, hidden suffering in order to become a “pleasing sacrifice, a holocaust full of sweetness and fragrance.”⁴⁹²

Faustina typically responds with a combination of resignation and patience when she is actively suffering. Even when she was faced with complete abandonment by God she accepted it as a way to become more like Jesus. Faustina claimed to be able to “accept all events and things,

⁴⁹⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 239.

⁴⁹¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 178.

⁴⁹² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1767.

pleasant and unpleasant, with love, as tokens of the heavenly Father's special affection.”⁴⁹³ She regarded suffering as “the greatest treasure on earth” because it purifies the soul.⁴⁹⁴ She claimed that “true love” is measured through suffering and welcomed the opportunity to suffer for God and for the sake of other souls.⁴⁹⁵

We must remember that, for Faustina, Jesus is the source of her pain however he is not an indiscriminate source, because he “never tries us beyond what we are able to suffer.”⁴⁹⁶ In her diary, Faustina explains that she was not permitted to die until she had suffered enough and sacrificed enough of herself according to God’s will. Jesus explained to her that he was going to teach her how to suffer and it would be her *privilege* to suffer the Passion as he did.⁴⁹⁷ In sharing the pain of Christ, like stigmata or the crown of thorns, she became more like Christ. She wrote, “O sweet, rose-red blood of Jesus, ennoble my blood and change it into Your own blood, and let this be done to me according to Your good pleasure.”⁴⁹⁸ She wanted not only to imitate, but to transform herself and to become more like Christ in her suffering.

The Fragrant Body as Floral Offering: The Floral Sweetness of St. Faustina

Faustina approached flowers with her entire body however it is accurate to say that it was primarily with her nose that she identified the importance of flowers. In her diary Faustina’s

⁴⁹³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 956.

⁴⁹⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 342.

⁴⁹⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 343.

⁴⁹⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 78.

⁴⁹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1626.

⁴⁹⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1575.

references to scent are almost exclusively tied to sacrificial, floral fragrances.⁴⁹⁹ Floral scent plays an important role in Faustina's identity as a living sacrifice, and is frequently emphasized in her writings. Scent is a defining feature of Faustina's flowers as well as Faustina's floral persona.

In the same way that Faustina oriented herself in space, she had an olfactory alignment as well, as is evident from her diary. This orientation follows a larger pattern, already established by the Catholic Church.⁵⁰⁰ Constance Classen suggests that "olfactory codes pervade classificatory thought" and this is true in the case of Faustina and Catholicism in general.⁵⁰¹ Harkening back to the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) claimed that "Smell is a spiritual sense, and serves in spiritual people to distinguish good from evil."⁵⁰² Furthermore, in the Western Christian tradition, holy people were recognized as having an "odour of sanctity" while evil people had the "stench of the Devil."⁵⁰³ Faustina herself tells us that heaven is filled with 'beautiful' fragrances, at least some of which come from virtuous souls.⁵⁰⁴ Humble people can emit these beautiful scents which waft upwards to God.⁵⁰⁵ Sweet smelling fragrances come from pious, holy people, and are present in heaven. The opposite case, foul odours, seep from

⁴⁹⁹ Not all olfactory sensation were pleasing for Faustina. On one occasion Faustina was led by an Angel into hell where the fifth torture was a "continual darkness and a terrible suffocating smell." Kowalska, *Diary*, 740-741.

⁵⁰⁰ Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 172.

⁵⁰¹ Classen, "The Odor of the Other," 133.

⁵⁰² Astell, "A Discerning Smell," 107.

⁵⁰³ Classen, "The Odor of Sanctity," 87-92.

⁵⁰⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1487.

⁵⁰⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1306.

hell. Faustina bore witness to these suffocating, foul odours of hell.⁵⁰⁶ William Brede (1816-1895) described a similar experience. He described the death of a “master of a family” from Cunningham, Northumbrian. Though his master had died, he returned from the dead with visions of hell saying, “I observed that all the flames, as they ascended, were full of human souls...an insufferable stench came forth with the vapors, and filled all those dark places.”⁵⁰⁷ An awareness of pleasant smells in heaven and fousls smells in hell situates Faustina in an existing Catholic olfactory paradigm. This is relevant because Faustina makes reference to the ‘sweet’ floral smells of her sacrifice, and hears from God that these floral scents are pleasing. Faustina is made special by her good works which have morphed into a fragrance. Scripturally, love poems like the Song of Songs were especially rich in odoriferous imagery. There is a long history of fragrances being used to communicate with God in sacrificial ritual. The word perfume comes from the Latin *per fumare*, meaning “to smoke.” This smoke is meant to rise to the gods from the sacrificial altar. These rising scents could be ‘coded,’ for example balsam was often a popular choice for Catholics, just as the Torbriand tribe use mint⁵⁰⁸ and the Umeda use ginger.⁵⁰⁹

An olfactory theology developed in Catholicism following the theme of a rising scent, whereby a rising earthly scent would reach and permeate paradise.⁵¹⁰ According to Susan Harvey “Most of the time, whenever the spiritual sense of smell is involved, it denotes a sacrificial

⁵⁰⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 741.

⁵⁰⁷ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V chapter XIV.

⁵⁰⁸ Malinoswki, *Sexual Life*, 448-9.

⁵⁰⁹ Gell, “Magic, Perfume, Dream” 25.

⁵¹⁰ Evans, “Scent of a Martyr,” 197.

context or sense or signifies divine presence of the basic paradigms of incense and perfume.”⁵¹¹
This is clearly the case in Faustina’s life.

When Faustina becomes a sacrificial offering for God, she *is* a floral sacrifice complete with a beautiful floral fragrance.⁵¹² More than anything else she wants the fragrance of her love to be known to God, and to continue to reach his throne on high and communicate her love. She wrote “Holy and Omnipotent God, at this moment of immense grace by which You are uniting me with Yourself forever, I, mere nothingness, with the utmost gratitude, cast myself at Your feet like a tiny, unknown flower and, each day, the fragrance of that flower of love will ascend to Your throne.”⁵¹³ Faustina does not come up with these floral associations herself, she has heard God speak of her fragrance in floral terms. One striking example occurred during the miracle of the roses. The hard work that Faustina performed, even in something as mundane as draining water from potatoes, is meaningful because God has recognized it. Her load is transformed into a bouquet of red roses, which is not only beautiful “beyond description” but possesses a fragrance which can reach God.

Faustina has learned what it means to embrace littleness and nothingness through the body of a flower. Using the visual of the violet she has come to embody insignificance for the sake of pleasing God. Through the creative, beautiful body of the flower, she has joined with

⁵¹¹ Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 172. One of the most popular, commonly cited passages for understanding scent in the bible is 2 Cor. 2:14-16: “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?”

⁵¹² Despite the precedent for an “olfactory silence” in the West scent remains significant in Catholicism. See Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1-10. There is a Catholic tradition of the body being less holy than the spirit. The senses war against the spirit, just as sinful human nature and the Christian spirit are enemies, see Galatians 5:16-17.

⁵¹³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 240.

God in divine union, and experiencing the floral life to the fullest, blossomed for God. The scent of the flower betrays its significance; floral scents are important markers of sacrifice in life and as we will see below, piousness in death.

God clearly reciprocates Faustina's floral relationship and contributes to her understanding of herself and her work in floral terms. Flowers "speak" to Faustina; they reveal their secrets to her, just as they did in the miracle of the roses.⁵¹⁴ Bachelard understands how flowers, as a part of the natural world, are capable of speaking out through colour and scent.

When a flower whispers like this, when the bells of the flowers sound at the tops of the umbels, the whole earth falls silent...the aerial universe is filled with a harmony of colors. The anemones with their many colors give colors to the four winds of the sky...Color mingles with voice and perfumes, as soon as flowers begin to speak.⁵¹⁵

Faustina hears what her wildly fragrant, striking red roses have to say through their very bodies, blazing red and highly perfumed. Faustina's flowers, however, are not whispering, they are shouting praise, as God affirms that she is a precious, pleasing soul. God continues to reinforce the connection between Faustina and flowers, and claims that her love is as "pleasing" as the fragrance of a rosebud.⁵¹⁶

Flowers are also a tool for describing her relationship with God. She compares God with flowers, saying "You are all there is for my soul. Your love is purer than a lily, and Your

⁵¹⁴ Concerning the transformation of potatoes into roses there is an entire class of miracles changing food into roses. Included in this list are St. Elizabeth of Portugal, St. Dedacus of Alcala, and St. Elizabeth of Hungary. St. Elizabeth of Hungary is the most famous of these cases; she was queen to Louis, King of Thuringia. During a famine she fed the poor, creating palace shortages. Her husband forbade his wife to do this, yet she did not stop. One day while she was carrying a basket full of food her husband caught her, but when he opened the basket there were only perfectly white roses, miraculously in bloom in the middle of the winter. See Wolf, Kenneth Baxter. *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth of Hungary*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁵¹⁵ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 51.

⁵¹⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1546.

presence is more pleasing to me than the fragrance of a hyacinth. Your friendship is more tender and subtle than the scent of a rose, and yet it is stronger than death.”⁵¹⁷ Faustina understands God as having greater charm than even the flowers she loves. Flowers and their rich fragrances are worthy of being compared to God, and his virtues. The pureness of love can be found in a lily, yet God is purer still. The hyacinth has a pleasing, scented presence, but God is greater still. Friendship can be compared to the tender, subtle scent of a rose, yet still these are surpassed by God.

In nature as the flower unfolds it produces a scent that dies away while the flower eventually withers. This fragrance of life is temporal and finite in a way that human beings can understand. Just as floral scent dies away into the musk of the decay, so too does the human body deteriorate. In Catholic history however a few chosen human beings have been an exception to this rule. Like a flower still in bloom, select bodies retain their original beauty, and remain unchanged after death. What else should be a part of their miraculous preservation than the essence of a flower—its beautiful fragrance! Preserved Catholic bodies have emitted, and continue to emit, glorious, floral scents. In Catholic history even up to the present there have been documented cases of the incorruptibility of saint’s bodies that are not subject to decay.⁵¹⁸ Preserved beauty becomes as an idyllic, eternal, shield against time. Flowers play a special role in this suspension of events. St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) was a Spanish mystic and Carmelite nun who died on a journey from Burgos to Alba de Tormes. Days before her death St. Teresa began to emit a floral fragrance, a fragrance which remained with her body at the time of

⁵¹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1575.

⁵¹⁸ Please see Cruz, Joan. *The Incorruptibles: A Study of the Incorruption of the Bodies of Various Catholic Saints and Beati*. Rockford: Tan Books and Publishers, 1977.

her death.⁵¹⁹ St. Teresa is one of dozens of saints whose bodies have taken on floral scents, and whose beauty has not faded but been preserved in incorruptibility.⁵²⁰ This is more than the natural course of decay being suspended—the body possesses the wafting aroma of a flower. The floral scent now exists outside of its natural form (a flower) and is appropriated by the human body and made holy. In this instance, the scent of the flower signifies a liminal state, these human bodies are physically dead yet not succumbing to the physical grip of death; they are not alive but appear closer to life than death through their preservation and beautiful scents.

Faustina's case is different, and slightly more complex. As a sacrificial being Faustina is constantly emitting a glorious floral fragrance to God while living in an in-between state.⁵²¹ Faustina is living as one alive yet not alive; it is her scent that confirms her precarious position. Although Faustina was decaying while still alive both the rank smell of her decay and the glorious scent of her sacrifice were hidden from those around her. On one occasion Faustina felt herself to be in great pain and physically coming apart. A sister coming into her room said, "Sister, I smell a corpse here, as though it were decaying. O how dreadful it is!" Faustina replied, "Do not be frightened, Sister, that smell of a corpse comes from me."⁵²² Faustina's scents identify how liminal a position she exists in, and how through hidden scents she is

⁵¹⁹ Please see Snoek, Godefridus. *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995. According to devotional literature, when St. Teresa of Avila was buried, the same floral scent rose from her grave. "Incorrupt Bodies of the Saints" <http://www.marypages.com/IncorruptBodies.htm> (accessed January 11, 2013).

⁵²⁰ Prudentius refers to the Holy Innocents killed by Herod as "flowers of martyrdom" or (*flores martyrum*) who were crushed like rosebuds (*nascentes rosas*). The innocent, chaste nature of the children naturally links them with unblossomed flowers that are pure and untainted. This association of sexual purity and flowers continues, as female virgin-martyrs commonly take floral associations in art and literature, apparent from the Middle Ages onward. Potter, *The Rose*, 92. This theme of meadows is taken up by Gregory of Nyssa who wrote that "the painter has colored the walls with flowers of his art" referring to the martyrdom of St. Theodore where, "he depicted the martyr's struggle clearly and ornamented the church like a magnificent meadow." The lifespan of the transient flower, and decaying body, are highlighted against the backdrop of eternity. Miller, "Blue Flower," 232.

⁵²¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 306.

⁵²² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1430.

communicating with God. Usually people could not discern her decaying scent, and did not know what she was enduring. According to Faustina, only God understood, and perceived her scent as beautiful and floral. Much power was held in the fragile form of Faustina, scented as a flower in a state of decay, holding onto heaven and earth.

David Howes argues that a connection exists between olfaction, transition, and liminality. It is a matter of scent causing changes in a person. Howes devised a theory of liminality whereby scents are used at key liminal moments to signal or even initiate a 'shift.' Scent is a physical signal of a transition from one state to another, it can raise spirits, awaken people and induce the transition between two different states.⁵²³ This lasting scent is a signal, it shifts us outside of our 'natural' space and time into something wholly other. Similarly, Alfred Gell describes smell as "traces which unlike words only partially detach themselves from the world of objects to which they refer," existing "in between the stimulus and the sign, the substance and the idea."⁵²⁴ Gell's position supports Howe's thesis of olfactory transition and liminality. Scent allows Faustina to transition to a sacrificial floral body, all the while understanding that her human body is in a state of decay. Her fragrances of death and sacrifice are hidden from those around her but are fragrant for God. Classen reminds us that odours are typically used to "categorize others" and Faustina is certainly an 'other.'⁵²⁵ She is 'other' among her sisters by being specially chosen by God. Additionally, by understanding herself as a flower she is other, and when her body produces a floral scent, she finds confirmation that her otherness is floral.

⁵²³ Howe's example of transubstantiation in Catholic Mass provides a good example of this. The moment of transubstantiation is marked by "tintinnabulation and the censuring of elements (i.e. the bread and wine) with burning balsam." Howes, *Sensory Experience*, 129. Olfactory and auditory stimuli *evoke* that Eucharistic transition. Synnott, *Puzzling Over the Senses*, 61-76.

⁵²⁴ Gell, "Magic, Perfume, Dream," 26.

⁵²⁵ Howes, Synnott and Classen, *Odor of Sanctity*, 133.

According to Howe, odour itself typically “transgresses boundaries” of all sorts, putting scent in a liminal position.⁵²⁶ Scent itself is the very epitome of liminality as a physical phenomenon yet also amorphous and invisible. It exists inside of individuals as they breathe it in, and also among crowds as it diffuses through the air as a shared, internalized experience. A physical encounter with a ‘holy’ sacrificial scent signals a sacred, transformative presence. In Faustina’s case, the transgression includes the boundaries that existed between ‘human and flower,’ ‘spiritual and natural,’ and ‘heaven and earth.’ These categories have blended in Faustina’s life. As Faustina’s sacrificial floral scents reach God these categories break down, such that Faustina crossed all of them simultaneously. She is human and flower, connecting earth with heaven as her floral fragrance wafts upwards to God. Faustina is becoming, through her own body, her own kind of flower, and possesses the most important part of the sacrificial floral body: the floral scent. Floral fragrances, like the floral body itself, provide a spiritual, sensuous aesthetic with which Faustina can rediscover herself. These floral perfumes with their “infinite resonances” have bound Faustina to very specific ways of being in the world, and understanding herself in the world. It can be said that “odours are perceptible bonds” and “there is continuity in their very bodies” such that Faustina finds herself continued in floral form, while her persona is completed by floral fragrances.⁵²⁷ Continuity of her floral self occurs through the scent of a flower whereby she is expressing her floral body.

⁵²⁶ Howes, Synott and Classen, *Odor of Sanctity*, 139.

⁵²⁷ Howes, Synott and Classen, *Odor of Sanctity*, 137.

Experiences of Body

Important Features of the Floral Body: Colour

*Colour is the most sacred element of all visible things.*⁵²⁸

Colours are important to Faustina because they can hold messages from God. The most prominent example of colour codes rests in Faustina's vision of Divine Mercy where two coloured rays emanate from Jesus' chest, the red ray signified the bloody Passion of Jesus, and the pale ray the cool, clear baptismal waters.⁵²⁹ Colour is a significant feature of flowers, and can also hold meaning. The idea that flower species and colours can hold secrets is not a new one. This was a common understanding in the flower writings of Victorian England and America—to understand flowers is to understand their meaning and also God.

In Faustina's life, as discerned through her writings, God is the creator of all of heaven and earth, and it is God who is responsible for colour, flowers, and putting them both together. Faustina connects with her hopes and prayers in her garden as she is surrounded by many different coloured flowers. She identifies colour with theologically laden ideals. For instance, for Faustina, red roses are not only blood red, but red with the blood of Jesus's Passion. Their presence works to bring back the Passion into the present, in another body, and in another time, while keeping the poignancy and pain of that time alive. In blood red roses the body of Jesus bleeds still. In Faustina's life coloured flowers communicate truths about another reality; she participates in a religio-aesthetic of flower colour and is captivated by their meaning. In this section we will focus chiefly on white and red colours linked mostly with Mary and Jesus

⁵²⁸ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 6.

⁵²⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 299.

respectively.⁵³⁰ Faustina has been trained to understand colours through her visions—the pure Virgin Mary appeared to her in white, and the suffering Jesus was dressed in red during his Passion. When Faustina looks at flowers these colour codes persist in her mind. According to her diaries she identifies the purity of the *white* lily, the humility of the *violet* coloured violet, and the rose-*red* blood of Jesus.

In her diary, Faustina records the colour of Jesus' clothes from her visions. On December 22nd, 1934 she claimed “When it was possible for me to go to confession during the week, I happened to get there when my confessor was saying Holy Mass. During the third part of the Mass I saw the Infant Jesus, a little smaller than usual and with this difference, that He was wearing a violet tunic. He usually has a white one.”⁵³¹ This was a memory that held significance because it was out of the ordinary. Later she recorded another example where she claimed “He [Jesus] covered me with a red cloak like the one He was clothed with during His Passion and a veil of the same color, and He said to me, this is how you and your companions are going to be clothed.”⁵³² The red colour, and the connection with the Passion, links Faustina with Jesus's own experiences and with Jesus himself. Each flower and colour relate to specific figures and virtues, and can facilitate meditative communion with God. For Faustina the prevalence of colour in flowers is not to be taken lightly. Colour speaks to the emotional, passionate, sensuous dimension of humanity. Colour, claims Michael Taussig, is capable of “affect[ing] all the senses, not just sight. It moves and has depth and motion just as a stream has depth and motion. It connects such that it changes whatever it comes into contact with,” and this change is evident in

⁵³⁰ There are other colours and other figures associated with flowers as well. For instance in Catholic tradition white and red roses are dedicated to St. George on his feast day 23 April, the yellow rose is offered to St. Nicomede on 1 June and the blush rose is offered to St. Mary Magdalene on 22 July. Ward, *Contemplation Flowers*, 313.

⁵³¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 345.

⁵³² Kowalska, *Diary*, 526.

Faustina who identifies the coloured virtues that she wants to model.⁵³³ She can participate in the meaning of red when she contemplates roses and the Passion of Jesus because for her, redness links them. Colour is a powerful commodity that affects our emotions and understanding of the world. The richness, depth and sensuality of colour mean that it has the capacity to overcome boundaries by intimately engaging and absorbing attention. There is something seductive and rebellious about floral bodies, whose sensuous colours spill out onto the countryside and evokes passion from onlookers. Charles Riley describes colour as “a splurging thing, an unmanageable thing, like a prancing horse or a run in a stocking, something. This thing, this formless thing that we need to fence in with lines and marks, the boundary-riders of thought.”⁵³⁴ This unruly element of colour animates the flower; colour may be delimited by the shape of the flower, but its influence does not end at the edge of the petal. Colour seems to pass through boundaries with ease; they have come to represent theologies and occupy multiple virtues simultaneously. The connection between God, colour and flowers is highlighted in a poetic verse written by Walafrid Strabo, which cites the lily imparting colour to the rose. “By His holy word and life He sanctified, The pleasant lily; dying, He gave its color to the rose.”⁵³⁵ God is intimately connected with the fate of these flowers. It was as if the red colour was the lifeblood of the lily, and would not survive once the lily had died, the quality of red had to carry on, resplendent, in another, living flower—the rose.

Bright white petals are more than aesthetically pleasing, their exterior appearance indicates their moral state for Faustina. Flowers have become a spiritual colour pallet for her, she understands colour by participating in the acts of colours, and by participating in the moral code

⁵³³ Taussig, *What Color is the Sacred*, 40.

⁵³⁴ Riley, *Color Codes*, 17.

⁵³⁵ Potter, *The Rose*, 89.

they extol.⁵³⁶ White flowers indicate purity in Faustina’s mind and encourage her to emulate that purity. The exterior whiteness of the flower reflects the interior purity of the flower, its own *inner* whiteness. We may even speak of the “act of whiteness” as an element of dynamic participation. For Faustina whiteness is more than a label, it is ultimately an active property that mirrored the purity of the Virgin Mary, and that could inspire her to greater purity in her own life. Bachelard explains this comparison further.

And any comparison made between a substance and a being in nature—snow, lily, or swan—is participating in deep interiority, in a dynamic virtue. In other words, all dreamers who valorize white substance by comparing it to substances that are immaculate believe that they are grasping whiteness in its act, in its natural acts.⁵³⁷

Just as the purity of the Virgin Mary is expressed in the whiteness of lilies and snow, each is painted with the same moral brush.⁵³⁸ The use of red roses to describe the Passion of Jesus reveals strong desires in Faustina—she desires the blood of Jesus, spilled during the Passion, to be her own blood shed for God. This wish is neatly embodied in the figure of the red rose. Seeing the rose triggers reflection on Christ’s suffering and blood, such that Faustina desires that blood to be her own. We may speak of “the intimate meaning of the passion for red,”⁵³⁹ as a powerful attractant. Faustina understands floral colour as communicative, and meaningful.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁶ Goethe suggested “*Die Farben sind Thaten des Lichts, Thaten und Leiden.*” Translated, this means that colours are caused by the light, colours are both the cause and agony of light. Bachelard, *Earth and Repose*, 27.

⁵³⁷ Bachelard, *Earth and Repose*, 36.

⁵³⁸ The account of fifth century Pope Sixtus III connects whiteness, snow, lilies and God. Pope Sixtus III dreamt that it snowed in August, a dream that actually came to pass. In recognition of his clairvoyance, he built the Borghese Chapel in Rome and on the anniversary of that snowy August filled the chapel with fragrant white jasmine flowers to represent snow. Ward, *Contemplation Flowers*, 230. These flowers, instead of being a part of the miracle, became a commemoration of the miracle, linked by their pure whiteness.

⁵³⁹ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xvii.

⁵⁴⁰ Colours are powerful even while being “inaccessible to the intellect” according to Proust. Taussig, *What Color is the Sacred*, 45.

These pure white flowers and blood red flowers distil into “tincturing virtues,” because coloured virtues that exist in the floral world and can be mirrored in human lives.⁵⁴¹

Colour has been harnessed by flowers, and subsequently branded in the Catholic tradition as a sacred, communicative entity. By linking flowers of particular species and colours with important Catholic events, like the Passion, a bridge is formed between the coloured flower, and the eternal Christian reality.⁵⁴² Flowers have been understood as beautiful, tantalizingly so. Their beauty captures and holds the imagination because they are picturesque but more than this, they hold truths about God for Faustina. Faustina understood flowers as a part of God’s creation but also as instructive tools as described below.

Meditating on the Floral Body

*Look at his [Christ’s] feet and his hands; do you not see roses?*⁵⁴³

Faustina sat in gardens, surrounded by flowers, carefully studying their faces, their names and getting to know their movements, she connected with them in prayerful meditation. This section describes the meditative stance of Faustina, as rooted in Catholic tradition, including a look at Marian gardens and jewels as a part of devotional floral reverie.

⁵⁴¹ Bachelard, *Earth and Repose*, 25.

⁵⁴² Much scholarly attention has been paid to colour and gender. For instance, Charles Blanc was a nineteenth century theoretician who understood colour as female, and line as male, he explains “The union of design and color is necessary to beget painting just as the union of man and woman to beget mankind but design must maintain its preponderance over color. Otherwise painting speeds to its ruin: it will fall through color just as man fell through Eve.” Riley, *Color Codes*, 6. Colour is the antithesis of shape and form in the world of art and minds of philosophers. Where nature has no problem simultaneously being form and colour, philosophers have chosen sides as linearists and colourists. This division has prompted Riley to classify philosophers on each side. He has categorized Kant, Hegel, and Wittgenstein (including his followers through to Richard Rorty) as ‘linearists.’ These are individuals who give shape, line and form precedent over colour. The second group is comprised of Nietzsche, Spengler, Adorno, E. Barthes, and Jacques Derrida—these colourists put colour at the forefront instead. Riley, *Color Codes*, 46. This theory speaks to the compelling, fascinating nature of colour in human life.

⁵⁴³ Fisher, *The Medieval Flower Book*, 121.

Floral faces brightly reflect resplendent divinity for Faustina, while floral bodies held the secrets of heaven and put them on display for those with a discerning spirit. Bachelard explains that the “fabric of spirituality” is not bounded by everyday perceptions but by imaginative floral renderings.⁵⁴⁴ Armed with a rich spiritual life, and a penchant for the natural world, Faustina has woven a floral understanding of the sacred where souls are blossoms made manifest in an otherworldly garden. Bachelard, who is intimately familiar with floral reverie, tells us that “Whenever we are struck by an image, we should ask ourselves what torrent of words that image unleashes within us.”⁵⁴⁵ In Faustina’s case, those images are the flowers that surround her and that torrent of words are crafted Catholic beliefs applied in the vegetable kingdom, like the red rose finding intimate kinship with Christ during the Passion. To experience a flower, claims Bachelard, is more than simply seeing “perceptual images, colours and fragrances,” rather it is to experience “images of man, of the delicacies of feeling, of warmth of memory, of temptations to make an offering, everything that can flower in a human soul.”⁵⁴⁶ Just as Bachelard suggests that the flower inspires us to blossom in our own humanity as an offering, so does Faustina accept the challenge, and blossoms for God as a sacrificial being.

Faustina is a receptive, discerning individual who accesses divine realities through garden flowers. Meditating on their bodies becomes a devotional act for Faustina. The flowers point beyond themselves, stretching into her life, and bringing her closer to God. Flowers are indicative of a life beyond the visible; they inspire dynamic communication with the divine. It was the garden space that inspired Faustina to conceive of bodies in floral terms, her own body as well as Jesus’ body and Mary’s body. Faustina was led to make an offering of herself and did

⁵⁴⁴ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 1.

⁵⁴⁵ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 3.

⁵⁴⁶ Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, 157.

so using the model of a flower; she was spiritually nourished by these flowers and felt remade in their image.⁵⁴⁷ Through the flower, the world and everything in it opened up, and as Faustina sat in her garden she communed with this world, and the next.

The meditative property of flowers has been recognized by Christians for centuries. One practice in particular stands out, the cultivation of “Marian gardens” constructed for the purpose of honouring and communing with the Virgin Mary. They host a range of flowers, each carefully planted to evoke specific meditations on the Virgin. These gardens were especially popular during the Middle Ages, and continue to be grown today. For Faustina, and the guests of these Marian gardens, the flower served as a versatile tool for understanding Catholic doctrine. The physical body of the flower is imaginatively paired with Catholic figures such that the height, colour, and species of a flower reveal the supernatural world in some way. The *L. candidum*, or the Madonna lily, is the floral namesake for the Virgin Mary, and represents the floral body of Mary. Flowers of the Marian garden have been entrusted with great responsibility, not just to clothe her body in whimsical flowers, but to reveal her very nature. Just as Mary is a pure, upright human being, so is the virtue of the flower reflected in its upright posture and white colour.

The Marian Garden is like another world where participants can view the apparel and accessories of the Virgin Mary. It is as if one can catch a rare glimpse at her closet, filled with her intimate apparel. Her floral wardrobe is extensive, and composed of delicate petals stretching and conforming to her body, protecting and providing for her, from head to toe. *Convolvulus arvensis* is a white or pale pink flower, whose petals are imagined to nestle the head

⁵⁴⁷ Conceiving of bodies in floral terms was not an unusual phenomenon within the Catholic tradition. Saint Felix spoke of his body as a fertile field where “new flowers have emerged.” Miller, “Blue Flower,” 228. St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) has been outright labelled the little flower of Jesus.

of Mary as she sleeps, for it is as known as “Our Lady’s Nightcap.” So many reveries can be inspired from just this single flower: what dreams will this blossom stimulate, from the head of Mary to the minds of Christians in the Marian garden? *Alchemilla mollis* has green leaves which protectively cover Mary as “Our Lady’s Mantle,” and her very toes are protected by a bright yellow flower, *Lotus corniculatus*, affectionately referred to as “Our Lady’s Slippers.” Various other clothing, accessories and body parts exist in between, including Our Lady’s toes, fingers, candlestick and even tears. To contemplate Lungwort, or *Pulmonaria*, whose blue flowers have a reddish center is to contemplate Mary’s blue eyes, red from crying. To cry alongside these flowers is to tenderly remember how Mary suffered. These flowers so poetically and perfectly express her pain. Two examples from Faustina’s diary will make the link between the flower and the body clearer in Faustina’s life, starting with the white lily and then the red rose.

Faustina regards the lily as a mirror of the Mother of God.⁵⁴⁸ The theological pairing means that the body of this flower is analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of Mary herself. Just as the epithet *candidum* means “shining, or pure white,” the colour of the lily indicates the chastity, innocence and purity of Mary. Faustina makes the same comparison as she speaks of white lilies mirroring Mary in their purity.⁵⁴⁹ Looking again at the body of this flower, its tall stature has “stateliness” about it and a commanding presence like Mary is thought to have. Faustina similarly points out that the lily is a flower which “stands out” among others.⁵⁵⁰ These simple comparisons can grow in complexity as the flower is studied in its minutia. George Bataille reminds us “What the configuration and colour of the corolla reveal, what the dirty

⁵⁴⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 79.

⁵⁴⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1746.

⁵⁵⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 591.

traces of pollen or the freshness of the pistil betray doubtless cannot be adequately expressed by language; it is, however, useless to ignore...this inexpressible real presence.”⁵⁵¹ This weighty floral presence, and attention to anatomical detail, has been picked up in a theological way. Every misplaced strand and any light bruising can have major theological consequences, and may strike a specimen from the holy menagerie. For instance, a lily that is not perfectly white is not perfectly pure, and cannot represent Mary. Bobby Ward explains that the lily’s petals point to “a spotless body and its golden anthers [point to] a soul gleaming with heavenly light.”⁵⁵² In this vegetal world the exact shade of gold in question will facilitate imaginings of heaven, and flower anthers will suggest the eternal fate of the Mother of God. Through careful reflection on the body of this flower, even its very anthers, the character of the Virgin Mary becomes apparent. These flowers are capable of confirming one’s theology, just as one’s theology makes creative imprints on the flower. Flowers “seem to *conform to what must be*” as a part of a larger theology, where the body of the flower represents something very important.⁵⁵³ When the Virgin Mary is understood as a lily, the lily becomes the teacher for in its petals and stem one can imagine what Mary is like. Though a theological ideal of Mary may lead to the lily, it is the lily that continues to inspire and uphold the connection to Mary. In the end, the flowers are teaching Christians about their holy figures. Faustina has picked up on these connections in her own life and understood floral bodies as vehicles for divine meaning.

Although Faustina echoed the connection between roses and Jesus, she was by no means the first to make that connection; her sentiment follows a rich Catholic history. Walafriid Strabo claimed that the death of Jesus gave red roses their colour, while St. Bernard concurred that red

⁵⁵¹ Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 10.

⁵⁵² Ward, *Contemplation Flowers*, 244.

⁵⁵³ Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 12.

roses represented the sufferings of Jesus.⁵⁵⁴ Just as it was said that roses gained thorns from the Fall of humankind, so do they acquire their colour from the bloody Passion of Jesus. The very bodies of roses are directly affected by Jesus' suffering; it changes them to reflect spilled blood and makes them keenly in tune with the state of humanity. Their fate is tied with ours; the effects of the Fall and salvation are written on their floral bodies. This section began with the words of the mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, who made this connection even starker by describing the wounds of Christ, saying "Look at his [Christ's] feet and his hands; do you not see roses?"⁵⁵⁵ These wounds have become roses, the very site of torture, the very physical mark of grief and love at once. The body of this flower has been used as the climactic, visual, visceral symbol of Jesus' bodily Passion, so that to see a red rose is to see the wounds of Christ.⁵⁵⁶

The body of the flower and the body of Christ are visibly linked through blood red petals, and the presence of thorns. Faustina meditates on the delicate red rose while conjuring images of the broken body of Jesus. She claims that Jesus is an eternal flower of humanity, whose rose-red blood is spilled for all, and wrote "I salute You, Jesus, never-fading flower of humanity...O sweet, rose-red blood of Jesus, ennoble my blood and change it into Your own blood, and let this be done to me according to Your good pleasure."⁵⁵⁷ Faustina has linked the sweet heroism of Jesus with the spilling of his blood, and that blood with a sweet rose. It is the flower which bears the weight of this comparison and one can almost imagine the rose shedding its petals in the midst of the Passion. The natural world, through the rose, is supporting and enhancing a

⁵⁵⁴ Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 75.

⁵⁵⁵ Fisher, *The Medieval Flower Book*, 121.

⁵⁵⁶ Neither the white lily nor the red rose is exclusively tied to one particular figure. Jesus has also been called a lily, and the Virgin Mary has been called a rose.

⁵⁵⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1575.

theologically laden idea of salvation through the Passion of Jesus. It is a heavy burden for the rose to bear, but provides a meditative model in the floral world. Faustina, by remaking herself as a floral body, comes closer to Jesus as the never-fading flower of humanity; she mimics him in her own floral way. Just as Faustina's hands, feet, and side feel the pain of the Passion of Jesus through invisible stigmata, she has been able to mirror Jesus in this transformative, floral way, calling herself a humble rose *bud* just sprouting in the world. All the world reveals the mysteries of God, for Faustina, and flowers in particular carry sacred messages.

Roses were not reserved for Jesus' blood and body alone. They blossomed indiscriminately at sites of violent deaths and heavenly rewards without contradiction; bloody flowers and flowers of paradise flowed freely in Christian writing.⁵⁵⁸ A rose then, might historically conjure images of any number of martyrs and their violent deaths.⁵⁵⁹ The martyr's body and the body of Jesus are seemingly identical in the body of a red rose. How is it that flowers, with their supple petals and beautiful fragrances, are connected with scenes of extreme violence and torture? Bachelard quotes from Louis Cazamian, claiming that "Wind, light, air and the odour of a flower stir violent emotions"⁵⁶⁰ because sometimes it is the "violence of

⁵⁵⁸ In early Christianity there existed a 'complex' of blood, flowers, death and transformation, appearing in connection with young women in particular. Miller, "*Blue Flower*," 229.

⁵⁵⁹ It should also be recognized that blood and flowers have existed in connection with death and rebirth long before the advent of martyrs in Christianity. This was a theme appropriated by the Christian cause. Paulinus of Nola, for instance, reimagined traditions associated with the Roman festival of *Rosalia* for Christian use. Miller, "*Blue Flower*," 228. There had also been the sentiment, expressed by St. Felix, that nature owed respect and flowers to these martyrs: "Sprinkle the ground with flowers, adorn the doorways with garlands. Let winter breathe forth the purple beauty of spring; let the year be in flower before its time, and let nature submit to the holy day. For you also, earth, owe wreaths to the martyr's tomb. But the holy glory of the doorway to the heavens encircles him. Flowering with the twin wreaths of war and peace." Miller, "*Blue Flower*," 228. Nature here has an obligation to holiness, and had a request put before it, to show its submissiveness.

⁵⁶⁰ Cazamian, *Etudes de Psychologie*, 52.

gentleness”⁵⁶¹ which descends and takes hold of a person. The flower is a delicate, gentle entity yet it is still capable of great power and can represent great suffering. As such, flowers have become sensitive channels for this violence, however gentle they seem. Flowers would not grow into these Catholic figures if it was not for human ‘intervention’ and perhaps, human imagination. Flowers became a part of a sensuous spirituality, so that instead of being superfluous, they were sanctified. It was almost as if, for Faustina, the heavens reached down and picked the choicest blooms, so that the most perfect of flowers were stamped with divine approval.

Patricia Cox Miller suggests that “in the cult of relics, flowers were never far from the weight of blood and bones.”⁵⁶² Flowers were used in combination with the body as a sensual cue, irrevocably linking Catholics with the earth, as well as the heavens where they were prophesized to grow. Observing flowers amongst relics point to the heavenly home of earth ridden bones, as well as the end of our time on earth and entrance into Paradise. The bodies of flowers and martyrs mingled, as did the presence of flowers at sites of death and visions of heaven.⁵⁶³ The case of Prudentius is especially fascinating. Jill Ross, who studied Prudentius’ Saint Eulalia, explained that Eulalia’s body was described as a “tender flower.” This foreshadowed her transformation into a flower of the Church’s “garland of martyrs,” where her bloody wounds appeared as blood red flowers.⁵⁶⁴ According to Prudentius the flow of her red blood (*purpura sanguinis*) will reappear in the *purpureas violas sanguinesoque crocus*, these are

⁵⁶¹ Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 38.

⁵⁶² Miller, “Blue Flower,” 231.

⁵⁶³ Miller has identified clusters of images, especially in the writings of Victorius of Rouen, Paulinus of Nola, Gregory of Nyssa, and Prudentius, which pair the blood and bones of Christian martyrs with floral images.

⁵⁶⁴ See Ross, “Dynamic Writing,” 339.

the purple violets and blood-coloured crocuses appearing on the mosaic floor of the basilica containing her relics. Ross explains that the mosaic floor is there, “so that you can imagine rose coloured meadows, reddening with many kinds of flowers.”⁵⁶⁵ Beliefs about otherworldly realities are made tangible in the forms of these flowers.

Another passage from Victricius of Rouen’s oration praising martyrs brings together relics, flowers, jewels and blood in a strikingly intense way. The crowns of the martyrs, wrote Victricius, are “adorned with the varied lights of the jewels” of various virtues (*diademata variis gemmarum distinct luminibus*). Christ is the artist (*artifex*) who has decorated the crowns with “spiritual jewels” (*spiritualibus gemmis*); these jewels, he continues, “bloom in beauty more and more [*magis ac magis in specie florescunt*].”⁵⁶⁶ The very same appreciation of holy jewels is picked up by Faustina in her writing and is connected with flowers. Bachelard identifies this longing for something miniature and exceptionally exquisite as a beauty to be “held in the palm of one’s hand: a lovely miniature, a flower or a jewel.”⁵⁶⁷ Both the flower and a jewel, compared with the human body, are miniature. We must bend down low to see them, and can indeed take them in our hands. Faustina admires both of these miniatures: flowers and jewels. She declares the Virgin Mary to be radiant, and “pure as a crystal” while also praising the purity of Mary as the purest “Snow-white Lily.”⁵⁶⁸ The flower and crystal are, for her, pure elements of nature, capable of receiving the rays of God’s love without flaw or imperfection. The flower is “always turning to the sun” while the sun passes through a crystal as mercy passes into souls from

⁵⁶⁵ Miller, “Blue Flower,” 232.

⁵⁶⁶ Miller, “Blue Flower,” 233.

⁵⁶⁷ Bachelard, *Earth and Will*, 225.

⁵⁶⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 844; Kowalska, *Diary*, 1735, 1746, 161.

Jesus.⁵⁶⁹ Just as Faustina desires to be a flower, and describes herself turning to the sun as a flower, so does she use the language of crystals, claiming “I expose my heart to the action of Your grace like a crystal exposed to the rays of the sun. May Your image be reflected in it, O my God...Let Your divinity radiate through me, O You who dwell in my soul.”⁵⁷⁰ Faustina understands that God, as “Divine Sun,” has rays which reveal “the tiniest specks of dust” and so she can only use the purest of images, and strive for the purest of forms to embody.⁵⁷¹ The flower and the crystal, as perfect, miniature beauties, are able to be both held and beheld, and occupy a special place in her prayers. The next section on floral experience explains how Faustina often occupied garden spaces and through them gained a floral understanding of her body.

Coming to the end of this section on corporeal orientation, it is apparent that the colours of flowers are contiguous with a divine colour pallet. The ‘morality’ of flowers is reflected in the colour and shape of their bodies. To meditate on these floral bodies is to meditate on larger theological ideals, like the purity of Mary or the Passion of Christ. Flowers act as bridges between the here and now and the future that awaits Christians. In the same way that jewels reflect light and colour, so do flowers reflect the same beauty and inspire thoughts of the divine.

⁵⁶⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 306; Kowalska, *Diary*, 528.

⁵⁷⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1336.

⁵⁷¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 71.

Life Experienced as a Flower: Faustina's Hidden Floral Body

The Crown imperial (Fritillaria imperialis)...stared boldly at Christ on His way to His crucifixion, and for ever after has had to hang its head, weeping.⁵⁷²

Flowers are easily drawn into the mythology of Christ and the lives of Catholics. This section looks at the specific, changing ways in which floral bodies are experienced in Faustina's life from hidden nothingness to blossoming flowers.

From the time she was a young child, Helena often occupied garden space. Her body stood, sat, knelt and bowed in the open air of the garden. She knew the feel of the soil, the sight of the flowers in bloom, heard the faint rustling of leaves, and could smell the fragrant, earthy blossoms surrounding her. Gardens were a large part of her existence and arguably became a defining factor in her understanding of herself. While being physically surrounded by flowers, Faustina turned more and more to them to understand her God and herself. Flowers became teachers as well as role models for her, and almost as a natural progression she came to imagine herself as one of these flowers in God's holy garden.

Through her diaries, it becomes obvious that the body of the flower reflected how Faustina felt about herself, such that the developmental state of the flower, either folded or in bloom, was significant. A rosebud is often a hidden beauty because it is small, concealed, full of potential but yet folded in itself and unknown. Violets are naturally inconspicuous, even when in bloom, because they are low to the ground and often hidden by grass. It is a meeker, humbler flower than the beautiful rose. The rosebud and hidden violet are both flowers that Faustina used to understand her place in the floral world, and her own world. Faustina gains an understanding

⁵⁷² Coats, *Flowers in History*, 19.

of herself as a hidden, floral sacrifice by considering these floral bodies as models. In the garden of life, Sister Faustina hides herself like the folded rosebud, or the hidden violet.

This journey to becoming a flower is expressed in two modes. Faustina first embraces herself as a sacrifice, and acknowledges her ability to be transformed into a *floral* body. Next, as a floral sacrifice, Faustina learns to open herself up to God by blossoming in his rays.

Faustina Transformed into a Floral Body

Faustina had chosen to become a victim soul, to offer herself fully to God, but more than this, she wanted to transform herself into a floral offering. Faustina transformed herself completely; she positioned her body at the feet of God as a flower would, possessed a floral fragrance, and had the anonymity of a floral offering. She explained this process in her diary.

O Lord. I cast myself as a little rosebud at Your feet, O Lord, and may the fragrance of this flower be known to You alone... Holy and Omnipotent God, at this moment of immense grace by which You are uniting me with Yourself forever, I, mere nothingness, with the utmost gratitude, cast myself at Your feet like a tiny, unknown flower and, each day, the fragrance of that flower of love will ascend to Your throne.⁵⁷³

As God unites himself with Faustina, Faustina is made into a tiny, unknown flower—this is her new, floral, personae. The hidden identity of the flower fits Faustina's reality as an offering, and when she recalls that experience of union, she recalls herself in the context of a flower. She has been remade as a sacrifice of flowers before the altar of God, producing lovely fragrances with her new bodily form. Flowers are a living response to Faustina's otherness, suffering, and desire to be with God in an absolute way.

⁵⁷³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 239-240.

To fully understand Faustina's embodied experiences of garden flowers we must first recall her penchant for hiding. The floral body of Faustina is most often a small, *hidden* body. From the time she was a child Faustina would hide herself away to dedicate herself fully to God. When the physical space of the church was not available, she would take to the open air of the garden. Later in life, Faustina would hide herself away from her fellow sisters for the same reason. She desired solitude and anonymity before God so that she might be hidden, and known to him alone. Sitting alone in the convent gardens, bearing her soul to God, she took this a step further. Her feelings were carried over in her embodiment of flowers, such that she would sometimes long to *be* those hidden flowers that surrounded her. For Faustina, hidden souls, like hidden flowers, are appreciated by God. She explains in her diary that "Jesus loves hidden souls. A hidden flower is the most fragrant. I must strive to make the interior of my soul a resting place for the Heart of Jesus."⁵⁷⁴ Faustina seeks to remake the most interior, intimate places of herself as a comfortable place for Jesus, leaving nothing for herself, and giving all to him. It is her greatest desire to be that fragrant, hidden floral presence. Flowers fit her ideals so precisely in part because she is forever carving out spaces of secrecy for Jesus. As mentioned in chapter four the interior body of the flower naturally holds such enclosed spaces. The body of the flower has this ability to encircle and to protect secrets within, while being unobtrusive without.

Jesus, You know how ardently I desire to hide so that no one may know me but Your sweetest Heart. I want to be a tiny violet, hidden in the grass, unknown in a magnificent enclosed garden in which beautiful lilies and roses grow...Oh, how happy I am to be able to hide myself in this way! O my divine Bridegroom, the flower of my heart and the scent of my pure love are for You.⁵⁷⁵

Sister Faustina is the tiny violet, and while those around her are more obviously beautiful, she alone is hidden for God. Violets are not blood red to display a violent death, or a beautiful

⁵⁷⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 275.

⁵⁷⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 591.

white to reveal splendour, instead they are hidden and meek to showcase a humble life. Just as the strength of the delicate rose is able to shoulder the violence of the Passion, the meek violet is able to represent the tortured body of Faustina. Her scent, produced from her good works and trust, are the only signs of her presence. She has distinguished herself as a particular *kind* of flower, and as a species apart from the others. She makes this point clearer later, stating that she is hiding among her sisters “like a little violet among lilies.”⁵⁷⁶ Faustina formulates and fulfills desires for her own life by studying and emulating the violet.

There is a nesting of flowers inside flowers, as both the floral bodies of Jesus and Faustina find solace in one another. Faustina hopes to continue her mission of suffering for God in the floral body, and explains the form that would take.

I will hide from people's eyes whatever good I am able to do so that God himself may be my reward. I will be like a tiny violet hidden in the grass, which does not hurt the foot that treads on it, but diffuses its fragrance and, forgetting itself completely, tries to please the person who has crushed it underfoot.⁵⁷⁷

Even as a flower, Faustina has devised a way to suffer for God. As a flower, she will place herself beneath others, such that her suffering causes no one else pain. Faustina intends to forget herself completely, and live for others as a floral body.

Sister Faustina is clear about her intention—she desires to be at the feet of God, lowered in a position of humility, forever grateful and adoring. Faustina wanted to make her innermost

⁵⁷⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 224. In *Song of Songs* we see the connection between a lover's bond and scent—the sweet fragrance of love is linked with nard (females) and myrrh (males). “Saints were seen as the scented lovers of God.” Evans, “Scent of a Martyr,” 201.

⁵⁷⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 255. In his text *Purest of All Lilies*, Donald Calloway cites the lily as the “favourite” flower of Faustina though this seems unconvincing. Calloway gives no supportive evidence for this claim. Calloway, *Purest of All Lilies*, 101-103. Despite the title, the focus of this book is not on flowers but the relationship between St. Faustina and the Virgin Mary.

self into a resting place; she wanted to be that hidden, fragrant flower. She explains this sentiment further.

O my Jesus, delight of my heart, You know my desires. I should like to hide from people's sight so as to be like one alive and yet not living. I want to live pure as a wild flower; I want my love always to be turned to You, just as a flower that is always turning to the sun. I want the fragrance and the freshness of the flower of my heart to be always preserved for You alone. I want to live beneath Your divine gaze, for You alone are enough for me. When I am with You, Jesus, I fear nothing, for nothing can do me harm.⁵⁷⁸

In so regularly and carefully observing these flowers, Faustina learns of the floral realities of the wildflower. Existing as a wildflower means more than having a hidden life; it is a pure life where the divine gaze of God nourishes like the rays of the sun. Faustina is not alive in the fullest sense of the word, nor has she died, she has become *other* in her life, and desires that continuity in her floral self.⁵⁷⁹ This physical orientation, this angling towards the sun, is the orientation that Faustina desires. As a spiritual flower, Faustina requires a spiritual sun—God. Faustina wants to turn herself towards God, and soak up his sustaining love the way a flower soaks up light. Faustina speaks of the “flower of her heart” making clear that her very being is as a flower dedicated to God. As one would expect from a flower, Faustina is able to blossom under the rays of God.

Faustina Blossoms for God

As Faustina imagines her floral body, she is precise about what it must be. As a flower, she wants to be wholly re-made, into a selfless, humble, sacrificial offering. Naturally, she desires to ‘express’ herself as any flower would—by blossoming. She explains, “I want to

⁵⁷⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 306.

⁵⁷⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1430.

blossom for my Lord and Maker, to forget about myself, to empty myself totally for the sake of immortal souls—this is my delight.”⁵⁸⁰ A flower in bloom can be understood as a visible sign of divine love because only by soaking up God’s rays can flowers blossom. How will this happen, how will Faustina use her human body to blossom? Faustina has transformed her understanding of her body, very specifically, as she attempts to blossom, making this striking comparison, “I open the calyx of my heart to You, like a rosebud to the freshness of dew.”⁵⁸¹ The very structure of her heart has changed to reveal her bodily presence as a flower. Her heart now has a calyx that opens for Jesus. Just as a rosebud opens itself to dew, so does Faustina open her floral heart to Jesus to mold as he desires. Faustina has led us through her desires: the desire to be a hidden flower, one that opens itself, one that blooms for God, and one that annihilates itself.

Faustina has more than the *desire* to embody a blossoming flower, she makes this happen in her life. She expresses a selfless, self-forgotten moment where she *has* blossomed for God. In the physical space of the garden, surrounded by flowers, Faustina experienced that blissful merging with God which she describes as a “blossoming.” Faustina understands her relationship with God, even their very union, using the special narrative of the life of the flower. This merging defies description according to Faustina, who can only *begin* to describe it. She can perhaps speak of the *entrance* into this state of nothingness, however words cease and there can be no true understanding or explanation. St. Faustina has come to experience herself as one might imagine a flowers’ experience—turning towards the bright sun, being nourished by its rays, then opening beautifully, thriving and blossoming. From her desires to embody a flower comes the experience of divine union.

⁵⁸⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 224.

⁵⁸¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1064.

God drew me to himself so strongly and powerfully that sometimes I was not aware of being on earth...My spirit has been turned towards the Sun and has blossomed in His rays for Him alone; I understand no more...[The sentence breaks off here and begins a completely new thought in the next line.]⁵⁸²

She abruptly ended her speech as she ceased to have understanding. How could she write? In this passage Faustina is basking in the rays of God's light, and love, and blossoming herself. This is the entrance into a mystical state of divine union, as experienced by a flower. Faustina has used flowers, in a multitude of ways, to reach out to God and in the end she has *become* that flower and met God as a flower in mystic union.

Eventually as Faustina offers up her soul, her body, her life and her death she will be more than a hidden violet, she will have achieved purity of heart, soul and body. Faustina exclaimed, as she prayed to the Mother of God, "O lovely lily! You are for me a mirror, O my Mother!"⁵⁸³ The transformation is complete. Faustina can identify herself not just as a flower, but the divine flower of the Mother of God. Her reflection is that of a beautiful, resplendent flower, no longer hidden as a bud, but whose glory is apparent. Faustina is able to look at the lily, and see not only the Mother of God, but also herself as she is striving to be like the Virgin Mary. Together, Faustina, the lily, and the Mother of God are one mirrored entity. Faustina is learning that flowers are a portal, and by imitating a floral body in all its purity, she can imitate a divine being. She finds herself perfectly representing the lily just as the Mother of God is the purest form of that same lily. Faustina has found a way to connect with the Mother of God, through floral imitation. It is as if she stands before a mirror and sees her reflection as a lily, while standing on the opposite side of the mirror, the Mother of God is also reflecting the same floral

⁵⁸² Kowalska, *Diary*, 142.

⁵⁸³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 79.

image. The lily unites them both, and stands as an embodied floral form of Faustina and the Mother of God.

Conclusion

Faustina strove to use her body to become closer to God, specifically, through the suffering of her body. With great patience and humility she lowered herself to be trod on, and humiliated. Just as the violet was crushed underfoot, unnoticed by others, so too did Faustina suffer in silence. She was a hidden violet in her life, and a burning sacrifice before the altar of God. Her littleness and lowliness were expressed in the little, lowly form of the violet. Hers is the small, hidden body of the violet, full of humility and overshadowed by the grandeur of the flowers around her.

Faustina's relationship with her body was governed by a hierarchy of the senses. Although Faustina used all of her bodily senses in life her journals clearly indicate that her sense of sight and sense of smell dominated her communications with God, while her ability to touch was only useful insofar as it allowed her to feel pain.⁵⁸⁴

The essence of the floral body is fragrance, and so it is fragrance that Faustina releases to God as a sign of faith, devotion and good works. The coloured bodies of flowers were also a reflection of their theological significance—Faustina saw the blood of Christ in a red rose and wished it was her own; in a white lily she saw her own purity, and the purity of the Virgin Mary. Ultimately, as an embodied being on earth, Faustina's liminality is captured in the form of a wildflower, straddling the lines between human and flower, death and life.

⁵⁸⁴ Faustina often describes smells as being "sweet" however she does not describe her experiences of taste in any detail. Faustina wanted to chastise her body and focus on her spirit as much as possible, the pleasure of eating would not have been appropriate in her life.

Floral bodies have served as a meditative focal point in the imagination of Faustina, and many other Catholics that have come before her. In her diary Faustina becomes a mirror of the lily, the Mother of God, she hides in the floral body that is Christ, and she eventually remakes her soul as a place of repose for Jesus. Faustina uses the language of the flower and features of the flower to understand her own body in a new way. In the end, she becomes a sacrificial, floral offering. Faustina undergoes great transformation, such that her body is repurposed as a floral body, capable of blossoming for God.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FLOWERS AND RELATIONALITY

O my most sweet Master, good Jesus, I give You my heart. You shape and mold it after Your liking. O fathomless love, I open the calyx of my heart to You, like a rosebud to the freshness of dew. To You alone, my Betrothed, is known the fragrance of the flower of my heart. Let the fragrance of my sacrifice be pleasing to You. O Immortal God, my everlasting delight, already here on earth You are my heaven. May every beat of my heart be a new hymn of praise to You, O Holy Trinity! Had I as many hearts as there are drops of water in the ocean or grains of sand in the whole world, I would offer them all to You, O my Love, O Treasure of my heart! Whomever I shall meet in my life, no matter who they may be, I want to draw them all to love You, O my Jesus, my Beauty, my Repose, my sole Master, Judge, Savior and Spouse, all in one; I know that one title will modify the other—I have entrusted everything to Your mercy.⁵⁸⁵

This excerpt is revisited in the context of relationality by looking specifically at Faustina's relationship with God and flowers. With absolute trust St. Faustina stands before God as a sacrificial offering, giving everything she is and wanting to give still more—in return she receives endless love. Nothing is held back in this relationship; she gives the fragrance and beats of her heart and would offer God the very sands and oceans if she could. Faustina stands, ready to be molded, before her trusted God. She responds to Jesus as her Betrothed, but also as her Beauty, Repose, Judge, and Master—all while navigating the three personas of the Holy Trinity. Hers is a complex relationship with Jesus, defined by overlapping roles that function without contradiction, but are layered with unique meaning. She offers her heart as a flower in bloom, fragrant and open, for the pleasure of God. The obviously intimate relationship with God is defined by her sacrificial efforts as a floral offering, and the great mercy and love she receives in return.

⁵⁸⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1064.

Introduction: Relating to God and Flowers in the Writings of St. Faustina

The Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy convents, buildings made of brick and mortar, may seem far away from the reality of an ethereal heaven—but not for St. Faustina. Her life was punctuated by visits from divinity so that the space and time of heaven were never absent from her everyday existence. Still, she lived by the structured schedule of the convent where she interacted daily with priests, fellow sisters or the poor, all in keeping with the established convent routines. As Faustina boiled, baked, swept, mended and otherwise served her community, she interacted with these others. This is what is meant by “relationality”—those “others” with whom Faustina shared her life. Despite constant human contact, the defining relationship of her life was not with another person but with the *absolute other*, God. It was this other that informed her decisions, influenced her life from an early age and ultimately shaped her character. The focus of this final section is on Faustina’s relationship with God, as she understood it, and as mediated and facilitated by flowers.

We have already explored the temporal, spatial and physical presence of flowers that defined Faustina’s relationship with God, and which allowed her life to assume intense meaning and purpose. Indeed flowers became the means through which she experienced the most intimate encounter possible—divine union.

The question is how did Faustina’s relationship with flowers and with God influence each other? “Orientation in Relation to the Other,” situates flowers at the centre of her relationship with God. “Experience of Relationality,” addresses how flowers behave as vessels and virtues, their role in sacrificial fires and their relationship with sunshine and flames. A brief conclusion presents, in concise form, the significant findings of this section.

Orientation in Relation to the Other

*In casting oneself into a cosmic image one both opens oneself up to the world and opens a new world up.*⁵⁸⁶

Faustina lived in a world where God was the centre of her reality, and where flowers connected her with that centre. When these two features of her life, God and flowers, combine, they mutually reinforce each other. Looking at flowers becomes a meditation on God, and interacting with God includes flowers. Faustina straddled two worlds, the here and now on earth, and the supernatural realm which often breaks through in her visions or visitations. Flowers occupy a space in this world and the next and so provided her with a comforting stability. Through flowers Faustina's "multiple realities are joined," producing a cohesive picture of God and the world.⁵⁸⁷ One of these realities is the natural world surrounding her. Faustina found deep theological insight through cosmic beauty, expressed in nature. She explained in her diary that her "soul is so sensitive to the rustle of grace [that] it knows how to talk with all created things and with everything that surrounds" her—she has become a permeable medium to the world.⁵⁸⁸ Faustina also confessed while in Derdy that in being surrounded by the beauty of the woods she can "see God in everything that surrounds" her.⁵⁸⁹ Faustina's reality holds great consistency and continuity; she knows that God is everywhere and she can actually sense God everywhere through his creations.

Faustina's flower experiences contribute to her spiritual growth and bring her closer to God. God is drawn towards Faustina when she is manifesting herself as a floral offering, and

⁵⁸⁶ Bachelard, *Poetics of Fire*, 110.

⁵⁸⁷ Bachelard, *Poetics Fire*, 32.

⁵⁸⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1120.

⁵⁸⁹ Sister Faustina wrote this in a letter to Father Sopocho in May of 1936. Mizia, *Letters*, 33.

Faustina in turn is drawn to God as a flower. These flower experiences can be understood as the ‘data’ of Faustina’s religio-aesthetic consciousness. The beauty of a floral presence gives aesthetic unity to her theology and the natural world. For example, in a letter to Father Sopocho dated 1937, Faustina wrote “I work in the garden. It looks beautiful, particularly this time of the year when all the trees are in bloom. This lifts my soul to God.”⁵⁹⁰ These blossoms rejoice with Faustina, and together they praise God.⁵⁹¹ Flowers stimulate, express and shape her relationship with her God and with herself. It is sometimes the case that “highly traditional images” like flowers become interpreted in diverse ways.⁵⁹² Faustina, through her love of flowers, claimed blossoms for her own religious ends. The other, such as Christ and Mary, are sought within the familiar roses and lilies, such that all become simultaneously other and familiar.⁵⁹³ Flowers provided, in some ways, a private code between Faustina and God. These flowers were indispensable in organizing her time, her space, her body, and her interactions with the outside world. Through them, she learned to negotiate and reshape her reality.

Experience of Relationality

Flowers as Vessels

Layered complexity persists in understanding the virtues and sacred dimensions of flowers because most blossoms have multiple connections. In Faustina’s diaries alone a lily may represent the Virgin Mary, or the tall, proud nuns of the convent. A red rose may represent the Virgin Mary, as well as Jesus, hard work, or the Passion itself. Even Faustina describes herself

⁵⁹⁰ Faustina wrote this in a letter to Father Sopocho on May 6th, 1937. Mizia, *Letters*, 95.

⁵⁹¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1120.

⁵⁹² Bachelard, *Poetics Fire*, 29.

⁵⁹³ Bachelard claims that “we seek the *other* within the *same*.” Bachelard, *Earth and Repose*, 60. The ways in which Faustina uses flowers, although common to her Catholic tradition, are highly personal and unique in her own life.

both *as* a flower, and sometimes as nestling *within* a flower. Clearly flowers can change in meaning, or simultaneously hold differing meanings. These dual or triple meanings should not be understood as contradictory, nor do they negate value in any way. Rather, these various meanings should be understood as an attestation to the polyvalent symbolism, durability, and encompassing nature of flowers. Despite their fragile form they are strong enough to hold and represent these varied meanings. Clearly it is not the fixed species of a flower which is important but the actual *linking* of the virtue or holy figure with the flower. Multiple uses do not weaken these associations but improve them, forming yet another connection in the tapestry linking flowers with God. Bachelard tells us that “Despite its thousand faces, the river takes on a single destiny.”⁵⁹⁴ Similarly for Faustina, despite the thousand faces of the flower they all lead to God in their own way. Although Faustina’s flowers are “charged with multiple impressions and feelings”⁵⁹⁵ they all cohere to a single reality where God is the creator, reflected in the floral faces of his creation. While violets, lilies and roses are the *expression* of humility, purity and love, God is the lasting *impression*, for God is at the heart of these virtues.⁵⁹⁶ This multiplicity forms the floral basis for the relationship between God and Faustina.

While flowers can be understood as vessels they are not *empty* vessels. They bring with them a host of organic features which must be accommodated or featured in the theology of the beholder, and as such, flowers provide a *transformative* beauty. The perennial flower is a perfect example of this, for they naturally wilt in the winter and return in the springtime. The idea of the resurrection becomes fused with the naturally occurring cycles of plants, such that perennials shoulder the supernatural resurrection of Christ. To see a flower reborn after the winter is to see

⁵⁹⁴ Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 151.

⁵⁹⁵ Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 50.

⁵⁹⁶ Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 130.

Christ, victoriously resurrected. Flowers readily absorb the theological underpinnings attributed to them, and radiate their own kind of light, colour and life. In so radiating they are able to awaken the beholder to the potential of transcending present realities, all while interacting in the present reality. In this way the strength of the flower is reinforced by ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ causes. Through their beauty and natural rhythms the deep religious insights stimulated by the flower are materialized on the earth, while looking towards a future time and space. We turn now to the concrete ways in which flowers materialize virtues.

Flowers as Virtues

Flowers mediate between Faustina and God as sacrificial intermediaries. They form a fragrant bridge between Faustina’s sacrifices on earth, and God above. The miracle of the roses demonstrates a clear example of this. We recall that well-worn kitchen in Vilnius where Faustina struggled to drain potatoes from boiling water. At the end of her labour the steam cleared to reveal the most beautiful flowers she had ever seen—large bunches of red roses that defied description. Astonished, she heard a voice proclaim “I change such hard work of yours into bouquets of most beautiful flowers, and their perfume rises up to My throne.”⁵⁹⁷ The virtue of hard work is changed into beautiful flowers, and these flowers produce perfume that rises to reach God. For Faustina, that odour is a product of virtue, and expresses the soul of the sacrificer: the strict morality of her life is joined with the “majestic morality of the universe” to produce flowers.⁵⁹⁸ We understand from Faustina’s writing that in life virtuous, immaterial acts find materiality through flowers. When her hard work turns into beautiful flowers it further reinforces the tangible connection between God, flowers and sacrifice. While Faustina looked at

⁵⁹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 65.

⁵⁹⁸ Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, 21.

the flower as a virtue materialized, God looked at the virtue and materialized flowers. This is a significant bridging of the human and divine as well as material and immaterial made apparent in her writing.

Faustina's life is a varied garden of floral virtues where her suffering is manifested as lilies, her humility as violets, and her love of her neighbours as roses.⁵⁹⁹ Each of her virtues has found a floral corollary in the plant world. When Faustina suffers she imagines herself as offering up lilies to God, when she practices the virtue of humility she offers up violets, and when she practices the virtue of silence she offers flowers at the feet of Mary.⁶⁰⁰ As Faustina offers of herself on earth, she can visualize the virtuous flowers that are also being offered on her behalf in heaven. Faustina has even found floral corollaries for the ways in which others around her are behaving. For Faustina, the showy works of her fellow sisters cast them as lilies and roses, towering visibly over her in their earthly grandeur. She seeks out the opposite: the most powerful flower of all is the hidden violet of humility. The flower of humility is one of the most beautiful but difficult flowers to attain, and it is one that Faustina desperately sought.⁶⁰¹ The violet of humility is "so difficult for human nature" to achieve because of our inherent pride.⁶⁰² A large part of attaining humility for Faustina comes from attaining a hidden nature. She often describes herself as "nothingness," "tiny," "unknown" and cast at the feet of Jesus.⁶⁰³ Just as her fellow sisters are emulating the status of the lily she begins to emulate the activities of the hidden

⁵⁹⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 296; Kowalska, *Diary*, 65.

⁶⁰⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1105.

⁶⁰¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1306.

⁶⁰² Kowalska, *Diary*, 255.

⁶⁰³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 240.

violet, for she desires to be the most fragrant.⁶⁰⁴ The violet is Faustina's special flower and can be considered her emblem, in a way, for it represents the virtue she most longs to have. Attaining humility, materialized as a violet, becomes an important part of Faustina's life and she behaves with that goal in mind. Humility is difficult to attain but it comes with a great reward of unlimited power. These flowers are all examples of sacrificial offerings, produced from virtue, and intended to please God.⁶⁰⁵ The humiliation that Faustina suffered, the difficulties she endured in both body and soul produced more than tears and spiritual cries—they were transformed into beautiful flowers for God. They come from her very self and soul, wrenched from her despair, to bloom before God.

On one occasion, while Faustina was at a treatment center at Bialia, she was allowed to decorate the chapel there with flowers. While picking the flowers she chose the “prettiest roses to decorate the room of a certain person” however when she drew closer to the room, Jesus met her with a question—who were these flowers for? Quite suddenly, Faustina recognized that she had a “very subtle attachment” to this person, and immediately threw down the flowers.⁶⁰⁶ Faustina did not want to grow attached to others, but reserved her love, devotion—and flowers—for God alone. As Thomas à Kempis stated in *The Imitation of Christ*, “God and His holy angels will draw near to him who withdraws from friends and acquaintances.”⁶⁰⁷ Faustina's sacrificial flowers have great meaning because they are cherished as beautiful offerings for God alone. The spiritual bouquet of Faustina came at the high cost of suffering for God, but it was a burden she

⁶⁰⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 275.

⁶⁰⁵ Faustina tells us that “love of God is the flower, mercy the fruit.” Kowalska, *Diary*, 948. She also claims that “Mercy is the flower of love.” Kowalska, *Diary*, 651.

⁶⁰⁶ Kowalka, *Diary*, 71.

⁶⁰⁷ Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 24.

was willing to bear. Through her self-sacrifice, Faustina believed she was given power to effect great change in the world. She was able to save souls from purgatory, gain pardons for living souls, reduce others' sufferings, and enable souls to find God.

God refuses nothing to such a soul; she is all-powerful and influences the destiny of the whole world. God raises such a soul up to His very throne, and the more she humbles herself, the more God stoops down to her, pursuing her with His graces and accompanying her at every moment with His omnipotence. Such a soul is most deeply united with God.⁶⁰⁸

This deep union is what Faustina longs for and it comes with tremendous power. Although Faustina is a part of the Catholic institution, her lowly ranking as a sister affords her no influence. It is the supernatural power, supplied by God, which enables her to effect change. There is Christ's flow of power on this one hand, and the institutional conformity on the other. Faustina desires to serve God through the institution she is in, however that institution is highly regulated and not always open to her alleged experiences. Even with all of the power to change the world, her personal freedom has been given over to the church, and so she must exert her influence only as she is permitted. Faustina is able to release souls from purgatory, save souls from being damned to hell, eliminate suffering, or prevent the wrath of God from being released but she cannot seem to gain respect from her sisters. Faustina remained an ordinary sister in the eyes of her peers and often her superiors. Though she would eventually go on to make great institutional changes within the Catholic Church, she received no recognition during her lifetime, working like that hidden, humble violet.⁶⁰⁹

As Faustina practices virtues in her life, they are transformed into different kinds of flowers. This transformative, physical manifestation fits into a larger context of flowers as

⁶⁰⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1306.

⁶⁰⁹ Some of these changes include the presence of the Divine Mercy image at the ceremony in Vilnius, and later, her Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

sacrificial intermediaries. These virtues fed the sacrificial fires, and were material representations of what Faustina was offering up to God. Ultimately, she would offer her very life before the altar of God. In the end, Faustina *becomes* a flower in order to enjoy the beauty and closeness that comes not only from *producing* floral sacrifices from virtue, but from *being* that floral offering for God. Soon, Faustina *is* that flower laid at the feet of God, or Mary the Mother of God.

The previous sections have all contributed to an understanding of how Faustina, God and flowers have been interacting with one another. It has looked at the role of flowers as direct intermediaries, as multipurpose vessels and as interactive vessels. Flowers are flexible and dynamic entities that have met the changing needs of Faustina as she journeyed closer to God. Flowers have been more than tools facilitating closeness, they have shaped the interactions between Faustina and God by virtue of their role in time, space and also the body.

St. Faustina and the Sacrificial Fires of Love

In this section, we explore Faustina as a living sacrifice, and her understandings of her body as a holocaust, her soul as floral incense burning for God and her will as ruled by devotion. Faustina is freed of her imperfect life when she suffers through the fires of God's purification unto the final release of divine union.

Then came the moment to receive Holy Communion, and Jesus disappeared, and I saw a great brightness. Then I heard these words: *We give Our blessing*, and at that moment a bright ray issued from that light and pierced my heart; an extraordinary fire was enkindled in my soul—I thought I would die of joy and happiness. I felt the separation of my spirit from my body. I felt totally immersed in God, I felt I was snatched up by the Almighty, like a particle of dust, into unknown expanses.⁶¹⁰

⁶¹⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 438.

The sensation of fire is familiar to Faustina, and brings her to the edge of life through union with God. Like most things in her life, these are often hidden fires, such that Faustina is suffering in “the most secret recesses of the heart” and burning “like a sacrifice noticed by no one.”⁶¹¹ Faustina’s experiences remind us of Bachelard’s fire which “receives its real existence only at the conclusion of the process of becoming light, when, through the agonies of the flame, it has been freed.”⁶¹² In her own fiery agonies Faustina experiences release in divine union and finally in death. Since it is through the multiplicity of fire images that we can understand how sacrificial flames operate in the life of Faustina, we turn to these now.

Faustina has felt “transformed into a blazing fire” through her love for God, causing her spirit to be “set aflame.”⁶¹³ This was the sacrificial state which she existed in. Hers was a fire of love, transformation and an insatiability whereby she was “all afire, but without being burned up.”⁶¹⁴ During her last spiritual retreat Faustina described the overwhelming sensation of “burning with an inner fire of love” upon meditation on God, so much so that she physically removed herself from her surroundings and headed to the garden to “cool off.” No sooner had she reached the garden that she looked up at the sky and found that “a new flame of love flooded” through her heart, and these divine fires continued to warm her.⁶¹⁵ Faustina describes this fire as a “fire of living love on which everything converges.”⁶¹⁶ Divine fire has become a melting pot, as it were, a central point of convergence for all things, where love and unity can be

⁶¹¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 351.

⁶¹² Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, 43.

⁶¹³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 160.

⁶¹⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 142.

⁶¹⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1755.

⁶¹⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 704

felt acutely. Faustina sacrifices herself to produce continual fodder for those flames. She explains, “Sufferings, adversities, humiliations, failures and suspicions that have come my way are splinters that keep alive the fire of my love for You, O Jesus.”⁶¹⁷ Faustina burns for God, providing the necessary suffering to keep those flames alight. She desires nothing more than to be an instrument of fire for God, claiming, “Throughout my life, I want to be a thurible filled with hidden fire, and may the smoke rising up to You, O Living Host, be pleasing to You. I’ll feel in my own heart that every little sacrifice arouses the fire of my love for You, but in such a silent and secret way that no one will detect it.”⁶¹⁸ Daily she commits herself as a sacrifice unto God, a secret flame incensed with floral fragrance. Faustina desires to be transformed by her fiery love into Jesus: she claimed, “Most sweet Jesus, set on fire my love for You and transform me into Yourself.”⁶¹⁹ Faustina has a strong desire for the transformative effects of fire. The next section looks to another form of this relationship between flower and light—the intense connection between flowers, and sun.

Flowers and the Sun

The connection between the flower and the fiery pyre begins less intensely with a connection between the light of the divine Sun and the flower. A beautiful flower is a flower well lit, growing and glowing in the sun. Illuminated petals teach us of the “brilliant play of light associated with flowers” that glisten and pop against their surroundings.⁶²⁰ The sun, flower and even the dew are in league together—in the natural world as well as in Faustina’s understanding.

⁶¹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 57.

⁶¹⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 751.

⁶¹⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1288.

⁶²⁰ Miller, “Blue Flower,” 234.

The flower, suggests Bachelard, “realizes this prodigious synthesis of air and light”⁶²¹ but truly flowers are the synthesis of air, light, and fire. Faustina has her own intimate relationship with Sun and flower.

O my Jesus, delight of my heart, You know my desires. I should like to hide from people's sight so as to be like one alive and yet not living. I want to live pure as a wild flower; I want my love always to be turned to You, just as a flower that is always turning to the sun. I want the fragrance and the freshness of the flower of my heart to be always preserved for You alone. I want to live beneath Your divine gaze, for You alone are enough for me. When I am with You, Jesus, I fear nothing, for nothing can do me harm.⁶²²

The relationship between the Sun and flower is not entirely one sided; the open flower stares back at the sun. Bachelard suggests that the flower “shoots back arrows at the sun, returning its rays, but paler, as if it were another sun. Its fire is like the pupil of an eye,” focused and central.⁶²³ In other words, the flower expresses a “will to shine” by blossoming for God, who is the “Divine Sun.”⁶²⁴ Faustina echoes this assertion and claimed, “O my Jesus, because of my trust in You, I weave thousands of garlands, and I know that they will all blossom. And I know that they will all blossom, When God's sun will shine on them.”⁶²⁵ Through faith and the light of God Faustina’s garlands of virtue blossom for God producing their very own brilliance and colour.

⁶²¹ Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, 51.

⁶²² Kowalska, *Diary*, 306.

⁶²³ Bachelard, *Earth and Will*, 246.

⁶²⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 71; Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 246.

⁶²⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 4.

Faustina and flowers both respond to illumination from God.⁶²⁶ The light has a positive, transformative effect. Faustina's soul responds to God's light by blossoming and becoming a "beautiful garden for His repose."⁶²⁷ In accepting God Faustina turns towards his love and light, naturally blossoming for him and becoming that garden covered in "verdure, flowers and fruit."⁶²⁸ Just as the sun feeds the flower, God as the sun feeds the flower that is Faustina.⁶²⁹ Bachelard suggests that "Fire, air, light, everything that rises also partakes of divine...The life flame of a being that flowers is a straining towards the world of pure light."⁶³⁰ The divine Sun feeds Faustina and flower alike.

Flowers and Flames

*Is not a red tulip a cup of fire? Is not every flower a type of flame?*⁶³¹

Flowers and fire have been brought together in bold ways in the work of Bachelard and in the life of Faustina. Meditating on the flame of a candle, Bachelard suggested that the stem of a flame "is so straight and so frail that the flame is a flower."⁶³² This is a single flame, but what of the larger, consuming fires? Bachelard tackles this in the fireplace of roses where "The rose is a veritable image-hearth for imaginary plant flames...A dreamer of roses must see an entire

⁶²⁶ Faustina explained, "You bless whoever approaches Your rays, And a soul all black will turn into snow." Kowalska, *Diary*, 1.

⁶²⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 605.

⁶²⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 605.

⁶²⁹ This has theological implications, for just as "Black flowers bloom in matter's darkness" so do light, pious flowers blossom in the Christian Sun that is God. Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 2.

⁶³⁰ Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, 60.

⁶³¹ Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, 56.

⁶³² Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, 40.

rosebush in his fireplace.”⁶³³ If Bachelard can find roses in poetic flames, it is worth exploring what Faustina has found. As Faustina is consumed with sacrificial fires, both spiritual and physical, flowers provide unlikely company. Faustina experiences these flames in much deeper, more painful ways, but the lingering presence of flowers is the same.

Fire is the principle mode of sacrifice for Faustina, and as sacrificial entities, flowers are drawn into these sacrificial flames.⁶³⁴ As previously established, there is a strong connection between sacrifice and fire, and between fragrance and flowers. Various combinations of these four elements (sacrifice, fire, fragrance, flowers) appear in her diary entries, and in one cases, each one of these elements is implied in a single passage, as described below.⁶³⁵

For Faustina, it is that same divine light, found in the sun’s rays, which awakens and enlivens the flower, even unto a fiery brightness of flames. Bachelard writes “The fire flowers and the flower lights up. These two corollaries could be developed endlessly: colour is an epiphany of fire and the flower is an ontophany of light.”⁶³⁶ For Bachelard, fire astonishes the world with its flaming colours, while flowers are manifestations of light. The flower can be identified as an epiphany of sacrificial fires, and as a dazzling ontophany of divine light. Fires flower as sacrificial offerings, and flowers light.

Faustina, as a floral body, is engulfed in divine fire, and through that fiery light, experiences the great epiphany of blossoming into God. Faustina is both a holocaust and fragrant rosebud as she states

⁶³³ Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, 57.

⁶³⁴ Bachelard, *Poetics of Fire*, 86.

⁶³⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 239.

⁶³⁶ Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, 59.

Love, it is for love of You, O Most Holy Trinity, that I offer myself to You as an oblation of praise, as a holocaust of total self-immolation. And through this self-immolation, I desire the exaltation of Your Name, O Lord. I cast myself as a little rosebud at Your feet, O Lord, and may the fragrance of this flower be known to You alone.⁶³⁷

At the centre of her intimacy with God Faustina experiences herself as being burned without being consumed as a holocaust. She is transformed through fire into something completely new such that she possesses a beloved odour and exists as a flower under the feet of God. Bachelard reminds us that “In the past as in the present, a beloved odour is the center of an intimacy.”⁶³⁸ We come back to that same intimate core through scent, just as Faustina’s sacrifices are held together by their floral scents. Faustina burns then blossoms in fires of love and claims

I felt I was transformed into love; I was all afire, but without being burned up. I lost myself in God unceasingly; God drew me to himself so strongly and powerfully that sometimes I was not aware of being on earth... My spirit has been turned towards the Sun and has blossomed in His rays for Him alone; I understand no more...⁶³⁹

In this passage Faustina responds to both the light of the Sun, and the burning fires of sacrifice. Through the burning love of God, Faustina was transformed, and allowed to blossom. Faustina recalls, in the same breath, her presence as blossoming and the sensation of immolation—the sacrificial pyre releases the beautiful fragrance of Faustina as a blossoming flower.⁶⁴⁰

Faustina negotiates between sacrificing in life and sacrificing her life. In this position of liminality the flower is “born of the mighty contradiction between life and death... [and] is

⁶³⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 239. In the original Polish holocaust is written as, *ofiara calopalna* or a “burnt offering.”

⁶³⁸ Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, 136.

⁶³⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 142.

⁶⁴⁰ See Kowalska, *Diary*, 142, 239.

sympathetic to all contradictory beauty” by engulfing, accepting and legitimizing contradictions.⁶⁴¹ This is precisely the role of the flower here—holding disparate realities together without issue. At the antipodes of life flowers stand as markers, they hold together those “ancient dualisms of Cosmos and Microcosm” of human and divine, and encourage dialectic in a single form.⁶⁴² Faustina chooses life through suffering and death; her flowers are a part of that choice, whether they are materialized virtues or a burning extension of herself. Flowers are experienced as a merging of boundaries between human and nature, life and death, and the self and other experienced as God.

In this exploration of flower experience and relationality it is clear that flowers have been a comfort and company to Faustina. Flowers were beings that she could hold onto, in order to endure the necessary sufferings of a life sacrificed. Together they were offered daily; together she suffered alongside of them for the love of God and for lost souls. Faustina desired the warmth of God’s rays and the burning fire of his presence; it has been the flower that has accompanied her into the bright sun, and into the burning flames.

Conclusion

Faustina’s relationship with God is the most important relationship of her life, though she also has relationships with the people around her, and with her own private world.

Her relationship with God was highly influenced by a floral presence. St. Faustina used flowers as intermediaries in her relationship with God, as divine role models to emulate, and as meditative aids in her devotional life. Flowers came to be a way to express her ideas about

⁶⁴¹ Bachelard, *Poetics of Fire*, 64.

⁶⁴² Bachelard, *Earth and Repose*, 3.

divinity, and a way to express her suffering, longing and strong desire for God. Flowers represent a host of different virtues and figures without contradiction. The rose of Faustina one day is not the rose of Faustina the next, however the meaning is still as powerful despite its changing nature. Flowers are strongly drawn towards light, however in the life of Faustina they are also part of the flames of sacrificial fires. Faustina conceives of herself as an immolated offering, at once a rosebud and a holocaust. As Faustina is consumed in the fire of God's love, she unites with him, and knows herself to be a flower blossoming in God. In her position between worlds Faustina's liminality finds roots in the flower, which basks in the rays of the sun, plunges deep into sacrificial flames, all while keeping company on earth.

Faustina also conceived of the people around her in floral terms, understanding her fellow sisters as the showy lilies that towered above the humble violet. When she developed a subtle attachment to someone in her life and favoured them with roses, it was God who intervened and pointed it out to her. Faustina did not want to be attached to those around her; she wanted to be alone with God, and to live for him exclusively.

In her private life flowers have come to function as a materializing, intermediary presence for the expression of virtues. That is, virtues expressed on earth can be imagined to materialize as flowers in heaven. The constant presence of flowers, in this life and the next, becomes a feature of existence. To exist as a Christian, for Faustina, is to embrace these eternal blossoms that will never fade completely. Her conceptualizations of flowers are of idealized flowers, and their perfection represents a higher perfection in heaven. Faustina's private world is an idealized world, where there is no uncertainty in God, only in people's imperfect understanding of his will.

SECTION THREE: CONCLUSION

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Having been drawn into Faustina's private world, we must now exit, and consider what has been uncovered. Faustina left behind a legacy through her writings, and it is through them that her influence grew in the Catholic Church, her religious experiences were shaped, and a life centered on Jesus was revealed. The images of flowers permeate her writing, not only as recurrent symbols, but as guiding expressions of the spiritual qualities she valued in her life.

This conclusion is comprised of three sections: the first section looks at how important Faustina's message became to the Catholic Church, particularly to Pope John Paul II, and the status of her congregation today. The second section addresses Faustina's relationship with God through the phenomenon of writing using the insights of Max van Manen, and delves more deeply into the role of language in writing. The third section provides a synthesis of the existential modalities expressed in the body of this thesis.

The Message of Faustina after her Death

The mystical experiences of Sister Faustina had been a well-guarded secret during her lifetime and their only trace, that is, her writings, seemed forgotten. After her death she was seldom mentioned for about two years. When the devotion to Divine Mercy began gaining popularity in Vilnius, Sister Faustina's name was inexplicably attached to it. It reached the ears of a number of the sisters from the congregations she had lived in and by 1941 Mother Michael Moraczwska, the Superior General of Our Lady of Mercy, decided it was time to officially announce the mission of Sister Faustina. The process of disseminating information was difficult in Western Poland where Polish churches had been closed down and their priests were killed or

imprisoned and although there was greater religious freedom in central Poland, Catholic publications had been banned. Despite these obstacles Faustina's message of Divine Mercy did spread.⁶⁴³ These revelations about St. Faustina were met with great shock, and likely some regret on the part of those sisters who had known her. The Divine Mercy devotion booklet, containing the Novena, the Litany, the Chaplet to Divine Mercy, and holy cards with the Divine Mercy Image, had of course been used for years however their authorship had not been revealed. After years of doubt it became clear that Faustina was not a lazy, hysterical sister, but a woman who had been undergoing great spiritual transformation.

The Divine Mercy devotion spread throughout Poland and, particularly during this uncertain time, it was a welcome message. Sister Faustina had always been constantly concerned for the fate of Poland. From 1940 and onwards, the Devotion to Divine Mercy was present in concentration camps throughout Poland.⁶⁴⁴ The Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy would introduce the image of Divine Mercy and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy to people under their care, those who sought help at their gates, and included it in packages they sent to prisons and concentration camps.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴³ Chrosciechowski, *Devotion to Divine Mercy*, 88-89.

⁶⁴⁴ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 275.

⁶⁴⁵ When the image of Divine Mercy was not available, the prayer was often written down or memorized. During World War Two, the concentration camp at Dachau held 2,720 priests, 1,780 of which were Polish Catholic priests. Father Franciszek Cegielka was present at Dachau and ill with a fever when he recorded the following events. He was visited by Father Ogradowski who was a priest from Krotoszyn. Father Ogradowski claimed that he could get better if he used the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. When asked where the Chaplet came from, Father Ogradowski claimed it was from the new arrivals at the concentration camp. Father Franciszek Cegielka along with Father Dominik Sierszulski, who was also ill, recited the Chaplet from the scrap of newspaper that it had been written on. The Chaplet was well known by the Polish priests at Dachau, and became a source of strength for those who used it. Sr. M. Elzbieta Siepak, "Chaplet of the Divine Mercy." http://www.faustyna.pl/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=377&Itemid=60&limit=1&limitstart=1 (accessed June 13, 2012).

The convent in Lagiewniki became the main center of devotion to Divine Mercy and special devotions to Divine Mercy were held there on the third Sunday of the month. The Sunday after Easter was now known as the Feast of Divine Mercy.⁶⁴⁶ The image of Divine Mercy was showing up in Catholic institutions around Poland with the blessing of the Catholic Church. Bishops from various dioceses around Poland were allowed to publish holy cards and prayers about Divine Mercy. At that time there was about one hundred and thirty centers of devotion to divine Mercy in Poland. The message did not remain in Poland however; it spread around the world via soldiers and refugees.⁶⁴⁷ It appeared as though the promise made to Faustina was being kept—her work was benefiting many souls all over the world.

In the early 1940s, Karol Wojtyla and Andrew Deskur were two classmates who belonged to the clandestine seminary in Cracow, Poland. It was Deskur who first told Wojtyla about the Polish mystic named Faustina Kowalska. At the time Wojtyla was working at the Solvay plant as a forced labourer, in close proximity to the convent graveyard that held Faustina's body. It was reported that he would visit her grave on his way home from work. Additionally, he was already familiar with the convent as he took part in retreats there.⁶⁴⁸ Thereafter, Faustina Kowalska would continue to be an ongoing interest in the life of Karol Wojtyla.

Faustina's writing remained with her congregation after her death, and as per her request, only her confessor and superiors had access to it. Despite the written request for her confessor to first review her notebooks, Mother General, Michaela Moraczewska ordered that her notebooks

⁶⁴⁶ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 274.

⁶⁴⁷ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 274-275.

⁶⁴⁸ Kosicki, George W. <http://thedinemercy.org/news/story.php?NID=3976> (accessed May 14th, 2013).

be rewritten immediately. This was done poorly with many transcription errors including missing words, and misinterpretations. It was especially difficult to identify which were the words of Jesus, and which were hers because the original underlining of Jesus's words was not included in the typed copy. This faulty transcript was later translated into Italian, and contributed to the decision of the Holy See to ban Faustina's message, and specifically, her journals. On the sixth of March, 1959 Pope John XIII, under the advice of Cardinal Ottaviana the Prefect of Office, signed a decree placing Faustina's diary on the index of banned books where it would remain for nearly twenty years. Faustina had in fact predicted this possibility and recorded this in her diary.

There will come a time when this work, which God is demanding so very much, will be as though utterly undone. And then God will act with great power, which will give evidence of its authenticity. It will be a new splendor for the Church, although it has been dormant in it from long ago. That God is infinitely merciful, no one can deny. He desires everyone to know this before He comes again as Judge. He wants souls to come to know Him first as King of Mercy.⁶⁴⁹

At the time of the ban all messages of devotion of Divine Mercy were halted beginning on March 6th, 1959. Years later, when the matter was revisited, the Holy See claimed to have received "inaccurate and insufficient" data about the revelations of Sister Faustina. Although the Vatican blames the faulty Italian translation for the ban there are other explanations based on theological messages contained in the diary. For instance, Faustina claimed that Jesus had promised a complete remission of sin in exchange for devotional sacramental acts.⁶⁵⁰ This may have touched on theological premises which Faustina did not have the authority to address. During the ban many images of Divine Mercy were removed from churches, and preaching about Divine Mercy stopped altogether. Father Sopoko was "severely admonished" and suffered much for his role in propagating the message of Divine Mercy. The chaplet, the images, the

⁶⁴⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 378.

⁶⁵⁰ Allen, "Divine Mercy," 2002.

devotions and the novena were all withdrawn. The Congregation of Sister Faustina was no longer allowed to spread these devotions in any form. In the Lagiewniki district of Cracow Poland, where the body of Sister Faustina lay, the Church was allowed to keep the Divine Image on the side altar and so it remained there. The celebration in praise of Divine Mercy was permitted to continue, by order of Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak.

By 1977 Karol Wojtyla had become the archbishop of Cracow and showed an interest in the diary of Faustina. He decided to pursue an inquiry, and interview those who knew Sister Faustina. The archbishop knew that they had to work quickly since time was working against them and soon there would be no living witnesses to Faustina's life. On October 21st of 1965, he asked Bishop Julian Groblicki to begin the Process of Information concerning the life of Sister Faustina. Meanwhile Faustina had gained the title Servant of God. Her remains were exhumed and transferred to the convent chapel in November of 1966. The Process of Information was finished in the Diocese of Cracow with a solemn session in September of 1967 and was received in Rome by the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints in late January of 1968. By the 31st of January the Process of Beatification of the Servant of God Sister Faustina Kowalska was formally inaugurated. As it happened, Archbishop Wojtyla was elevated to the See of Peter as Pope John Paul II on October 16, 1978. By April of 1978, the original documents of St. Faustina had been formally reviewed. The Vatican responded as follows.

This Sacred Congregation, having now in [its] possession the many original documents, unknown in 1959; having taken into consideration the profoundly changed circumstances, and having taken into account the opinion of many Polish Ordinaries, declares no longer binding the prohibitions contained in the quoted "Notification" [of 1959].⁶⁵¹

⁶⁵¹ Kosicki, George W. <http://thedinemercy.org/news/story.php?NID=3976> (accessed May 14th, 2013).

The Vatican Congregation issued a new “Notification” lifting the ban. It was obvious how important St. Faustina had become for Pope John Paul II. Divine Mercy was a favourite topic of the Pope; he issued a second encyclical in November of 1980 entitled *Dives in Misericordia* (Rich in Mercy) which was inspired by Faustina. In it he describes the power of God’s love and mercy over evil, sin and death. The Pope admitted to feeling “very near” to Faustina and had been thinking of her “for a long time” before the writing of his encyclical.⁶⁵² He said this of his writing

[T]he reflections offered in *Dives in Misericordia* were the fruit of my pastoral experience in Poland, especially in Krakow. That is where Saint Faustina Kowalska is buried, she who was chosen by Christ to be a particularly enlightened interpreter of the truth of Divine Mercy. For Sister Faustina, this truth led to an extraordinarily rich mystical life. She was a simple, uneducated person, and yet those who read the *Diary* of her revelations are astounded by the depth of her mystical experience.⁶⁵³

Through John Paul II, Faustina would receive the acclaim in death that she was denied in life. A year later, in November of 1981, Pope John Paul II made a public visit in Collevaleza, Italy, where he reiterated the importance of the *Dives in Misericordia*.

By my presence I wish to reconfirm, in a way, the message of that encyclical. I wish to read it again and deliver it again. Right from the beginning of my ministry in St. Peter's See in Rome, I considered this message my special task. Providence has assigned it to me in the present situation of man, the Church, and the world. It could be said that precisely this situation assigned that message to me as my task before God.⁶⁵⁴

Pope John Paul II, therefore, understood his position as pope to be integrated with his “special task” of spreading the message of Divine Mercy. These two Polish natives were

⁶⁵² Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 387.

⁶⁵³ John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*. New York, N.Y.: Rizzoli, 2005, 5-6.

⁶⁵⁴ John Paul II was at The Shrine of Merciful Love in Collevaleza, Italy, November 22, 1981. Kosicki, George W. <http://thedivinemercy.org/news/story.php?NID=3976> (accessed May 14th, 2013).

connected, and it was largely through the efforts of Pope John Paul II that Faustina was able to gain worldwide popularity in the lives of believers.

Faustina was beatified by Pope John Paul II on April of 1993; in his homily he described Faustina as “a sign of the times—a sign of our twentieth century” and asked “Where, if not in the Divine Mercy, can the world find refuge and the light of hope? Believers understand that perfectly.”⁶⁵⁵ The message that Faustina had brought to the world was intended as a refuge for all Catholics, in the same way as God’s mercy had been a personal refuge for her in her own life. On January 23rd of 1995 the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship officially deemed the Sunday after Easter as the Divine Mercy Sunday for Polish Bishops. On April 23rd of 1995 Pope John Paul II celebrated Divine Mercy Sunday, with the Divine Mercy Image placed at the Divine Mercy Centre for the diocese of Rome in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Sassia. During his Divine Mercy Sunday speech Pope John Paul II suggested that St. Faustina was capable of uniting Eastern and Western Catholicism through her message of Divine Mercy—in death as in life Faustina would be an intermediary figure between worlds.⁶⁵⁶ The Polish Catholic Church was already considered a blending of eastern and western Catholicism, and so it was natural that this Polish saint would take up this unifying task, and help to bring about the second coming of Christ.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁵ Kosocki, George W. <http://thedivinemercy.org/news/story.php?NID=3976> (accessed May 14th, 2013).

⁶⁵⁶ Taking after John Paul II, author Rev. George W. Koscki addressed Faustina as “the Spark from Poland: Where East meets West.” Koscki’s conclusions stem largely from the valuation of Poland as a mix of Eastern and Western spirituality, in part playing off of its central geographic position. He claims that the Eastern Catholic Church has values in sync with both Faustina and the message of Divine Mercy. See Kosicki, George W. and David Came. *Faustina a Saint for Our Times: A Personal Look at her Life, Spirituality, and Legacy*. Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2010.

⁶⁵⁷ Kosicki, *Saint Times*, 86.

In June of 1997 Pope John Paul went on a pilgrimage to the Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Lagiewniki, Poland where he prayed at Faustina’s tomb. He claimed that “There is nothing that man needs more than Divine Mercy—that love which is benevolent, which is compassionate, which raises man above his weakness to the infinite heights of the holiness of God.”⁶⁵⁸ By 1999 the Divine Mercy Sunday was being celebrated in St. Peter’s Square in Rome, at which time Faustina was publically named “the great apostle of Divine Mercy.”⁶⁵⁹ Sister Mary Faustina Kowalska became Saint Faustina in the year 2000 as part of the Jubilee celebrations of Pope John Paul II. The Jubilee was attended by 250,000 pilgrims at St. Peter’s square in Rome.⁶⁶⁰ The pope described the canonization of Sister Faustina as the happiest day of his life.⁶⁶¹ She was the first saint of the third Christian millennium. Pope John Paul II celebrated her Divine Mercy Mass in St. Peter’s square before 200,000 people in 2001.⁶⁶²

Pope John Paul II died on the eve of Faustina’s Divine Mercy Sunday on April 2nd, 2005 in Rome, however in the Eastern part of the world Divine Mercy Sunday had already begun. The Pope had prepared a message to be read for Divine Mercy Sunday, which happened, posthumously. On April 3rd of 2005 the final words of the Pope about Divine Mercy were given to the world.

As a gift to humanity, which sometimes seems bewildered and overwhelmed by the power of evil, selfishness, and fear, the Risen Lord offers His love that pardons, reconciles, and reopens hearts to love. It is a love that converts hearts and gives peace. How much the world needs to understand and accept Divine

⁶⁵⁸ Kosocki, George W. <http://thedivinemercy.org/news/story.php?NID=3976> (accessed May 14th, 2013).

⁶⁵⁹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 278.

⁶⁶⁰ Faustina required two miracles before she could be canonized as a Saint. Maureen Digan and Father Ron Pytel received miraculous medical cures from Faustina, on March 28, 1981 and October 5, 1995 respectively. O’Dell, *Apostle*, 159-161.

⁶⁶¹ Kosocki, George W. <http://thedivinemercy.org/news/story.php?NID=3976> (accessed May 14th, 2013).

⁶⁶² Allen, “Divine Mercy,” 2002.

Mercy!⁶⁶³

Pope John Paul's dedication to St. Faustina would be picked up by the new Pope, Pope Benedict XVI. In April of 2008 the first *World Apostolic Congress on Mercy* was held in Rome by Pope Benedict XVI where he emphasized the positive role of St. Faustina in the life of John Paul II. Pope Benedict had already stated what he understood to be the special relationship between them—John Paul II was the interpreter and St. Faustina was the mystic. Later that year in September of 2008, Michael Sopocho was beatified in Poland; in attendance were sisters of the Merciful Jesus, the order founded by Sopocho as explained below.

Faustina and the Catholic Church

It is not surprising that with the help of John Paul II, who earned widespread popularity within the Catholic Church, Faustina received a lot of attention. Faustina was a familiar addition to Catholicism, for in many ways she expressed dualisms so historically prominent in the Catholic Church. Faustina was raised listening to stories from the Bible and the lives of Catholic saints—those were shaping factors in her life. She learned from a young age that many things had symbolic meaning, that the shape of a cross was more than just a cross but could be understood as “the” cross, symbolizing the crucifixion and Passion of Christ. In the same way flowers could be understood as more than beautiful, they could be representatives of the Catholic world. Signs and symbols were prominent in Faustina's life. She continually received visions and messages that informed her life choices, though sometimes this caused her to ‘go astray,’ like when she burned her original journal in the spring of 1934. It is important to remember that she was frequently visited by holy and demonic agents; they were a constant presence in her life.

⁶⁶³ Kosocki, George W. <http://thedinemercy.org/news/story.php?NID=3976> (accessed May 14th, 2013).

Faustina had more than faith in God—she had direct experiences with God. Faustina identified a spiritual and a physical component in her life, where the spiritual took precedent over the physical as a “higher” way of being, an ideal way of being. Faustina used her body to benefit her soul and other souls; it became a tool of suffering aimed at pleasing God. Faustina was drawn to the idealized perfection of the holy, and strove to mimic that on earth through the presence of idealized flowers. Much like the stories of her childhood, Faustina strove for obedience and the imitation of Christ, using the image of the perfect flower.

Faustina’s Congregation Today and Status of her New Congregation

Religious orders worldwide would be affected by the life and messages of St. Faustina.⁶⁶⁴ On the 25th of August 1995, Faustina’s own congregation, the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, acknowledged Sister Faustina as a spiritual co-founder.⁶⁶⁵ They continue to spread Faustina’s message and mission today. Although mercy had always been a central message of the congregation, after Faustina, it has become even more pronounced. The convent found increased popularity with the growing global awareness of St. Faustina, and through her, the Sisters of our Lady of Mercy congregation spread into other countries.

Although her upbringing in Poland was far removed from the world of theologians and scholars, Faustina’s initiation into the convent, and ensuing life, would bring her into contact with established Church policies. In discussing St. Faustina one must remember that her work

⁶⁶⁴ Even in North America there are a number of organizations which propagate the message of Divine Mercy: the Divine Mercy Apostolates (Eucharistic Apostles of The Divine Mercy (EADM), Healthcare Professionals for Divine Mercy (HCPDM), John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy (JPII), and Mother of Mercy Messengers (MOMM)) which are outreach ministries of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception. In addition are the Association of Marian Helpers, The John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy and The Eucharistic Apostles of the Divine Mercy; all seek to spread the messages of St. Faustina.

⁶⁶⁵ Sr. M. Elżbieta Siepak, “Saint Faustina Kowalska” http://www.faustyna.pl/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=250&Itemid=62 (accessed August 13, 2012).

was evaluated after the fourth phase of Vatican II. *Aggiornamento* was then the guiding principal of Vatican II and meant that the Church had to change to meet the needs of the times. Catholicism desperately needed to engage with the concerns of the world, to address the needs and legitimate demands of the people. Vatican II had four specific goals: to renew Catholic spirituality, to modify church observance according to the needs of the time, to unite Christians and to strengthen the universal Catholic cause. Faustina, being a contemporary saint, was easily accessible to people while being rooted in traditional Catholicism; this helps explain the focus she received within the Vatican II context.

Over 100 million Catholics today practice the Divine Mercy devotion. There are specialized centers around the world which focus on Faustina's message of Divine Mercy. Substantial Divine Mercy Sanctuaries are now located in Poland in the cities of Cracow, Vilnius and Plock where Faustina lived. Another national shrine, The National Shrine of Divine Mercy, is located in the Philippines. The largest center in North America, Eden Hill, is found in the United States, Massachusetts.⁶⁶⁶ In addition, there are many much smaller, local groups belonging to Catholic Churches worldwide that celebrate the message of Divine Mercy.

The dream of Faustina's new congregation was not lost with her, she benefited from a solid ally: Father Sopocko. Despite difficulties caused by the war Father Sopocko was able to begin a new congregation in 1942 called the Servants of the Merciful God. It was based on the regulations that Faustina had established during her life and was composed of six sisters. A few

⁶⁶⁶ The largest centre of Divine Mercy in North America is 'The National Shrine of The Divine Mercy.' It is located in western Massachusetts, with 350 acres of land forming "Eden Hill." It had been established by the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the site of the Association of Marian Helpers as well. Since November of 1943 it has been a site of Divine Mercy. It was honoured with the title National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in 1960. They hold Mass, confession, three o'clock Chaplets of Divine Mercy, and Eucharist adoration. The site is covered in statues and shrines, including those of St. Thérèse and St. Francis. Since Faustina's canonisation in 2000 this shrine remains the site of the largest celebration of the Feast of Divine Mercy in the Northeast and is televised on Eternal World Television Network (EWTN). Thousands of people attend each year.

years later, in November of 1946, the six sisters met to renew their vows. They decided they would include ideals of Divine Mercy in their lives in different ways. Sisters Faustina Osińska and Benigna Naborowska wanted to start a religious congregation, others went to lay institutions, and some left to tend to their families.⁶⁶⁷ These are the three branches of communion that Faustina described in her diary: the first branch would be separated from the world and burnt as an offering, the second branch would pray for mercy, and the third branch would perform acts of mercy without vows—all of the world could be in this third category.⁶⁶⁸ This is the framework that Faustina predicted for her new congregation before her death, though she did not live to see her plans realized as she had expected.

Today the congregation of Marian Fathers runs the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy, while the Marians of the Immaculate Conception actively promote the message of Divine Mercy. Although the majority of actual congregations are in Poland, they can also be found in the United States, Italy, Israel, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. There are about 400 professed sisters, along with thirty-five novices, twenty-two postulants and two novitiates worldwide today. They are using their congregation to spread Faustina's message of divine Mercy by using the chaplets and prayers that she recorded. Faustina is their "spiritual co-foundress" who, to them, was meant to prepare humanity for God.⁶⁶⁹ Additionally, members and volunteers are part of the "Faustinum Association of Apostles of the Divine Mercy," they lead

⁶⁶⁷ The sisters received permission to open a religious house under the guidance of their Jesuit spiritual director, Father Władysław Wantuchowski. They were also given permission to hold services for the parish in Myślubórz. The Congregation of Sisters of Merciful Jesus <http://www.faustina-message.com/congregation-sisters-merciful-jesus.htm> (accessed June 16, 2012).

⁶⁶⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1155-1158.

⁶⁶⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 249.

their own lives, but are dedicated to the same task of mercy; they form yet another part of the legacy that Sister Faustina has left behind.⁶⁷⁰

Faustina's Relationship with God through Writing

The process of writing shaped the experiences of Faustina especially in her later life, when she followed God's orders to write, an act that brought her closer to God. Faustina began writing her journal in the spring of 1934 at the request of Father Sopocko. She produced a very personal work; it was an outpouring of her love and devotion to God, a testimony of her visionary experiences, and a description of her struggles and great fears in life. Faustina was writing for her confessor, a confessor chosen by God, and she felt safe in these communications. Even after burning her original journal Faustina was able to begin again with great passion and honesty.⁶⁷¹

Writing quickly became for her a central medium of her divine communications. A significant shift occurred very early in the writing process of Faustina's journals. Instead of writing simply at the request of, and for the eyes of, her confessor Father Sopocko, Faustina began writing at the request of Jesus and for the sake of many souls. She was visited by Jesus, who began to call her his "secretary of my most profound mystery."⁶⁷² Jesus would visit her and dictate what she needed to write down. This was not an easy task set before Faustina—she had received little education and struggled to describe her experiences, often she felt physically ill

⁶⁷⁰ The sisters received permission to open a religious house under the guidance of their Jesuit spiritual director, Father Władysław Wantuchowski. They were also given permission to hold services for the parish in Myślubórz. The Congregation of Sisters of Merciful Jesus
<http://www.faustina-message.com/congregation-sisters-merciful-jesus.htm> (accessed June 16, 2012).

⁶⁷¹ Faustina was visited by a figure, whom Father Sopocko later explained was a temptation from Satan, who instructed her to burn her journals, which she did.

⁶⁷² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1693.

and it was difficult for her to write. Additionally, she was asked by Jesus to write in secret, and so she hid her work however possible, using all of her spare moments for this task.⁶⁷³ As much as God praised Faustina for her good work, Satan hated her for it. Faustina was tormented by Satan as she wrote; Satan came to her, audibly grinding his teeth, banging the walls of her cell⁶⁷⁴ and complaining that she was revealing Divine Mercy, causing him to “lose so much.”⁶⁷⁵

Faustina was now sharing her innermost thoughts with Father Sopocho, Jesus, and eventually, with a great many other souls as well. Although she continued to write about her own daily life, she would also transcribe the words of Jesus exactly as she had heard them, or describe the appearances of Jesus exactly as she had seen them. Often she would record Jesus as saying “Write down what you hear”⁶⁷⁶ or “write down these words,” and she would do exactly that.⁶⁷⁷ Of particular importance to Jesus was the message of Divine Mercy; this was the primary focus and task of Faustina—to convey the Divine Mercy of God.⁶⁷⁸

Writing itself was therefore a significant and essential component of Faustina’s relationship with God. When Faustina received a vision, or heard the voice of Jesus, Mary, or a saint, an important part of that experience was recording it in her journal. In writing it down she was reliving, and sharing her experiences, and also adding her own thoughts and feelings about the experience. Since Jesus asked her to record these things in her journals, every time she wrote she felt as if she was acting in accordance with the will of God; her writing was a fulfillment of

⁶⁷³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1567.

⁶⁷⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1583.

⁶⁷⁵ Kowlaksa, *Diary*, 1338.

⁶⁷⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 85.

⁶⁷⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 372.

⁶⁷⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1142, 1693.

his will. Faustina's rich inner life found expression in her journals; she was able to release some of the tension surrounding her secretive life and communicate her trials and victories. On a personal level, by writing down her actions Faustina was accountable to a larger audience. Every time she doubted God she made note of it, and every time she failed to listen to him, she shared that failing. Faustina was able to look back and see how far she had come, and strove to make an example of her life for others.

Through writing she communed with God, and also felt that she was developing her capacity for patience, positivity, and the ability to share the mercy of God. Faustina remembered the words of a confessor from the times of her novitiate, he had said to her to "Go through life doing good, so that I could write on its pages: 'She spent her life doing good.' May God bring this about in you."⁶⁷⁹ This is what her life had become—an open book, an intended story of inspiration for others, and a demonstration of God's mercy on the pages of her life.

Writing as a Phenomenological Activity

Max van Manen addresses the role of writing in his texts *Researching Lived Experience* (1997) and *Writing in the Dark: Phenomenological Studies in Interpretive Inquiry* (2002). He describes the project of human science as a linguistic project where "writing mediates reflection and action."⁶⁸⁰ It is through writing that lived experience is transformed into an accessible form and made intelligible for a wide audience.⁶⁸¹ In the end, Faustina's writing is what made the writing of this thesis possible. Writing is specifically "fused" in the task of semiotics, phenomenology and hermeneutics because it is an inseparable component of research and

⁶⁷⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 55.

⁶⁸⁰ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 124.

⁶⁸¹ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 125-126.

reflection.⁶⁸² It may therefore be useful to interrogate her attitude in counterpoint to van Manen's observations.

Van Manen addresses the usefulness of diaries, journals and logs as sources of lived experience for a hermeneutic study.⁶⁸³ Phenomenologically rich texts describe lived experience, (not abstractions of experience) referring to moods, states of mind, and sensory engagement. Yet, as much as Faustina does describe her lived experiences she *is* forced into abstraction because of the ineffable nature of her experiences.⁶⁸⁴ In this abstraction one can yet attempt to reach the base phenomena, and try to understand what these subjectively felt experiences were like.

The reflective attitude necessary for writing, together with the linguistic demands of the writing process, place certain constraints on obtaining lived-experience descriptions. For example, a reflective attitude is not spontaneous.⁶⁸⁵ The spontaneity of the lived experience may be lost in the writing process. Writing works antagonistically in that it distances us from, and then draws us back towards the lifeworld by separating us from what we know and then drawing us back towards it.⁶⁸⁶ We can make a familiar experience strange through the reflective and distancing activity of writing, and at the same time that writing can draw us even more closely to the lived experience. The process of writing abstracts and then concretizes our understanding of the world⁶⁸⁷ or put another way, "Writing decontextualizes thought from practice and yet it

⁶⁸² Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 125.

⁶⁸³ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 73.

⁶⁸⁴ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 64-65.

⁶⁸⁵ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 64.

⁶⁸⁶ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 127.

⁶⁸⁷ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 128.

returns thought to praxis.”⁶⁸⁸ In Faustina’s writing, this double process is less obvious since she is close to writing under dictation—the act of writing is fused with obedience to the divine will.

The experience of writing itself is a phenomenon worthy of investigation. Writing produces its own “writerly space” claims van Manen, which does not refer to the physical location of the author, but to their state of mind.⁶⁸⁹ Extending the thoughts of Derrida, van Manen claims that “It is in this writerly space where there reigns the ultimate incomprehensibility of things, the unfathomable infiniteness of their being, the uncanny rumble of existence itself. But in this feeling gaze we also sense the reflection of our own existence of our own death that belongs to us more essentially than anything.”⁶⁹⁰ The words open up other spaces, and the writer dwells in these spaces.⁶⁹¹ In Faustina’s case the writerly space is a holy space created at the request of Jesus and it provides great comfort to her and many other souls. In reading, we are privy to the experiences of others and are able to “make contact” with the things of their world.⁶⁹² In this process, the writer as well as the reader enters into the “space of the text” opened by words, where their sense of self “steps back” and witnesses the world.⁶⁹³ Each may be drawn into that space or “temporary dwelling space” of these experiences,⁶⁹⁴ and find themselves gazing in wonder at what they find.⁶⁹⁵ The phenomenological project, claims

⁶⁸⁸ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 128.

⁶⁸⁹ Van Manen, *Writing in the Dark*, 1.

⁶⁹⁰ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 243.

⁶⁹¹ Van Manen, *Writing in the Dark*, 1.

⁶⁹² Van Manen, *Writing in the Dark*, 237.

⁶⁹³ Van Manen, *Writing in the Dark*, 2-3.

⁶⁹⁴ Van Manen, *Writing in the Dark*, 4.

⁶⁹⁵ Van Manen, *Writing in the Dark*, 5.

van Manen, must begin with wonder and induce wonder, and in this wonder, the writer and reader are touched, or moved, by what they encounter.⁶⁹⁶ Faustina wrote in order to be read: her role as Jesus' secretary is not different from a prophet whose role is to be heard. In her case, as with prophets, wonder does not have to be induced; it is built into the relationship with the explicitly divine source of the words.

The Role of Language

Van Manen describes the connection between language and experience as follows—using words we “recreate some-thing (concepts, insights, feelings) out of no-thing (lived experience), yet these words forever will fall short of our own aims.”⁶⁹⁷ Words will continually fall short of our intentions of expression. Personal experiences are so unique that we ourselves cannot always identify and express all that we are feeling and experiencing, let alone accurately convey it to other people. Language is central here; van Manen describes four possible levels of the role and limitations of language. We will consider each of these four below, and describe the application in the case of St. Faustina.

In the first level, language absolutely falls short of described experience. This happens because words are based on a collective understanding of experiences, and it is only in this collective language that we can share our unique, private experiences. The “unique, private quality” of our world is therefore inaccessible, and experiences are “always more immediate, more enigmatic, more complex, more ambiguous than any description can do justice to.”⁶⁹⁸ Still, van Manen suggests that “While outspoken or written words may never coincide with the actual

⁶⁹⁶ Van Manen, *Writing in the Dark*, 5-6.

⁶⁹⁷ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xviii.

⁶⁹⁸ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xvii.

sensibility of our lived experience, it may still be possible and worthwhile to try to emulate our pre-reflective life by means of a lifeworld sensitive-text.”⁶⁹⁹ Where purely descriptive language may fail to capture an experience, poetic expression may succeed in communicating the nature of the experience. Through some form of language we need to “make intelligible and understandable what always seems to lie beyond language.”⁷⁰⁰ This is especially relevant for St. Faustina, whose divine union with God, she claims, is beyond the scope of language. Her metaphoric, poetic description of flowers enables her to approach the reality of her experiences through symbols. This artfully transforms the experience, at times making it difficult to get at the core phenomena, or the experiential dimension. “The phenomenological inquiry,” claims van Manen, “is not unlike an artistic endeavour, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive.”⁷⁰¹ Even in the most extreme cases of rapturous union with God or extreme pain, Faustina still tries, through poetic metaphors, to evocatively communicate her experiences. Her experiences are not so unique that she cannot find approximations to point in the direction of understanding. Even though she cannot *entirely* express those unique, intimate experiences, she does find some commonality of meaning in the flower symbols she uses.

A second level is when language is capable of creating and describing an *intersubjective* lifeworld. Using a shared language we understand and live in a ‘collective realm of meaning.’⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁹ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xiii.

⁷⁰⁰ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xviii.

⁷⁰¹ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 39.

⁷⁰² Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xiii.

The experience takes on the meaning of the words used to describe it. It is possible that our differing meanings all “adhere to the socio-cultural context to which a given language belongs” so that different languages, like Polish or English, express things differently.⁷⁰³ I would argue that Faustina is capable of communicating not just within her own intersubjective lifeworld formed by language, but also outside of that group and with much of humanity. By using flower images that are globally known and accessible, she can relate something different (her experiences of God) using something familiar (the flower) to many people. The foundation for this has already been laid by the Catholic Church and its symbolic inclusion of flowers in Christian literature and especially the lives of saints. The feelings that Faustina expresses through the image of the flower can move beyond a single verbal language or context, and touch on shared experience. The success of her communication rests on her ability to approximate her experiences in a way that is accessible to a wider audience who have not felt divine union with God or extreme suffering. Faustina has found a way, with flowers, to make her words relevant to other human beings, outside of her twentieth century Polish context. The enormous number of sold copies of her diary, in many languages, attests to the accessibility of her work.

A third level is when language allows us to realize what is ‘experience-able.’⁷⁰⁴ Van Manen explains, “Through language we discover our inner experiences, just as we can say that through experiences we discover the words to which they seem to belong.”⁷⁰⁵ Also, while some words or meanings are unique to an individual, the process of phenomenological hermeneutics allows us to ‘employ a heuristic of discovery’ to determine greater possibilities of meaning for

⁷⁰³ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xiii.

⁷⁰⁴ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xiii-xiv.

⁷⁰⁵ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xiii-xiv.

that individual.⁷⁰⁶ Faustina clearly believes that her experiences are outside the scope of her vocabulary. Still, her experiences do belong within her Catholic tradition, and mystics for centuries have been attempting to express the ineffable. In the course of this thesis I have provided examples from other Catholic saints and mystics whose writings demonstrate experiences similar to Faustina's. Although they are uniquely experienced in her life, Faustina seems to share components of many of her experiences, particularly divine union, with other Catholic mystics. As well, she shares the symbols through which those experiences are described, like the symbol of the flower. Faustina's experiences, not her language, determine what is 'experienceable' and she struggles with her ability to convey those experiences using the language available to her, which in turn is constructed from traditional Catholic literature.

Finally, van Manen suggests that phenomenology attempts to bring together "cognitive and non-cognitive modes of discourse."⁷⁰⁷ This means things are understood intellectually as well as corporeally, relationally and through situational modalities.⁷⁰⁸ Although language is an intellectual activity, it is not *just* that, as Faustina demonstrates. The task is to evoke understanding in a way that seems non-cognitive such as through empathy or intuition. Van Manen points to several professions, like nursing or counselling, where intuition, tact and a capacity for empathy are essential.⁷⁰⁹ Since so much of what Faustina experiences is based on emotion it is useful to empathise with her in order to better understand her. Phenomenology seeks to get at those meanings which are 'implicit in our actions'—we get to know things

⁷⁰⁶ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xiv.

⁷⁰⁷ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xiv.

⁷⁰⁸ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xiv.

⁷⁰⁹ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xviii.

through our bodies, through our interactions with people, and with the world.⁷¹⁰ This kind of knowing, that moves outside of the purely intellectual, provides valuable data in phenomenological inquiry. This final and fourth level or possibility is the guiding hope of this thesis. By looking at the way Faustina has used symbols to express how she negotiated her space, time, body and relationships, I attempted to reconstruct and bring together the different cognitive and non-cognitive modalities of her experiences.

Synthesis of Existential Modalities

The final segment of this conclusion is not a comprehensive analysis of hidden motives or of the ‘true’ meaning of phenomena; rather the final outcome of this project is the entirety of the project. The final word is left to the reader and their engagement with the material as it has been presented and experienced. This segment is meant to bring together *existing* descriptive elements in a new synthesis.

Oppositions, contraries and dualistic struggles are recurrent themes in Faustina’s writings and in the symbols she uses, including the images of the flower. Yet, she speaks of unity and completeness when touching on her mystical experiences. Throughout her life she manifests an obvious singleness of purpose in serving God. This purpose unites the phenomenological data gathered in this thesis. It is clear that St. Faustina experienced a number of experiential modalities that structured her space, time, body and relationality. Whereas the previous chapters analyzed each individual existential as distinct modalities one cannot do them justice without bringing them together in a synthesis—the way they were experienced in her life.

⁷¹⁰ Van Manen, *Lived Experience*, xiv.

Faustina belongs to a Catholic garden tradition, with Eden as a perfect past, Paradise a perfect future, and Gethsemane as a present, shared garden of suffering with Christ. All of these spaces are times (past, present, future), and each of these times have corporeal consequences (original perfection, suffering, restored perfection). Faustina was temporally anchored in these Catholic gardens using the images of flowers. As she suffers with Christ in Gethsemane, she meditates on his rose-red blood, and when she dreams of the future she can see the Paradise garden of her visions. There is complete consistency in the world she lives in, in the colours, scents, and the visions she receives.

For Faustina, God, as the ultimate source of all life and meaning, imbued nature with ideals of good and evil. In her view, the topography of the natural world followed a Catholic cosmological orientation. The mountains, like the mighty oak, reach great heights, bringing Faustina closer to God, to light, to a future life in Heaven, and to a physical state freed from sin. The dark pull of the muddy abyss draws humans into evil, blackness and death. Flowers, as a part of nature, exist in their own realm of Christian complexity. For Faustina the ordinary, everyday imperfect garden does not reflect Jesus, Mary or the lives of saints; Faustina requires flowers to be *perfect* in order to compare them with holy figures. In many ways Faustina lives in an idealized world, where many things take on symbolic meaning in a larger Catholic context. Where St. Francis communed with nature on its own terms as valuable entities in themselves, the gardens of Faustina are idealized gardens symbolic of a divine reality. Flowers were specimens of great earthly beauty, of great perfection—and in their perfection they were capable of representing what was holy. Although Faustina appreciates the transitioning flower as it buds, blossoms and fades flowers are representations of something else—something holier. The physical flowers in Faustina's life have been transformed into allegorical flowers, their value is

found in their allegorical meanings. These meanings are as varied as floral species are, they can represent virtues (humility) as well as vices (pride). Faustina understands all of earthly existence as a preparation for a heavenly existence to come, and imaginatively transforms flowers for that end.

Faustina lived in a floral world, striving for light and aware of the darkness of death however she did not neatly occupy these dualisms. Although Faustina and her flowers existed within the orientation of good and evil, light and darkness, heights and depths, they both found themselves occupying a middle ground as sacrificial intermediaries. Faustina, like the flower, was an intermediary being, a bridge between all things divided. Flowers were, for Faustina, a constant presence in the liminality that was her life. Flowers, as materialized virtues, were mediators between the material and the immaterial. Flowers mediated between life and death for Faustina; they were the never fading flowers of Jesus, promising to be present on earth as well as in heaven. Faustina moved from being a victim soul to a floral offering; she was able to become a flower, understanding herself in the context of a floral sacrifice. Finally, flowers mediated between powerlessness and powerfulness in Faustina's life. Flowers here are more than traditional, literary images, they are more than evocative symbols—they are models of being and are imbued with the power of their ideal spiritual state.

Faustina found solace in God, reserving her friendship and love for God, intentionally neglecting the other relationships in her life. As a hidden violet, her most important companion was God as sun, shining down and encouraging her. She created a world where her existence as a flower, and God's presence as the sun, made perfect sense together. She became purified in the heat of the sun, and transformed into an immolated floral offering in the flames of God's fire. In this suffering Faustina is able to imitate Christ, the never fading flower of humanity, and

overcome her trials on earth through obedience. Body and soul are ultimately tied in all the modalities of experience through that holy obedience.

In *Fragments of the Poetics of Fire* Bachelard claimed that “The phoenix, a creature born of the mighty contradiction between life and death, is sympathetic to all contradictory beauty. It helps us to legitimate all of the contradictions found in passion.”⁷¹¹ Faustina led a life that was mostly contradictory, but with the flower, it has made sense. She negotiated between powerfulness and powerlessness, immaterial and material embodiment, life and death; ultimately it transformed her from a human sacrifice to a floral offering. Flowers were able to accompany Faustina into the places that no others could go, and to witness her most terrible and most joyful moments. The flower accompanied her, and together, they would make sense of the world, transitioning between poles of being. When Faustina could not conceive of her life in human terms any longer, there was the flower, beside her, offering its petals, its fragrance and its life as a model. With the flower Faustina made sense of her life and her devotion to God. Flowers were the phoenix in Faustina’s life; they rose from the sacrificial ashes, and with their position of liminality were able to both follow and guide her in life. The familiar becomes strange in the face of the flower as a powerful ally, and the strange becomes familiar when Faustina remakes *herself* into the floral phoenix.

⁷¹¹ Bachelard, *Poetics of Fire*, 64.

SECTION FOUR: APPENDIX I

CHAPTER NINE: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ST. MARY FAUSTINA KOWALSKA (1905-1938)

Section 1: Helena Kowalska (1905-1925)

Section 2: Sister Mary Faustina “the Theologian” (1925-1928)

Helena Kowalska enters the World

Novitiate

Section 3: The Hysteric Visionary” and “Princess” (1928-1932)

Section 4: Third Probation and Final Vows (1932-1933)

Section 5: Living in Vilnius (1933-1936)

A New Congregation

Section 6: A Slow Death (1936)

Section 7: Saying Goodbye (1937-1938)

Section 1: Helena Kowalska (1905-1925)

Helena Kowalska

The present overview is meant to provide a substantial, but not exhaustive, account of St. Faustina's life. Particular attention has been paid to her interaction with flowers, the main interest of this thesis. Not every vision or encounter with divinity, nor every recorded conversation, can be included here. Only those events deemed to have shaped her life and character are made evident.

On August 25th of 1905 Helena Kowalska was born in the small town of Glogowiec in the Turek County of Łódź Province, Poland.⁷¹² She would grow up during a time of great change. Her young life encompassed the entirety of the First World War, while her adult life spanned the antebellum period of Poland as it struggled through territorial conflicts, all while seeking stability and a national identity. During each of these numerous political changes the Catholic Church was highly involved. Helena was born during the papal reign of Pope Pius X (1903-1914) who was known for his strong opposition to the separation of church and state, and the secularisation of the government. This position was in response to the growing trend of separating government from religion, a process which would eventually result in diminished power for the Roman Catholic Church.

Although Helena was born at a time of great social and political upheaval her diary gives no mention of the early revolutions that had impacted Poland. There was widespread rioting and strikes amongst the Polish people during the year of her birth. While the rest of Russia was

⁷¹² Glogowiec is no longer on the Polish map; it is now encompassed by the region of Swinice Warckie. The term "Glogowiec" comes from "glog" which is a hawthorn berry, or hawthorn brambles. This shrub flowers in the spring with pink and white scented flowers. Michalenko, *The Life of Faustina*, 13.

occupied with the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), Poland took the opportunity to rebel against her occupiers, resulting in rioting and strikes in the urban areas of the country.⁷¹³ Strikes in St. Petersburg resulted in the massacre of protestors on Bloody Sunday, on January 22nd of 1905. In an effort to appease Poles, the Russian government issued a number of positive reforms in Poland. They increased rights surrounding free speech, created an elected parliament and loosened restrictions on land ownership. Additionally, as Poland transitioned from an agrarian society into an industrial nation, one of the affected areas of public life centred around the presence and role of women.⁷¹⁴ The women's movements of early twentieth century Poland, at the time of Helena's birth, were from "urban-based intelligentsia" and were far removed from the fields of her childhood home, as a result, their concerns centered on access to higher education, and professional employment.⁷¹⁵ The Kowalska family's rural location and the family's farming background largely protected them from the general state of Polish unrest, and women's movements, this helps to explain the absence of these social events in Helena's writings.⁷¹⁶ Later in life, Helena would remain shielded from the aftermath of the First World

⁷¹³ Russia was approaching defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) which had begun over rights to Manchuria, located in a North Eastern corner of modern day China. The war had resulted in the sinking of the Russian Pacific and Baltic fleets.

⁷¹⁴ Blobaum, *Woman Question*, 799.

⁷¹⁵ Blobaum, *Woman Question*, 799-801.

⁷¹⁶ There were revolutionary actions, strikes, and much unrest in Poland in the 1900s. For further information please see Prazmowska, Anita. *A History of Poland*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011. Faustina was instructed to write her diary first by Father Sopocho, and then, she claimed, by Jesus who came to her in a vision. Her diary was meant to record the divine experiences she had and messages she received, therefore she may not have felt the need to include a complete history of herself or her country.

War as she lived within the shelter of her convent. She did pray for Poland every day, and was filled with concern and compassion for the Polish people.⁷¹⁷

Helena was the third of ten children born to Marianna and Stanislaus Kowalski of which only eight survived into adulthood.⁷¹⁸ The couple had had no children for ten years before the arrival of their first daughter, a birth which nearly resulted in the death of Marianna. Her third pregnancy with Helena was the first to proceed smoothly. Years later Marianna would claim that Helena had “sanctified” her womb. Helena’s devout parents took her to be baptised within two days of her birth by Pastor Rev. Joseph Chodynski in Casimir Church in Swinice Warkie, Turek County.⁷¹⁹ Helena would grow up with her parents and siblings in their stone and brick cottage alongside a country road. Her father was a farmer and a carpenter who made a modest living. He owned seven acres of land for growing, and five for pasture. The house, adjacent to their two barns, was bounded by a courtyard outside and filled with religious imagery inside.⁷²⁰ It contained holy photos on the walls, and an altar in the main bedroom which showcased a crucifix and two holy statues: the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.⁷²¹

Helena preferred to spend much of her time outdoors, being surrounded by the natural world. She possessed a lively and entertaining personality and was well liked.⁷²² Every morning

⁷¹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1188. Sister Michalenko suggested that St. Faustina, like many saints who came before her, had a special affinity for her home land. Often she prayed for Poland and begged for God’s mercy on her home land. In fact, Jesus had given her specific instructions on how to pray for Poland, when to pray for Poland, and how long to pray for Poland. After having done this, Jesus promised to bless the entire country.

⁷¹⁸ Tarnawska, *Sister Faustina*, 14.

⁷¹⁹ Siepak, *Gift*, 11; Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 14.

⁷²⁰ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 14.

⁷²¹ Siepak, *Gift*, 12.

⁷²² Tarnawska claims that “In seeking God, Helenka, led by pure spiritual instinct, did not find Him in Nature—though that delighted her—but in His home, the tabernacle.” Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 52. She continues on to

her father would rise and sing the “Little Hours of the Immaculate Conception,” a Catholic hymn known as *Godzinki*. During Lent, he would sing “Lamentations of the Lord’s Passion” known as *Gorzkie Zale*. Faustina grew up listening to praise of God through hymns and prayers of the Catholic Church. Her father Stanislaus had been described as a simple but devout man, who attended church every Sunday, and received Holy Communion on feast days. While Helena also attended church, she often took to the garden to say her prescribed prayers.⁷²³ This would be a feature of her adult life as well, as Sister Faustina was perpetually praying in gardens.

In the Kowalski household Stanislaus ruled his patriarchal family with an iron fist, or alternately, a leather belt. Helena learned to suffer first under her earthly father, before dedicating herself to suffering for her divine father. Stanislaus was a strict and severe disciplinarian who effectively kept his children in line. The softer influence of the household, Helena’s mother, was in charge of raising the children, keeping the house, and taking care of her husband. She carried a hot meal to her husband in the field every day, returning with firewood for the house.⁷²⁴ She kept the family home clean and tidy, a trait passed down to Helena who took pride in her own cleanliness.⁷²⁵

Helena was described as a devout child, who confided in God instead of other children. She would rouse herself at night to pray in bed. When discouraged by her mother she responded

say that Faustina was sensitive to beauty, especially the beauty of nature and “treated it as the gift of a loving God. A starry night, the quiet sleep of the whole of Nature, the shining morning dew and birdsong, and flowers, all spoke to her in the language of adoration of the Creator. She kept this sensitivity to the beauties of Nature to the end of her life.” Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 53. The relationship between Faustina and the natural world is much more complex, and I contest, a greater source of God for Faustina that Tarnawska acknowledges.

⁷²³ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 53.

⁷²⁴ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 15-16.

⁷²⁵ The habit of cleanliness, learned in her early years, persisted throughout Faustina’s life. When she joined the convent she would wear a carefully kept religious habit, darned and cleaned. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 21.

“My guardian angel must be waking me to pray.”⁷²⁶ At the age of five she had a dream, and described it to her family stating, “I was walking hand in hand with the Mother of God in a beautiful garden.”⁷²⁷ Already in her young mind the link had been fastened between holy Catholic figures and garden delights. The invisible world of angels and saints seemed to be just as real and present for young Faustina as her country life. None of these rich details of her family or childhood home were included by Sister Faustina in her diaries. She recorded only one event from her childhood, and that was at age seven.

From the age of seven, I experienced the definite call of God, the grace of a vocation to the religious life. It was in the seventh year of my life that, for the first time, I heard God’s voice in my soul; that is, an invitation to a more perfect life. But I was not always obedient to the call of grace. I came across no one who would have explained these things to me.⁷²⁸

This entry records the original call from God recognized by Helena, experienced during vespers, the evening prayers.⁷²⁹ Her lack of guidance, either by her parents or religious authorities, is one that would continue to plague her. Helena would continue to hear the voice of God and search for spiritual guidance throughout most of her life. Although the young Helena was invited into a “more perfect life” she remained unaware of how to proceed, and did nothing.

Faustina skips ahead eleven years in her diary to age eighteen, where she begged her parents for permission to enter a convent, however her request was denied. Details about the

⁷²⁶ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 16.

⁷²⁷ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 16.

⁷²⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 7.

⁷²⁹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 16.

decade in between are provided in her official biography.⁷³⁰ This was a time of obedience and piety for Helena who soon became her parent's favourite child. She was eager to help her parents however she could, and responded to them with great love and respect. Despite the normalcy of her childhood Helena was being raised in times of war; she was nine years old when the First World War began.

In July of 1914 Austria had declared war on Serbia; the Austrian government blamed the Serbian government for the assassination of the archduke of Austria-Hungary, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife. As is well known, from this starting point countries began to honour the existing defence treaties they had made. Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy⁷³¹ were part of Triple Alliance, while France, Russia and Britain belonged to the Triple Entente. Poland, as a part of the Russian empire, was obligated to support Russia during times of war. Russia followed Serbia's lead and started to mobilize its troops, becoming fully mobilized once Germany had declared war.

Around the same time in Poland feminists attempted to modernize villages, a practice that included peasant wives who were seen as rural and therefore backward. Education was seen as one solution, and agronomy schools for rural women were opened by 1914. This was meant to fit within the Roman Catholic teachings by preserving women's obligations to "faith and family" while being prepared through modern education and social culture. Though household divisions remained, women were increasingly taking part in market activities outside of the home, like selling their goods. The Polish Mother or *Matka Polka* was a national symbol of an ideal Polish

⁷³⁰ The official biography is not the only biography; other sources including devotional materials provide information about her formative years as well. Material continues to be published as people interpret her thoughts and practices, generating new information long after her death.

⁷³¹ Despite their alliances, Italy declared neutrality, and then joined the side of the allies in 1916.

woman. This image had been modernized but still retained core Catholic values just before the Great War. Women were seen as capable of carrying both national values, as well as religious values, in public and private life. Women were meant to act, according to the Church, as “bonding elements” to prevent community breakdowns. In the years to come feminism would continue to evolve in Poland, and was susceptible to pressures of Nationalism in the coming years of political turmoil.⁷³² What was happening in Poland was part of a larger movement in the second half of the nineteenth century across Europe from west to east, from Great Britain to Russia, where politically conscious, educated, elite women were making decisions.⁷³³ Faustina would not be exposed to much of what was transpiring in Poland, for once she entered the convent she would not leave it again.

Despite the turmoil raging in Europe, Helena was steadily progressing in her religious life. It was only a month after the beginning of the war, in August of 1914, that Helena would have her first communion sometime after her ninth birthday. She had been preparing with Father Pawloski several times a week. When the morning of her first communion came she was overjoyed, and took her parents by the hand, kissing them, and begging forgiveness, fulfilling a Polish custom.⁷³⁴ Though there are no details of the ceremony, after the service Faustina was seen walking alone, as if in her own world. She stopped another little girl and asked “Are you happy about today?” to which the child responded, “Yes, of course. Look what a pretty dress I’m wearing.” Helena, on the other hand claimed “I am happy because Jesus has come to me.”⁷³⁵ While Helena was preoccupied with her own religious life, those around her in Swinice were

⁷³² Blobaum, *Women Question*, 807.

⁷³³ Blobaum, *Women Question*, 800.

⁷³⁴ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 22-23.

⁷³⁵ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 23.

overhearing rumours of war. These rumours did not take long to be confirmed and in the month of August Germany had declared war on Russia, and then France. When Germany invaded France through Belgium, the British became entangled as they had guaranteed Belgium's neutrality.

At this point Britain, along with the rest of the British Empire, including New Zealand, Australia, India, South Africa and Canada among others, declared war on Germany. This was the "Great" war in that it included so many territories and of them, Poland was particularly devastated. Much of the fighting on the eastern front occurred in Galicia, the territory of future Poland. The geographic location of Poland, situated between Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary meant that it acted like a buffer zone for the Russian army. Poland allowed Russia to trade space for time as the Russians moved their forces across the great distance of their country, with little infrastructure to hasten the process.⁷³⁶ On an everyday level, this activity in Poland meant that there were general seizures of wagons, horses, food, and fodder. The Polish people were also being conscripted by the Russian army, as well as by the German and Austrian armies. They were forced to fight against each other and on the battlefield as a divided people. Meanwhile their land was being ravaged by the war, and the Polish people suffered from famine and extreme poverty.

As a farmer, Stanilaus remained with his fields, and struggled to provide for his growing family.⁷³⁷ Even in such a remote part of Poland, the effects were clear. For Helena and her family this took the form of extreme poverty. Stanilaus attempted to sell extra grain from his farm, and

⁷³⁶ The German army was able to assemble quickly because of the small size of their country and their useful infrastructure. The Russians focused on assembling their own army over their vast lands, which would take much longer. The phrase 'trade space for time' means that Russia was sacrificing peripheral lands in the interest of having more time to assemble and mobilize their army before engaging the enemy.

⁷³⁷ Sister Faustina did not record anything in her diary concerning the First World War.

his family survived on the meagre produce that they were able to grow themselves.⁷³⁸ Helena was forced to alternate church attendance with her sisters because they shared a single good dress. Ironically it was the very same lack of money for clothing that would later prevent her from directly entering a convent. On days she could not attend mass Helena would hide away and pray alone using her prayer book. She would come out again only when she thought that mass had ended. Even if she was called by her mother for help, she would remain hidden.⁷³⁹ The desire to hide herself away and devote her time to God continued into her adult years. Incidentally, the clash between authorities would intensify; here it was a clash between her mother's call and the call of God while later it would be her convent superiors pulling her apart from God's wishes. Faustina was always negotiating between streams of obedience and she strained to always do the right thing for God. As she grew older it became more difficult to know how to act for God.

Despite the upheaval in her country, Helena was being raised on her family farm in the best way that her family could. Growing up Helena took part in the chores on the farm alongside her siblings, included taking the cows out to pasture. One story in particular stayed with the Kowalska family. Little Helena had woken early on a Sunday and wanted to take the cows to pasture so that there would be time to attend church. This was a difficult task as the cows needed to be carefully led between two fields of wheat, without straying to either side. When her father woke that morning he saw that the cows were missing. Removing his belt, he went in search of Helena. When he found her, she was beaming with smiles, and perfectly leading the cows down the narrow path. Instead of feeding on the more succulent shoots on either side, the cows had

⁷³⁸ O'Dell, *Apostle*, 23.

⁷³⁹ Tarnawska described her attitudes towards authority as her "hierarchy of obedience" placing God at the top, and her parents below.

contented themselves with ordinary grass, following the narrow trail of little Helena. Stanislaus was shocked that the cows had behaved so well for Helena and regarded this as a miracle.⁷⁴⁰

Helena was often followed by young children who would gather to hear her tell stories. Stanislaus had a collection of religious reading materials, including the Bible and stories about missionaries and biographies of saints. Faustina would hear and remember these, later reciting them to her young followers. It was her wish to one day leave home and become a hermit, subsisting on the herbs and berries of the forest.⁷⁴¹ Helena was struck by the awesome power and beauty of nature, and regarded natural beauty as a gift from God. This desire to be with nature, and commune with God through the natural world, only strengthened with time. Much of her worship already occurred outdoors. Aside from her prayers in the garden, the family had an outdoor shrine. Stanislaus fashioned a little shrine that was affixed to a pear tree outside of their house. It was especially used for devotions to the Virgin Mary, a highly important figure in Catholic Poland, especially in the month of May. Along with neighbours and family Helena would kneel at the shrine in prayer. She particularly loved to decorate the holy pictures with flowers.⁷⁴² Later in life Helena would be decorating her own image of Jesus with flowers, not outside of her family home but for thousands to see in Vilnius. Today this image is known as the Divine Mercy image, and that Jubilee celebration in 1935 was the first time it had been publically displayed.⁷⁴³ Helena's dream of Mary, her time spent at the outdoor shrine, and her

⁷⁴⁰ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 22.

⁷⁴¹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 18.

⁷⁴² Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 23. This period in history has been called the "Age of Mary" by Mariologists. Mariology is the theological study of Mary, and a Mariologist is someone who practices Mariology. See René Laurentin, *The Question of Mary*, trans. I.G. Pidoux (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 9-52.

⁷⁴³ Although we know that Helena prepared for the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation, she leaves no record of them in her notebooks. Her Holy Communion took place when she was nine. Michalenko, *Life of*

presence in the garden were all part of her early contact with flowers in a religious context. Flowers would continue to be important components of her prayer life and her relationship with God.

Just a few short weeks after the start of the war, the Battle of Tannenberg would change the course of Polish history by leading to Polish independence. The Russian army had launched an invasion from Poland into Prussia and by late August of 1914 Germany defeated the second Russian army. Another battle, called the battle of Masurian Lakes, happened just a few short weeks later. It was responsible for destroying the Russian First army. Both armies, intended to protect Poland, were annihilated leaving Poland defenceless. It was only a matter of time before Germany invaded, pushing the Russians back after years of control. The Polish people had mixed reactions towards the Russian expulsion; after the lax policies of the 1900s many had grown accustomed and ambivalent towards their Russian rulers and they were not eager to see them replaced by an unknown people.⁷⁴⁴ To make matters worse Germany instituted a number of “Germanization” procedures which were being resisted by the Poles, adding to the tensions already present. All of this was compounded by the destruction of the Polish city of Kalisz which had been shelled by the German military and then burned at the very onset of the First World War.

Faustina, 16. Helena’s Confirmation happened when she was around seventeen in Aleksandrów. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 32.

⁷⁴⁴ In 1915 Jozef Pilsudski formed an alliance with Austria, and was successful in leading Polish forces to overcome Russian forces. Once the Russians were no longer present in Poland, Germany and Austria attempted to take over the country. By 1917 Roman Dmsowski created the Polish National Committee for Polish autonomy. O’Dell, *Apostle*, 27.

From 1916-1918 Poland was declared the new Kingdom of Poland by Germany. It was actually a client state under German military, economic and political control.⁷⁴⁵ Despite these efforts on the part of the Germans, the Polish did not respond well, especially when expected to volunteer for the “German cause.”⁷⁴⁶ These changes had unexpected effects in the life of young Helena. In 1917, at the age of twelve, Helena was permitted to attend the Regional District School in Swinice.⁷⁴⁷ The Russian occupation of Poland meant that schools had previously been closed. Now, under the new Kingdom of Poland, Helena was able to attend classes for the first time. She was already able to read, having been taught at home by her father, and so was placed in the second grade. Literacy among woman was slow in the formal education system as they comprised a minority, however home instruction often provided girls and boys with literary skills. Helena was an excellent student, well-liked by her classmates and teacher. She excelled at oratory, and even won an award for reciting a ballad by a Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz. Quite fittingly the poem “The Father’s Return” was about a wife who urged her children to pray at an outdoor shrine for the safe return of their Father.⁷⁴⁸ After only three terms, in the spring of 1917, Helena was forced to leave school to make room for younger students. Given her limited formal education it is truly remarkable that she was able to undertake the massive task of writing her diary in later years.

⁷⁴⁵ Existing as a ‘client state’ meant that Poland had nominal independence and was subject to German rule.

⁷⁴⁶ “The German cause” refers to enlistment in the German military.

⁷⁴⁷ The front, or the front lines where direct fighting occurs, went by the voivodeship of Łódź.

⁷⁴⁸ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 28.

The Catholic Church warmed to the idea of the kingdom of Poland because it seemed to be a step towards Polish sovereignty.⁷⁴⁹ In the Vatican Pope Pius X had been succeeded by Pope Benedict XV at the beginning of the war, and was left to face the devastation in Europe. Throughout the course of the war Benedict XV was largely ineffectual in that the Vatican remained coolly silent on its policy for Polish independence.⁷⁵⁰ There was a single wartime statement in August of 1917, a Peace Note, urging people to live by equity and justice as a “response to the Polish question.” The idea of an independent Poland, as suggested in this Papal statement, received little attention. It would not be until January of 1918 that American President Woodrow Wilson would give his famous speech of fourteen points, a speech that would later inform the conditions of German surrender.⁷⁵¹ Among these points was the need for an independent Poland. Later still in the treaty of Versailles the issue of Polish independence was resolved and Poland would become its own country.⁷⁵² During the last year of the war things progressed quickly. There is no information of what Helena was doing at that time, or to what extent she knew about the events happening in her country. The best estimation is that her thirteenth year was spent hard at work on her family farm, tending the cows, tilling the soil, and praying daily alongside her brothers, sisters and parents.

By October of 1918 it became clear that Polish independence would come from the allies.⁷⁵³ Pope Benedict made an announcement to the Polish people expressing his joy that at

⁷⁴⁹ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 17.

⁷⁵⁰ It was only after the First World War in 1921 that Pope Benedict XV objected that “only the Apostolic See” had declared plainly that Poland required complete independence. Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 16.

⁷⁵¹ Of the fourteen points in the American treaty, the question of Polish independence was number thirteen.

⁷⁵² Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 17.

⁷⁵³ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 18.

“last the dawn of the resurrection of Poland has broken” adding his great desires that the emancipated country might soon “resume her career as a civilizing and Christian force.”⁷⁵⁴ The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had meant that Poland had been annexed by Germany along with Lithuania, Ukraine, and parts of Russia.⁷⁵⁵ Poland was now an “independent country” as granted by Germany, with Marshall Józef Pilsudski as chief of state. On November 1st, the feast of All Saints, bishops of Galicia celebrated the national rebirth of Poland by singing the *Te Deum* followed by *Boże coś Polskę*.⁷⁵⁶ The *Te Deum* is not only a popular Catholic hymn, but a central liturgical hymn of praise and thanks, while the *Boże coś Polskę* had nationalistic overtones.

The latter was written in 1816 and would gain popularity as an important religious and nationalistic hymn becoming the official anthem of the Kingdom of Poland. The year of 1918 was only the beginning for Poland. It would be seven years later before liberation would begin in earnest.⁷⁵⁷ The status of Poland as a German territory was officially reversed in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. Poland was officially given western Prussia, thus gaining access to the Baltic Sea. Strategically this meant they could conduct trade, as well as be linked with Britain and France. The rest of Helena’s adult life would fall in the two decades of Poland’s sovereignty between wars, 1918-1939, the antebellum period.

In February of 1919 the government of the Second Polish Republic established its parliament, Sejm, in Warsaw. They did this with an inaugural Roman Catholic high mass, cementing the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the national life as well as linking it with

⁷⁵⁴ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 34.

⁷⁵⁵ Pope Pius X’s main goal was to unify all of Christianity under the Pope, establishing the Congregation for the Oriental Church and the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome in 1917 to that effect.

⁷⁵⁶ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 19.

⁷⁵⁷ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 76.

the ruling powers. This inauguration has been described as a “symbolic union of church and state” one that is still cited today. It supports claims of the far reach of the Catholic Church in Poland, and the “natural affinity” of Poles towards Catholicism. It becomes obvious in her writing that St. Faustina was closely tied to her country and connected to its people; she often prayed for the safety of Poland.

Despite the difficulty Poland had in establishing itself as a country it would soon enter into even more conflict. Poland’s boundaries were not sharply defined by the Treaty of Versailles, nor were they particularly stable. There were a number of uprisings in neighbouring Russian Ukraine, Germany, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia. From 1919 to 1921 Poland was engaged in the Polish-Soviet War, involving Russia, Ukraine and Poland. Although the treaty of Versailles had secured the borders of Poland, these aggressing countries each wanted their territories back after losing them during the partitions in the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1920, the “Warsaw miracle” took place, as the Polish army stopped the advance of the Red army⁷⁵⁸ into central Europe. It was a decisive battle in the war lasting from August twelfth to twenty-fifth. This was an unexpected and stunning victory, won through careful military manoeuvring. Poland was expected to have been defeated but instead they crushed the Russian forces. Although this was not the end of the war, Poland was able to successfully defeat its enemies in the battles that followed. As a result, they would enjoy independence for the next twenty years. That same year a symbolic gesture renewed hope for Catholic Poland. Pope Benedict XV sent a candle to Warsaw that had been set aside by Pope Pius IX who instructed its return when Poland was finally free.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁸ The Red Army was the name given to the army of the Soviet Union.

⁷⁵⁹ Stone, *The Eastern Front*, 29.

Section 2: Sister Mary Faustina Kowalska “the Theologian” (1925-1928)

Helena Kowalska enters the World

After Poland had won the Polish Soviet war, taking back most of its western Ukrainian land in a peace treaty, the Peace of Riga, came into effect in March of 1921. It was a treaty between Poland and Russia that clearly defined their territories. When it came time for peace settlements the role of the Vatican was largely dismissed. Pope Benedict’s position of neutrality rendered him seemingly “complicit” and he was completely left out of the Peace Council of Paris. Throughout Polish history, the policy of the Vatican had been one of pacifism; they discouraged violent resistance by the Poles towards any occupying nation and as one climbed the clerical hierarchy it was less and less likely that they would be involved in the politics of the country. It was the local clergy, who were close to the everyday people, who desired to effect change through political means.

It was just as the country began to settle that Helena decided to venture out from her farmhouse and into the world. By 1921 Helena was fifteen years old and her two elder sisters were already working outside the home as maids.⁷⁶⁰ At fifteen Helena told her mother, “Mom, Daddy works so hard and yet I still have nothing to wear. Of all the girls, I have the worst looking dress. I should be going out to earn something for myself.”⁷⁶¹ Her parents agreed and Helena was given permission to work for Mrs. Helen Goryszewska, a neighbour’s sister living in Aleksandrów.⁷⁶² Her tasks involved cleaning, cooking, and caring for the woman’s young child,

⁷⁶⁰ In Tarnawska’s account, and O’Dell’s account, Helena was sixteen years old. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 33.

⁷⁶¹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 20.

⁷⁶² Siepak claims that Helena was sent to work at age sixteen, and worked for Kazimierz Bryszewski and his wife Leokadia at a bakery. Siepak, *Gift*, 17. Tarnawska also claims that the name of Faustina’s employer was

who immensely enjoyed Helena's storytelling.⁷⁶³ This was the first of a series of jobs that Helena would hold in her lifetime. Even after professing her vows she continued to work in kitchens, a bakery, gardens and a gateway. Women were increasingly relying on themselves to make their way in the world, and even after marriage, many were still financially required to work. Despite the move to the workforce outside of the home low wages made it difficult to earn a living, or even a dowry. Often a woman's education and career became a substitute for a dowry.⁷⁶⁴

Helena remained in Aleksandrów for only a year before stating her desire to leave. She was growing closer to God, praying more regularly, and was increasingly bothered by bright lights from God.⁷⁶⁵ One event in particular stood out at this time.⁷⁶⁶ Helena was in the courtyard of the Goryszewski's house when she stumbled upon a blazing fire. She cried out "Ogien! Ogien!" (Fire! Fire!) causing Mrs. Goryszewska to rush out with her son. She found Helena standing there, with no sign of a fire anywhere. A doctor was called, but Helena knew that she was not ill rather she was seeing God's visible presence through these signs. It seemed to be there in Aleksandrów that her decision to enter a religious order crystalized.⁷⁶⁷ The invisible world of God was breaking through into her life via these rays and she needed to get closer to the source of these divine lights.

Bryszewski, though she claimed that Faustina began work at age 16, in 1921. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 33. Michalenko claims that Faustina's employer was named Goryszewska. Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 20.

⁷⁶³ O'Dell, *Apostle*, 30.

⁷⁶⁴ Blobaum, *Women Question*, 804.

⁷⁶⁵ This is reminiscent of Hildegard von Bingen who experienced similar symptoms of seeing bright lights. For more information on Hildegard please see Heinrich Schipperges and John Cumming, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen: Her Life, Times, and Visions* (Toronto: Novalis, 1998).

⁷⁶⁶ Catherine O'Dell and Tarnawska both recorded this event before Faustina's departure which prompted her to leave her position though it is absent from the official biography.

⁷⁶⁷ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission* 34; O'Dell, *Apostle*, 31.

When Helena returned home she tried once more to gain permission to enter a convent however her father refused her request once more. The local parish priest advised Stanislaus to sell a cow to help pay for the wardrobe costs and to let his daughter go, but he rejected this idea.⁷⁶⁸ Even if her parents had allowed her to join there were no convents near Glogowiec. During the First World War many convents were targeted and their possessions were confiscated, the sisters themselves had also dispersed. Helena would have had to travel to gain admission to a convent. Her sister Josephine recalled “We were all very shocked by this, [the desire to enter a convent], because at that time, people knew very little about the religious life. Our parents were very sad, and the children were crying.”⁷⁶⁹ That Helena was a dedicated Catholic was expected, but her desire to join a convent was altogether foreign to her family.

Faustina’s background as a farm girl was not uncommon for the religious members of Poland. In fact, historian Neal Pease paints a compelling picture of Polish Catholics shaping their faith as an agrarian society. The same is often said of St. Faustina, whose simple country origins contributed to her humble engagement with God.⁷⁷⁰ Pease claimed that Polish peasants formed the bulk of the Catholic Church base giving Polish Catholics a “definitive earthy quality.”⁷⁷¹ They tended to be uneducated, and had a definite penchant for Marian worship.⁷⁷² These country people were present in pews and sanctuaries accounting for more than ten thousand clergy and religious members. Priests were from local peasantry while about half of the episcopate came

⁷⁶⁸ Siepak, *Gift*, 18.

⁷⁶⁹ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 33.

⁷⁷⁰ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 13.

⁷⁷¹ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 23.

⁷⁷² Another attribute of Polish Catholic peasants, not considered by Pease, is the bond they shared with the natural world as people who often worked on the soil.

from “the nobility or landed gentry,” bishops were of a higher standing and reflected the elite class, whereas the typical Polish priests did not.⁷⁷³

Catholicism had been so integrated into the lives of Polish people and had become such an essential feature of Polish life that there was an “apparent merging of faith and ethnicity” which linked Polishness with Catholicism.⁷⁷⁴ A census in Poland revealed that Roman Catholicism was the core religion of Poland, with three quarters of the population being Catholic.⁷⁷⁵ At the time, ethnicity closely followed religion, such that Germans were often Lutherans, Poles were often Catholic, Belarusians tended to be Orthodox, Jews practiced Judaism, and Ukrainians were Greek Catholic in Galicia but Orthodox in the former Russian provinces. Despite this variety of faiths many associated Poland with Catholicism, even if they knew little else about the country. There was a “time-honored legend of *Polonia semper fidelis*” or “Poland is always faithful” that stressed the faithful nature of Poland to the Catholic Church.⁷⁷⁶ This echoes the old adage that Poland “is Rome’s most faithful daughter.”⁷⁷⁷ Another popular expression claimed that “to be Polish is to be Catholic” or “*Dire polacco è dire cattolico.*”⁷⁷⁸ The Catholic religion kept Polishness alive during statelessness and helped them to maintain their cultural integrity through this largely common religious bond.

Even without permission to join a convent, Helena still needed to earn a living. Leaving home once more at age seventeen she headed for Łódź to live with her cousins, the Rapacki

⁷⁷³ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 23.

⁷⁷⁴ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 7.

⁷⁷⁵ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 21.

⁷⁷⁶ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 2.

⁷⁷⁷ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 3.

⁷⁷⁸ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 2.

family.⁷⁷⁹ There she found work from three women who belonged to the Third Order of St. Francis and was given permission to be a penitent, or a confessor, by their confessor Father Wyzykowski.⁷⁸⁰ Faustina was also allowed to attend Mass every single day and to visit the dying. Despite seeming more content here than in her previous positions, this job would not last. Faustina was increasingly absorbed in prayer, and wanted nothing more than to dedicate every waking hour to God. She realized that she would never be satisfied living and working in the world.

It was not long before she returned home once more and begged her parents to be allowed entrance into a convent; their refusal stood firm. Faustina claimed that this latest refusal by her parents had led her to the “vain things of life.” Biographic detail reveals that she began attending dances and buying pretty clothes including a “pretty rose dress.” Her improved wardrobe nearly prevented her from being hired at her next position as a maid in the home of the Sadowska family in Łódź. Her new employer thought the position might be beneath her, and hesitated to hire such a well-dressed young lady. Helena began work in early February of 1923, caring for the Sadowska family’s three children while their mother tended to their grocery store. The children deeply enjoyed her company. Helena was described as a “strong, hardy and independent” young woman, someone with an honest and direct character, keen on obedience and asceticism.⁷⁸¹ She was chastising her body with fasting at the time, so much so that her employer began to notice

⁷⁷⁹ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 35.

⁷⁸⁰ Members of the third order are lay people devoted to the spirituality and ministry of the order. They live in the world without having taken vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. O’Dell, *Apostle*, 35. In Tarnawska’s version, Helena found work with two Tertiaries. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 37.

⁷⁸¹ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 55.

and questioned her about it. “That’s how our father brought us up” she explained simply.⁷⁸² She did not consume meat during Lent, or dairy on Wednesday, Friday or Saturday. Helen’s constant fasting continued up until the end of her life. While she was young and healthy it did not seem to harm her, but fasting during an illness severely weakened her. Although Helena did not yet know it, she was truly on a pious path that would end with much suffering and an early death.

Although Helena was well liked in this household in Łódź, she simply could not settle. She quit her position in July of 1924, but resigned herself to lead a secular life. Part of that new life included attending dances with her friends. Shortly after becoming unemployed Helena attended a local dance with a few other girls, including a friend named Lucyna Strzelecka who also worked as a maid. Helena wore “a pink cotton dress with frills at the side” recalled one girl. She was described as having “beautiful copper sheened hair, gathered in a thick plait” she possessed a “strong chin, all rather pale and freckled, grey-green eyes with enormous pupils that reflect warmth and interest looked out.”⁷⁸³ Though she tried to excuse herself from dancing that night, Helena ended up on the dance floor with a young man.⁷⁸⁴ It was during this dance that Helen saw a vision of a wounded Jesus who asked her “*How long shall I put up with you and how long will you keep putting me off.*”⁷⁸⁵ She left the dance, feigning a headache and heard these words “*Go at once to Warsaw; you will enter a convent there.*”⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸² Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 22.

⁷⁸³ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 15.

⁷⁸⁴ Siepak, *Gift*, 21.

⁷⁸⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 9-10.

⁷⁸⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 9-10.

So it was finally settled. Helena could no longer wait for parental permission; she travelled by train to Warsaw leaving all of her earthly possessions behind. At age nineteen she was a minor travelling without the consent of her parents. She was aware that she was disobeying her parents and that she would cause much grief to her family. Just like when she was a child, hiding under covers with her prayer books, Helena chose to disregard the calls of her parents, and obey what she thought was the will of God. The next morning she entered St. James's Church in Ochota where mass was being conducted by a series of priests. At one point during the service an interior voice said to her "*Go to that priest and tell him everything; he will tell you what to do next.*"⁷⁸⁷ So it happened that Rev. James Dabrowski listened to her desire to become a sister, and recognized her need for work and a place to live.⁷⁸⁸ He sent her to a woman he knew, along with a note, stating that he did not know this girl but that she might be useful working in a household.⁷⁸⁹

Mrs. Lipszyc was a pious woman with four children who was in need of a maid. With the note from the priest, Helena arrived on her doorstep. Mrs. Lipszyc looked at young Helena and agreed to give her a job, allowing her to live with her family in Ostrówek in the district of Klembów. Helena would commute to Warsaw to search for a convent. Helena's new life in Warsaw very much resembled the old life she had left behind, at least initially. Aside from her work as a maid Helena began making the rounds, knocking on convent doors, asking to be admitted. Most regarded her simply as a maid and denied her request. Finally, she knocked at the door of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, where she was able to meet with the Mother Superior,

⁷⁸⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 12.

⁷⁸⁸ The name of the priest is not present in the official bibliography, but only in Tarnawska. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 45.

⁷⁸⁹ Siepak, *Gift*, 22.

Mother Michael Moraczewska; the details of this meeting come in varied forms. According to Mother Michael Helena “did have some merit” including her simplicity and sincerity. She claimed to have admitted her on the basis of her overall good countenance.⁷⁹⁰ In her diary, Faustina records something different, she claims that Mother Michael asked her to enter the chapel and ask Jesus if *he* accepted her. If Jesus did, so would Mother Superior. According to her diary, as she prayed in the chapel she heard a voice stating *I do accept; you are in My Heart*. Mother Superior did not mention sending her to the chapel, though however it happened, the matter was settled. Provided that Helena could come up with the funds for her wardrobe, she could enter the convent as a novice.⁷⁹¹

The next year of work was a time of great joy for St. Faustina for she was about to “step into a life of paradise.”⁷⁹² Mrs. Lipszyc meanwhile did not know of Helen’s intentions to enter a convent and tried to find suitors for the young woman. Helen had already made a vow of perpetual chastity during vespers at the Octave of Corpus Christi in June of 1925.⁷⁹³ Even after it had become clear that Helena was headed for the convent Mrs. Lipszyc still had her doubts that this energetic youth could find happiness in the monotonous routine of a nun. She assured Helena that she could return to her household if she wanted to. More difficult still was the visit by her sister Genevieve, who had travelled to visit Helena in an effort to convince her to return home. None of these appeals worked and Helen continued to deposit her wages for safekeeping at the convent, until she had earned enough to be admitted. Her parents continued to protest, and

⁷⁹⁰ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 24.

⁷⁹¹ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 46. Kowalska, *Diary*, 14.

⁷⁹² Kowalska, *Diary*, 17.

⁷⁹³ Later, when Helen had become Sister Mary Faustina, she would make vows of Chastity to Christ once more. In April of 1929 Faustina, after years of prayer to the Mother of God, was given the gold belt of chastity by Christ, such that she would never be tempted in body or mind. Kowalska, *Diary*, 40.

when Helena requested the necessary paperwork from her parents, they sent her older sister Eugenie instead, tasked with trying to persuade her to come home. Unfettered, Helena wrote to her parish priest who supplied her with the necessary documents. Instead of calling on her family as references Helena was able to use her employer, Mrs. Lipszyc. Despite the family turmoil, this may have been one of the simplest and happiest times of Helena's life. She was free to dream of the spiritual life that awaited her, where she would finally fulfil God's desires for her. Life *after* entering the convent would be much more complicated.

As Faustina struggled to gain admittance into the Catholic religious institution, the Catholic Church was struggling with its own integration issues. Despite the unifying qualities of Catholicism the various branches of the Polish Church would not easily be joined together. There were regional differences in custom and psychology which, according to Pease, prevented true unification.⁷⁹⁴ Only when Warsaw drafted its own constitution and laws did the old legislation of previous regimes give way, including German and Russian statutes.⁷⁹⁵ From the perspective of the Vatican the independence of Poland was a consolation for the state of affairs in the world. The traditional Catholic, conservative empires of central Europe were defeated, making way for Western liberal ideas, and eastern atheistic Russian practices. Pease suggests that the Allies' victory "cemented the hegemony of a liberal and anticlerical worldview inherently hostile to the Church, a conviction hardened by the unceremonious exclusion of the Holy See from the peace councils of Paris."⁷⁹⁶ Still, the Roman Catholic Church had a dominant role in defining what it meant to be Polish. Soviet Russia was no longer in charge, leaving

⁷⁹⁴ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 27. There were three national episcopates with a number of ecclesiastical structures and laws. Diocesan boundaries became obsolete and jurisdictions had to be changed. The Polish Church needed to work out its relationship with the Holy See, to figure out the rights of the Church within the republic.

⁷⁹⁵ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 27.

⁷⁹⁶ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 20.

Poland to assert its national identity through its faith. Religious and Church affairs were closely bound and after Poland gained its independence. There were a number of reasons for the increased presence of the Catholic Church, claims Pease. He cites a real enthusiasm for the independence of the country, the need to establish patriotism, to dispel its perceived linkages with Central Powers, and to provide that familiar, stable, controlling presence at a time of disorder.⁷⁹⁷ Between the wars the Catholic Church had a highly developed staff and organization network.⁷⁹⁸ The new bourgeoisie and landowning class were linked with the Catholic Church, which had an abundance of religious members. A survey produced towards the end of Faustina's life revealed that there were 16, 738 nuns and sisters in Poland.⁷⁹⁹ Poland was a shining hope for Rome because it remained largely 'faithful' to Catholicism, just as Faustina remained faithful to the Catholic Church and her chosen convent.

Novitiate 1925-1928

From 1925 to 1928 Helena was to be a novice at Sisters of our Lady of Mercy convent. The convent originated in Laval, France and had been founded by Teresa Rondeau in the year 1818 with the intention of reforming prostitutes. It entered Poland forty four years later along with Ewa Sulkowska, Countess Potocka in 1862. The congregation still focuses on imitating the mercy of Christ towards souls in need; they tended mostly to the rehabilitation of women and girls. In Poland there were fewer prostitutes than France, and so the institution was geared less toward the reform of prostitutes, and more towards difficult, 'morally-neglected,' or disturbed

⁷⁹⁷ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 19.

⁷⁹⁸ In 2002 the number of Polish Catholics climbed to ninety-five percent. John Allen, "Divine Mercy Pope's Mantra during Poland Visit: A Saint despite Vatican Reservations," *National Catholic Reporter*, 30 August 2002, World section 5.

⁷⁹⁹ Pierkarski, *The Church in Poland*, 68.

women who needed guidance.⁸⁰⁰ There were, and still are, two choirs in the convent: the first is made up of educator-directresses who work in the wards with women, while the second is made up of sisters who do household work along with their apostolic work. All of the women take part in prayer and penance through various mortifications.⁸⁰¹ This congregation has a special devotion to Mary, Mother of Mercy, and to the mercy of God. As a result, when Faustina developed a fixation on divine mercy her devotion did not seem out of place in the convent. What did seem out of place was Helena herself. Despite her lively personality, Helena felt herself to have a highly contemplative nature when it came to communing with God, yet she had just joined an active order. That meant there was much work to be done and little time for prayer. This was not the life that Helen envisioned as a child, living off of roots and berries, nor was it the contemplative life of prayer that she had been working towards that previous year.

As Faustina carried out her novitiate years, the rest of Poland was also attempting to establish and define itself in a new, independent context. Poland could finally begin to address its own needs and reshape itself into an independent country. This period has been described by Pease as “the chaotic formation phase of independence.”⁸⁰² Once Polish boundaries were fixed, there were issues to be decided between Church and state concerning both the role of Catholicism in Poland, and Poland within Catholicism. The first relationship required a constitution and the second a concordat. The constitution was meant to establish the role of the Church in the country, either as a secular or confessional state; this was a domestic matter for

⁸⁰⁰ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 396. Of all the women present at the convent Sister Faustina would always request to work with the most difficult. These girls grew so fond of her that when she had to leave, they wanted to follow her. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 438, 444.

⁸⁰¹ These mortifications were not ever physically severe; they might include fasting or sleeping without a pillow for instance. Later, Faustina would ask permission for more difficult mortifications, like wearing a hair shirt or binding her waist with chains.

⁸⁰² Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 54.

Poland. The concordat would involve a treaty between the Holy See and the Polish government; it would address religious policies of mutual interest. The existence of a concordat meant a “*de facto*” recognition of the sovereignty of the papacy.”⁸⁰³ So it was that the modern Polish constitution, including relations between State and Church, were institutionalized in 1921.⁸⁰⁴ The concordat in 1925 established the legal and diplomatic relationship between Church and state in the Second Republic.⁸⁰⁵ The bishop of Siedlce, Henryk Przeździecki, claimed that 1925 would be remembered “as the year the shackles of slavery fell from our holy Church in Poland.”⁸⁰⁶ Poland was a Republic up until 1926 with a national bank, a developed mining industry, and a Polish seaport. Despite these advances instability was still a trademark of Poland and in 1926 Josef Pilsudski, the Polish Marshal,⁸⁰⁷ organized a coup to take control of the Polish government. Surprisingly, he was successful in both his seizure of the country, and in his control of Poland. Under the Pilsudski dictatorship, the Polish economy began to stabilize, and Polish culture flourished. After years of living under communist Russia, Poland embraced a capitalist social system while all progressive social movements, reminiscent of Russian occupation, were rejected.

⁸⁰³ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 54.

⁸⁰⁴ Pierarski, *Church in Poland*, 61-62.

⁸⁰⁵ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 54. Despite the presence of the constitution and concordat the role of Catholicism in the Second Polish Republic polarized the country. The majority of Polish people were Catholic; this was a stable relationship that asserted independence. Neal Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 5. Catholicism did not remind people of foreign rule, in fact the opposite was true, Catholicism was a national identifier. The difficulty was that the Catholic Church was not an important *political* player of Poland. It was the Polish political and intellectual elites who led the interwar republic and these were the figures who expressed hostility towards Catholicism. It became for them “a dubious force in national affairs” and a part of an ever more complex, changing Poland. Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 5. The concordat actually did not clarify and define rights and duties of the Church in Poland as expected, in fact, it was left wide open for interpretation. Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 75.

⁸⁰⁶ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 76.

⁸⁰⁷ The title Polish Marshal is the highest rank of the Polish army.

Helena was under the care of her own absolute ruler at this time. Mother Jane Bartkiewicz was Mother Directress for the first six months of Helena's postulancy in Warsaw. Mother Jane was a senior nun, aged 67 and used to absolute obedience in her nuns. She was sometimes heavy handed in making the nuns fit in. Her personality seemed thoroughly incompatible with that of Helena. Still, Mother Jane thought highly of Helena and later reported that she seemed to be a "soul in close contact with the Lord Jesus."⁸⁰⁸ After just a few short weeks in the convent under Mother Jane, Helena was determined to leave the order. Faustina reported that God intervened at the right moment before she had a chance to go through with her plan. Mrs. Lipszyc had gone to the convent as a character reference while Faustina was feeling particularly despondent. It was standard for new members being initiated to provide such a character reference. At this time Helena was able to speak privately and openly with Mrs. Lipszyc, and who later recalled the meeting.

She said that she was in difficulties, that she found the rule with its insistence on silence and walking slowly to be burdensome, that she could not defend herself when unjustly accused of anything...I understood her, knowing her lively personality, and I knew that she might experience some difficulties from her superior.⁸⁰⁹

Helena was later described by her peers in a similar manner—a lively and joyful person. Sister Joachim G. who knew Helena from her last months of postulancy and then novitiate in Cracow would later describe her as "joyful...always with a smile on her lips...animated" and "an example of good humour and gaiety."⁸¹⁰ Helena initially felt stifled in the convent and misdirected in her efforts, despite these misgivings she remained with the order until her death.

⁸⁰⁸ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 71.

⁸⁰⁹ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 60.

⁸¹⁰ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 67.

How did this happen? It came to pass, recalled Faustina, that the night before she intended to leave she had a vision of the sorrowful face of Jesus.

On the curtain I saw the very sorrowful Face of Jesus. There were open wounds on His Face, and large tears were falling on my bedspread. Not knowing what all this meant, I asked Jesus, “Jesus who has hurt You so?” And Jesus said to me, *It is you who will cause Me this pain if you leave this convent. It is to this place that I called you and nowhere else; and I have prepared many graces for you.* I begged pardon of Jesus and immediately changed my decision.

At confession the next day Helena confessed what she had almost done, and the priest confirmed that she needed to honour her commitment by staying in the convent.⁸¹¹ Helena resigned herself to settling in. She worked in the kitchen and was assigned to clean Mother Jane Markiewicz’s room. While she lived and worked in Warsaw, Helena received the first of many visions concerning souls in purgatory.

I saw my Guardian Angel, who ordered me to follow him. In a moment I was in a misty place full of fire in which there was a great crowd of suffering souls. They were praying fervently, but to no avail, for themselves; only we can come to their aid. The flames which were burning them did not touch me at all. My Guardian Angel did not leave me for an instant.⁸¹²

It would become her lifelong mission to pray for those souls and to shorten their suffering. It was soon after her arrival at the convent that her health began to deteriorate; the stress leading up to her decision to stay had left her exhausted and physically vulnerable. Her health became such a concern that she was sent away to rest at Skolimow, a summer home for sisters.⁸¹³ While there she was charged with the task of preparing food for the others. How was it that a young, strong girl accustomed to farm work, faltered under the weight of religious pressure

⁸¹¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 19.

⁸¹² Kowalska, *Diary*, 20.

⁸¹³ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 31.

after just a few weeks, asks Tarnawska?⁸¹⁴ When Helena worked in Łódź she was described as “plump” and then by Mrs. Lipszyc as “a strong and healthy girl” however by the time she visited Mother Michael at the convent for the first time she was called a “skinny little thing.”⁸¹⁵ Clearly there were massive changes happening in the life of Helena, which had both spiritual and physical consequences.

Helena’s novitiate period was two years long. The first year was canonical, where novices are permitted meditations and religious practices. They are expected to study the rules of the convent, the constitutions, the meaning of vows, and also practice virtues like humility. The second year of the novitiate would involve additional studies, work under a professed sister, as well as religious and spiritual activities. After this trial period would come the profession of vows, lasting for one year. These are renewed annually for five years before one’s perpetual profession.⁸¹⁶ Faustina would have known all of this before she committed herself fully through permanent vows. Though she did not do so, Faustina could have turned her back on the convent at any step along the way.

After her stay at the summer home Helena entered “Joseph’s Place” for the three months remaining of her postulancy. Joseph’s place, as it was fondly referred to, was an educational institution in Lagiewniki, Cracow. It was dedicated to St. Joseph and had been founded in 1890 by reverend Alexander Lubomirski as a place to educate wayward girls. The buildings were physically imposing and surrounded by orchards and gardens. During her time at St. Joseph’s, Sister Faustina was under the direction of Sister Margaret Gimbutt and then Sister Mary Joseph

⁸¹⁴ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 256.

⁸¹⁵ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 255.

⁸¹⁶ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 32.

Brzoza. Gimbutt was an older woman who taught mostly by example and like Faustina placed high importance on prayer. Faustina, she recalled, was “a Happy child of God.”⁸¹⁷ Sister Mary Joseph Brzoz remained with Faustina for the remainder of her stay and has been described as principally responsible for Helena’s spiritual formation.⁸¹⁸

Shortly after her arrival at Joseph’s Place in April of 1926 Helen was visited by the spirit of a recently deceased Sister, Sister Henry. Sister Henry wanted her priest, Father Rospond, to offer mass for her and to pray three exclamatory prayers in her honour. Faustina was unsure if she had dreamt or imagined this communication and so it took another three apparitions before Helena finally told her Mother Directress. Once she had, the Mother assured her that these matters would be taken care of, and it was out of her hands. This is just one example of how Helena struggled with the validity of her visions, and how to behave.

On April 30th of 1926 Helena underwent a ‘clothing ceremony’ where she would take on the robes of a sister, and also a new name, becoming Sister Mary Faustina, meaning fortunate or blessed.⁸¹⁹ As she pulled on her black habit and white veil for the first time, she received another vision.⁸²⁰ This time it was a vision of her, but in the future. She saw all of the sufferings still before her and fainted at the very sight of it.⁸²¹ Despite this horrifying revelation Faustina persisted in her new life. Though she was now officially Sister Faustina, she developed several

⁸¹⁷ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 72.

⁸¹⁸ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 69.

⁸¹⁹ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 191.

⁸²⁰ According to Tarnawska Faustina wore a white wedding dress at the time. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 73.

⁸²¹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 32. Helena wrote to her parents asking them to attend the Clothing ceremony. They received the letter too late and did not attend. They did attend her first vows two years later but were not present at her death, as she did not wish to burden them with the news of her illness or the financial expense of the trip itself.

nicknames while at St. Josephs. She was called “the lawyer” because of the dynamic hand gestures that accompanied her speech. Sister Faustina continually talked about God during her work in the kitchen; often with Sister Placia and Sister Regina the three would discuss theological matters. She especially encouraged her fellow sisters to pray for souls in purgatory. She was soon given the nickname “the theologian” for that very reason, leading me to include it in the title of this segment.

Although her work required her to be inside, Faustina often desired to be outdoors. She especially loved recreation period, visibly so. She would lift her hands to the heavens and cry “O infinitely good God, how marvellous are your works!”⁸²² Being outside made Faustina feel joyful and appreciative of God; she claimed that she was able to connect to God through his creation.

Unlike the other sisters, Faustina’s experiences were not always what they appeared to be. Sister Faustina tells us that “One time during the novitiate” she was sent to work in the kitchen where she struggled with the size and weight of the pots. Most difficult of all tasks was draining the potatoes from the boiling water used to cook them. She described losing all of the hot water from the pots in an effort to drain them. In an uncommon instance, Sister Faustina complained to her Mother Directress, who told her that practice would make the task easier. As her physical condition weakened, she was having more difficulty, not less. Finally, she took the matter to God in prayer. God comforted her with a promise of strength. That evening Faustina trusted in God’s words and rushed into the kitchen to drain the potatoes. According to her diary the following miracle occurred.

⁸²² Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 34.

I took up the pot with ease and poured off the water perfectly. But when I took off the cover to let the potatoes steam off, I saw there in the pot, in the place of the potatoes, whole bunches of red roses, beautiful beyond description. I had never seen such roses before. Greatly astonished and unable to understand the meaning of this, I heard a voice within me saying, *I change such hard work of yours into bouquets of most beautiful flowers, and their perfume rises up to My throne.*⁸²³

Even in the kitchen, and even through a pot of potatoes, God chose to communicate with Faustina using beautiful bunches of red roses. This floral miracle hit an intimate cord with Faustina, who had always held flowers in high regard, and had often experienced God in natural surroundings.

As the first year of her novitiate drew to a close, Sister Faustina appeared to be like any other sister for she had effectively hidden her spiritual gifts. Soon, that would change. She began to struggle with a great darkness that visibly dampened her spirits.

One day, just as I had awakened, when I was putting myself in the presence of God, I was suddenly overwhelmed by despair. Complete darkness in the soul. I fought as best I could till noon. In the afternoon, truly deadly fears began to seize me; my physical strength began to leave me. I went quickly to my cell, fell on my knees before the Crucifix and began to cry out for mercy. But Jesus did not hear my cries. I felt my physical strength leave me completely. I fell to the ground, despair flooding my whole soul. I suffered terrible tortures in no way different from the torments of hell.⁸²⁴

Faustina felt rejected and hated by God. Although there were both earthly and divine sources of comfort provided to her, all relief was short lived. Mother Directress and her confessors tried to assure Sister Faustina that she was on the right path but the feeling of being offensive to God plagued her and she existed in a state of anguish. Faustina described in her diary, “A terrible hatred began to break out in my soul, a hatred for all that is holy and divine. It

⁸²³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 65. When the miracle of roses occurred the sister next to Faustina in the kitchen remembered her staring into the pot with surprise. When she asked about it, Faustina had replied that it was “nothing.” Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 403.

⁸²⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 24.

seemed to me that these spiritual torments would be my lot for the rest of my life.”⁸²⁵ She felt enveloped in total darkness. Even after a visit from the Virgin Mary, who promised to suffer with her, she could not break the hold this darkness had.

During the night, the Mother of God visited me, holding the Infant Jesus in Her arms. My soul was filled with joy, and I said, “Mary, my Mother, do You know how terribly I suffer?” And the Mother of God answered me, *I know how much you suffer, but do not be afraid. I share with you your suffering, and I shall always do so.* She smiled warmly and disappeared. At once, strength and a great courage sprang up anew in my soul; but that lasted only one day. It seemed as though hell had conspired against me.⁸²⁶

It was not until Good Friday in April of 1928 that Sister Faustina found relief from her darkness. Her suffering was replaced by an intense yearning for God. Sister Faustina was able to make her first temporary vows on April 30th of 1928 but even then, the darkness returned.⁸²⁷

Mother Superior [Raphael] called me aside after the exercises and said to me, ‘Sister, ask God for grace and consolation, because I can see for myself and the sisters keep telling me that the very sight of you evokes pity. I really do not know what to do with you, Sister. I command you to stop tormenting yourself for no reason.’⁸²⁸

Faustina was not well understood by her superiors or her fellow sisters. In fact, even her confessors had difficulty interacting with her. Because she kept her sufferings mostly hidden, and because her experiences were so unbelievable, it was easy to doubt Faustina. By way of relief, Faustina was asked by the priest to “say the *Te Deum* or the *Magnificat*, or to run fast

⁸²⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 25.

⁸²⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 25.

⁸²⁷ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 38.

⁸²⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 68.

around the garden in the evening, or else to laugh out loud ten times a day.”⁸²⁹ These measures did little to help her condition.

Faustina was visited in a dream one night by a young woman who, at a later time, revealed herself as St. Thérèse of Lisieux. The unidentified woman comforted her, and assured her that she too had suffered. Sister Faustina doubted her, and refused to believe that she had truly suffered. When the identity of St. Thérèse was revealed, Sister Faustina was overjoyed. St. Thérèse guaranteed Faustina that she would also become a saint.⁸³⁰ After this vision Faustina endured another six months of spiritual darkness. At the time she did not understand the phenomenon of the dark night of the soul. That particular suffering ended one night when Jesus came to her during prayer and said to her “*you are my heart’s delight.*”⁸³¹ She was finally able to feel the presence of God and to commune with him again.

Sister Faustina continued to have fantastic visions and amazing experiences, gaining much hidden knowledge. She recorded in her diary

One day, I saw two roads. One was broad, covered with sand and flowers, full of joy, music and all sorts of pleasures. People walked along it, dancing and enjoying themselves. They reached the end without realizing it. And at the end of the road there was a horrible precipice; that is, the abyss of hell. The souls fell blindly into it; as they walked, so they fell. And their number was so great that it was impossible to count them. And I saw the other road, or rather, a path, for it was narrow and strewn with thorns and rocks; and the people who walked along it had tears in their eyes, and all kinds of suffering befell them. Some fell down upon the rocks, but stood up immediately and went on. At the end of the road there was a

⁸²⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 68.

⁸³⁰ This encounter with St. Thérèse of Lisieux is not dated, nor do we know when during her novitiate it happened. Kowalska, *Diary*, 150.

⁸³¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 27.

magnificent garden filled with all sorts of happiness, and all these souls entered there. At the very first instant they forgot all their sufferings.⁸³²

This was a vision about the journey on earth, and the two outcomes available to humanity. Interestingly, flowers are a sign of passing pleasures on earth, and also a sign of lasting pleasure in heaven. Faustina had already closely identified prayer with flowers and miracles with flowers, now she learned that eternity would hold a floral presence as well.

Faustina kept these visions to herself where possible. When Jesus asked something of her, she tried to oblige but it was rarely easy to do so. The following account makes this clear: once Jesus told her, “*Go to Mother Superior [probably Mother Raphael] and ask her to let you wear a hair shirt for seven days, and once each night you are to get up and come to the chapel.*”⁸³³ When approached, Mother Superior vehemently denied Faustina’s request, stating “I will not permit you to wear any hair shirt. Absolutely not! If the Lord Jesus were to give you the strength of a colossus, I would not then permit those mortifications.”⁸³⁴ Faustina was bound by holy obedience to her superiors not to listen to the direct requests of Jesus. Faustina turned back to Jesus, and explained what had happened. He in turn responded

*I was here during your conversation with the Superior and know everything. I don't demand mortification from you, but obedience. By obedience you give great glory to Me and gain merit for yourself.*⁸³⁵

Faustina seems to be caught in the middle of this hierarchy of obedience and left wondering what to do. It becomes clear that Jesus required the obedience of Faustina to her superiors first, even at the cost of disobeying his direct requests. Catholicism is invariably linked

⁸³² Kowalska, *Diary*, 153.

⁸³³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 28.

⁸³⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 28.

⁸³⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 28.

with networks of power on an institutional as well as spiritual level, both of which are necessary to the Catholic tradition.⁸³⁶ It is that continual manifestation of the experience of spiritual power that legitimates the existence of the Catholic institution, while the institution regulates and legitimizes spiritual power according to its theology. Tensions do exist between spiritual or experiential power handed down from God, and the institutional, social power acquired by those in the Church hierarchy. The hierarchy of power in Faustina's life would become less clear, and Faustina would be torn about whom to obey.

The close relationship Faustina had with God caused doubts about her among the other sisters. This came to a head when one of the Mothers informed Sister Faustina that she was deluding herself and that Jesus would not speak to one like her.⁸³⁷ These matters weighed heavily on Faustina's mind as she approached the stage of temporary profession.⁸³⁸

Section 3: "The Hysteric Visionary" and "Princess" (1928-1932)

The Catholic Church played a supportive role for the Polish people and safeguarded Polish culture; as such the Church had a role in defining the Polish identity which included a strong Church presence.⁸³⁹ Ecclesiastical life in Poland had been preoccupied with Polish identity and sovereignty to such an extent that it did not engage in many of the debates taking place over the rest of Europe regarding modernism and social issues. One can imagine that if Faustina lived in Russian proper her mission to serve God might have looked very different, for

⁸³⁶ Institutional power refers to hierarchical power within the Catholic Church; it is the power of a priest to conduct mass for instance. Spiritual power refers to the power that comes directly from God; it is experienced by martyrs or saints and allows them to convey visions from God for example. Both kinds of power can lead to change in the Catholic Church.

⁸³⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 28.

⁸³⁸ Temporary profession occurs after the novitiate period has ended, and is characterized by the profession of vows.

⁸³⁹ Pease, *Faithful Daughter*, 9.

although Faustina struggled with isolation in her life, as a Catholic Pole she was among the majority.

In October of 1928 Faustina returned to the convent in Warsaw, where she had been a postulant years earlier, to begin her temporary profession. During this time the rumours about her grew in frequency and hostility. Her failing health meant that she could not complete the tasks set before her and this necessitated special treatment from her superiors. Rumours circulated that she was pretending to be sick, or worse, that she was possessed.⁸⁴⁰ Faustina recorded these things in her own words.

In order to purify a soul, Jesus uses whatever instruments He likes. My soul underwent a complete abandonment on the part of creatures; often my best intentions were misinterpreted by the sisters, a type of suffering which is most painful; but God allows it, and we must accept it because in this way we become more like Jesus. There was one thing which I could not understand for a long time: Jesus ordered me to tell everything to my Superiors, but my Superiors did not believe what I said and treated me with pity as though I were being deluded or were imagining things.⁸⁴¹

As Faustina explains, the suspicions went beyond her fellow sisters; her superiors also looked upon her with suspicion. One superior advised her that she was being deceived by illusions of Jesus, and suggested she seek the council of a priest. When she spoke with a priest, he likewise took issue with what she was telling him, and he sent her back to her superiors. No one seemed to know what to do with Faustina, a young woman who was claiming to have such an extraordinary connection with God.

This period of time was one of great growth, not only for Poland, but for the congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. Sister Michael opened four new houses: Józefinek near

⁸⁴⁰ The diary of St. Faustina records many instances of encountering demons. She felt plagued by Satan who desired to tempt her from her prayers, and her mission to save souls. Kowalska, *Diary*, 96-98, 129, 173, 411-412, 1465.

⁸⁴¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 38.

Warsaw, and others at Rabka in Lwow, and at Biala near Plock. These houses needed new sisters and so relocating between the houses was a common occurrence for many nuns, but never more so than for Sister Faustina who moved constantly. During her thirteen years at Sisters of our Lady of Mercy Faustina' remained in the novitiate house in Cracow for two years and nine months, in Plock for two and a half years, Vilnius for three years and then Cracow again for two years. For the remaining two and a half years she was moved a remarkable eleven times.⁸⁴²

In February of 1929 Sister Faustina was sent to Vilnius for a two-month kitchen duty as a replacement for Sister Petronela where she was responsible for cooking for her fellow sisters. She returned to Warsaw in April, but then was sent off again in June to work at another kitchen in Jozefinek, Warsaw. A few short weeks later in July she was moved once more to a home in Kierkrz, near Poznan, where she remained in the kitchen until October. Returning from there to Cracow, she was put to work in the garden.⁸⁴³ By way of explanation for these frequent moves, Mother Michael, Superior General, stated that of all of the sisters, Sister Faustina did not resist reassignment. Although Faustina felt these moves were difficult she did not want to oppose the will of God. It is also possible that no one felt comfortable keeping Faustina, this sick sister with such unusual gifts. Faustina's physical condition began to deteriorate during these frequent moves, possibly aggravated by the upheaval. By May or June of 1930 Sister Faustina was moved once more to Plock where she was given yet another kitchen assignment.⁸⁴⁴ When that became too taxing for her Mother Rose Klobukowska moved her to a country rest house in Biala ten kilometres away. While she was there Faustina had another direct experience of roses. This time they were not part of a miracle but were an object of unresolved chastisement. It was Sister

⁸⁴² Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 102.

⁸⁴³ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 42.

⁸⁴⁴ O'Dell, *Apostle*, 61.

Faustina's "privilege" to decorate the chapel in Biala with flowers. As she was doing so, the following incident occurred.

One day, I had picked the prettiest roses to decorate the room of a certain person. When I was approaching the porch, I saw Jesus standing there. In a kindly way He asked me, My daughter, to whom are you taking these flowers? My silence was my reply to the Lord, because I recognized immediately that I had a very subtle attachment to this person, which I had not noticed before. Suddenly Jesus disappeared. At the same moment I threw the flowers on the ground and went before the Blessed Sacrament, my heart filled with gratitude for the grace of knowing myself.⁸⁴⁵

Faustina, whose floral offerings should have only been for God, offered them to another sister.⁸⁴⁶ She clearly learned that her fondness belonged to God alone. These roses had again been a sign, this time for a circumstance that needed correction. After this hurdle Faustina experienced relaxation and even joy in the treatment house and within a few months she was able to resume her duties at the bakery and store in Plock.⁸⁴⁷

While in Plock, on February 22nd of 1931, Sister Faustina had a vision of Jesus that would become a source of both great personal joy and pain. In time it would become an image of mercy revered around the world by Catholics, and hold the attention of the Vatican.⁸⁴⁸ The vision, much like Sister Faustina herself, would rise and fall in popularity, finding renewed appreciation years after its original manifestation. The image of mercy, now famous around the

⁸⁴⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 71. There is no record of who this person might be, whom Faustina had a subtle attachment to.

⁸⁴⁶ Faustina's diary does not include any information about this individual aside from her being a fellow sister at the convent.

⁸⁴⁷ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 109.

⁸⁴⁸ The original painting was hung in the Church of St. Michael in April of 1937, where it was consecrated and hung next to the altar. It was borrowed by the parish of St. Francis, and in 1940 taken by the Bernadine Sisters where it was slightly damaged during the war. In 1942 the picture was returned to the main altar where it remains today. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 169.

world, was first witnessed by St. Faustina in her convent cell. She described the incident as follows.

In the evening, when I was in my cell, I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. One hand [was] raised in the gesture of blessing, the other was touching the garment at the breast. From beneath the garment, slightly drawn aside at the breast, there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale. In silence I kept my gaze fixed on the Lord; my soul was struck with awe, but also with great joy. After a while, Jesus said to me, Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world.⁸⁴⁹

According to Sister Faustina, Jesus went on to say that those who venerated the image would not perish but have victory over their enemies, especially at their hour of their death. Jesus instructed her to paint an image of the vision she had seen of him. Faustina was naturally unsure of how to proceed. How could she paint such an image? Clearly she needed help. Desperate, she spoke with her confessor, who assured her that such an image must be painted interiorly, in her heart. Not for the first time there was friction between the commands of Jesus and the instruction of Sister Faustina's superiors. After meeting with her confessor, Jesus again requested that the image be painted for others to see. He added to his request that the painting should be blessed on the first Sunday after Easter for that Sunday would be a feast of Divine Mercy. How would a Sister such as Faustina, so doubted and seemingly despised, introduce a feast of Mercy into the liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church through an original image she had seen in a vision? The task seemed impossible. It would take many months and much struggle before the painting was finally commissioned, and even longer before it was exposed to the public. As Sister Faustina struggled to meet the requests of Jesus she was sorely hurt and anxious about her inability to act.

⁸⁴⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 47.

Rumours about Sister Faustina continued to circulate. In town, children were drawn to the convent and “stood in the street opposite the rooms of the nuns and saw rays coming from one of the windows. This was the window of Sister Faustina’s cell.”⁸⁵⁰ There was something *different* about Sister Faustina. The members of her congregation could also see that. She was being called a hysteric, a visionary and a fantasist by her fellow sisters. Even the Mothers were struggling to contain their contempt. Faustina recalled when one day a Mother screamed at her “‘You queer, hysterical visionary, get out of this room; go on with you, Sister!’ She continued to pour out upon...[Faustina’s] head everything she could think of.”⁸⁵¹ These seeds of doubt took root in her own mind, and soon Sister Faustina doubted the validity and source of her visions. The sisters started to monitor her more closely. Faustina explains, “More than once I was seized with laughter when I learned they would not even leave my bed alone. One of the sisters told me that she came to observe my cell every evening to see how I behaved in it.”⁸⁵² Sister Faustina felt as though she were being “watched like a thief” in her own space.⁸⁵³ She soon gained a new nickname—the princess. The others saw Sister Faustina as raising herself above them, separating herself as holier.⁸⁵⁴ In reality Faustina described herself as feeling bullied, desperate, and like a failure for not completing the task set before her.

As Faustina struggled interiorly, Europe was also in a state of unrest. By 1931 central Europe was in financial crisis as countries struggled to repay their war debt. As a result a hold

⁸⁵⁰ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 116.

⁸⁵¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 128.

⁸⁵² Kowalska, *Diary*, 128.

⁸⁵³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 128.

⁸⁵⁴ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 69.

had been placed on reparation payments.⁸⁵⁵ In Poland, Jozef Pilsudski had established a right-wing government in an attempt to unify Poland; however the country remained divided into three partitions.⁸⁵⁶

If Faustina was aware of the plight of her continent or her country, she does not say so. Although she remained secluded in convents and rest houses, her work in the bakery shop did expose her to the public. Beyond praying for Poland, Faustina does not go into detail about the unrest in her country. She was totally immersed in finding a painter capable of capturing the image of Jesus that she had witnessed. Faustina even searched for a sister with skill in painting, only causing the rumours about her to increase. In a desperate attempt to fulfil Jesus' wish, Faustina tried, unsuccessfully, to sketch the image herself with charcoal.

Section 4: Third Probation and Final Vows (1932-1933)

In November of 1932 Sister Faustina left for Warsaw where she would be under the direction of her first Directress of Novices, Mother Margaret Gimbutt once more.⁸⁵⁷ Despite a warm welcome at Warsaw, Sister Faustina was informed by a sister that she would not be permitted to take her final vows. "I myself will see to it" the sister claimed. Faustina had no knowledge of why she had said this, but had been assured by Jesus in a vision the following day

⁸⁵⁵ O'Dell, *Apostle*, 66. Germany was attempting to pay reparation debts to Britain and France from the First World War however the money being loaned from the United States was stopped. Without that source of income, they were unable to make payments. At the same time Britain and France were paying back the United States for money they had borrowed to fund the war. When Germany's reparation debts stopped, so did their payments to the United States. By 1931 central Europe was in financial crisis.

⁸⁵⁶ O Dell, *Apostle*, 66-67.

⁸⁵⁷ Faustina would stay at the motherhouse, and then Cracow for the final five months of probation before her profession of final vows.

that she *would* be permitted to take her final vows.⁸⁵⁸ This was a lesson for Faustina who learned that “people can do very little on their own” for Jesus is ultimately in control.⁸⁵⁹ Furthermore, she learned that she would meet a confessor during her retreat who Jesus would use as a conduit, to answer her “through his lips.”⁸⁶⁰ After this reassuring vision Faustina was immediately sent to a retreat in Walendow. This retreat would be a source of great inspiration to her, and as Jesus promised, so it happened. Father Edmund Elter received Faustina’s confession, and he gave her great peace of mind.⁸⁶¹ It was during her confession with Father Elter that Sister Faustina felt sure of the divine message she had received. She was filled with great joy and hid herself in the garden to be alone with God. She said that “In an instant, all my nothingness was drowned by God and at that moment I felt, or rather discerned, the three persons living in me.”⁸⁶² With assurances from Jesus, through this confessor, Faustina felt strong enough to move forward.

Faustina’s third probationary period officially began after her retreat on December 1st of 1932. During her stay it would be her job to help sisters in the vestiaries where she would inspect and mend clothing as well as distribute them to the sisters. Unfortunately Faustina’s failing health meant that she could not always complete her duties. When this happened she was labelled as lazy. “Even in Warsaw” claims O’Dell, “some of the sisters had heard that this second-choir nun preferred to pray all day, leaving the laundry undone, the meals uncooked.”⁸⁶³ When she did have to rest, and leave her work undone, it confirmed their suspicions. Faustina

⁸⁵⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 165.

⁸⁵⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 165.

⁸⁶⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 169.

⁸⁶¹ Father Edmund Elter was a professor of homiletics and ethics at the Gregorian University in Rome.

⁸⁶² Kowalska, *Diary*, 174.

⁸⁶³ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 75.

would not complain about her physical sufferings and illness, nor would she defend herself against such allegations, only making matters worse for her.

While in Warsaw Sister Faustina took on yet another responsibility, one that would redefine and literally consume her life—she was to become a *victim soul*. This is a term known in Catholicism for one who devotes their lives to God as a being of suffering for reparation for others’ sins. Faustina had a vision of what this new identity would entail, and it left her in a cold sweat—before her lay a lifetime of both physical and spiritual suffering. Most difficult of all was that these sufferings would be hidden. They would lead to suspicion and cause her to lose her good name, isolating her even further from her congregation. It would be a martyr’s life, thankless and bitter. Despite her fears Faustina accepted the path laid out for her; she captured the moment poignantly as she stated “My name is to be: ‘sacrifice.’”⁸⁶⁴ From that time on Sister Faustina continued to have visions of Jesus, uniting with him in his suffering of the Passion, and even uniting with the pregnant Virgin Mary. She continually combined her sufferings to the sins of others, that she might save them and please Jesus.

Sacrifices were humble offerings for Faustina; she imagined them as flowers at the feet of Jesus, because for her, these were the most perfect sacrifices she could imagine.⁸⁶⁵ Faustina was comfortable using floral language in connection with her experiences with God, and God in turn used floral language with her, as she recorded in her diary.

I am delighted with your love. Your sincere love is as pleasing to My Heart as the fragrance of a rosebud at morningtide, before the sun has taken the dew from it.

⁸⁶⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 135.

⁸⁶⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 208.

The freshness of your heart captivates Me; that is why I unite Myself with you more closely than with any other creature.⁸⁶⁶

Faustina was growing ever closer to God, and that closeness was often expressed using floral language. Faustina's last retreat before her perpetual vows happened in the convent at Legiewniki near Cracow in April of 1933. She was assured by Jesus that all would be arranged between her superiors and confessor, and that she should trust and confess to Father Andrasz. She was to be like a child towards him in pureness and simplicity. She was instructed by Father Andrasz to accept the instructions of Jesus and to seek out a permanent spiritual director to guide her. After her meeting with Father Andrasz she recorded the following passage in her diary.

For a few days, my soul was in a state of continuous ecstasy. God's presence did not leave me for a single moment. And my soul remained in a continuous loving union with the Lord. But this in no way interfered with the performance of my duties. I felt I was transformed into love; I was all afire, but without being burned up. I lost myself in God unceasingly; God drew me to himself so strongly and powerfully that sometimes I was not aware of being on earth...My spirit has been turned towards the Sun and has blossomed in His rays for Him alone; I understand no more...[The sentence breaks off here and begins a completely new thought in the next line.]⁸⁶⁷

Faustina struggles to explain the depths of her experience. Her words of transformation, and sensation of being lost in God, find their conclusion in the final sentence. Faustina has remade her identity completely by turning towards the sun and blossoming in God, just like a flower would. Faustina has become both a sacrifice and flower after dedicating her life to God.

Faustina continued to receive visions about her spiritual director in Cracow, the one promised by God to guide her. On the eve of her perpetual vows, Sister Faustina experienced the same kind of joyous anticipation as before her entrance into the novitiate. She had been assured

⁸⁶⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1546.

⁸⁶⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 142.

by Jesus that she would indeed take these vows.⁸⁶⁸ She remained awake all night with thoughts of her life to come. Despite all of the hardships she had experienced she was still excited and eager to fully join the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy.

I will spend all my free moments at the feet of [Our Lord in] the Blessed Sacrament. At the feet of Jesus, I will seek light, comfort and strength. I will show my gratitude unceasingly to God for His great mercy towards me, never forgetting the favors He has bestowed on me, especially the grace of a vocation. I will hide myself among the sisters like a little violet among lilies. I want to blossom for my Lord and Maker, to forget about myself, to empty myself totally for the sake of immortal souls—this is my delight.⁸⁶⁹

Faustina identifies herself as being different from the other sisters. She is the hidden violet, while they are the lilies. Faustina prizes humility, and this hidden nature accentuates her desire to be humble.⁸⁷⁰ She continues to desire to blossom for God, and to become this sacrificial flower for him, as a means of expressing her humility and thanks.

Faustina professed her final vows, without opposition, in Cracow on May 1st of 1933. Becoming a permanent part of this congregation was a defining moment in the life of Faustina. It was a decision that would bring her great initial joy, and then great turmoil. During Mass on the day of her perpetual vows she heard the voice of Jesus confirming what she felt “My spouse, our hearts are joined forever. Remember to whom you have vowed.”⁸⁷¹ Although guests were welcomed for this ceremony, no one was present for Sister Faustina.

To better understand the significance of this moment we must understand what it is to take final vows. The taking of vows is a dying to the world. The sisters involved prostrate

⁸⁶⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 165.

⁸⁶⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 224.

⁸⁷⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 95, 114.

⁸⁷¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 238.

themselves in front of the altar; they are covered in a pall, a black sheet with a white cross ordinarily used to cover caskets. They are dying to their old life in order to enter their new. Bells toll as they would for a funeral, and the sisters pray for themselves and other people. It is a death during life and a rebirth into a new, godly life. Faustina prayed at that moment

Love, it is for love of You, O Most Holy Trinity, that I offer myself to You as an oblation of praise, as a holocaust of total self-immolation. And through this self-immolation, I desire the exaltation of Your Name, O Lord. I cast myself as a little rosebud at Your feet, O Lord, and may the fragrance of this flower be known to You alone.⁸⁷²

Not surprisingly it is the familiar imagery of flowers that Faustina turns to at this moment. Faustina is the hidden rosebud now, living her life for God alone, giving herself up for the sake of God. The sisters were given time to pray during this special moment, and Faustina prayed that she not offend God in any way. She prayed for the Church, the congregation, those close to her in her religious life, the women helped by the congregation, the dying, and she requested that all the souls in purgatory be set free. She promised to remember these vows when the world turned its back on her and all she had left was God. After being given time to pray the sisters were sprinkled with holy water and then rose to their feet to greet their new world and their new lives. As Sister Faustina received her ring, binding her to her betrothed Jesus, she felt a close connection with God. After this ceremony she recorded the following vow.

I will hide from people's eyes whatever good I am able to do so that God himself may be my reward. I will be like a tiny violet hidden in the grass, which does not hurt the foot that treads on it, but diffuses its fragrance and, forgetting itself completely, tries to please the person who has crushed it underfoot. This is very difficult for human nature, but God's grace comes to one's aid.⁸⁷³

⁸⁷² Kowalska, *Diary*, 239.

⁸⁷³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 255.

Faustina is expressing herself through floral language at this important moment, dedicating herself to God as a humble, hidden, sacrifice. During this solemn Jubilee Year of Jesus' Passion, when remission of sins is possible for all, Faustina's sacrifices and that of Jesus join together.⁸⁷⁴ Although she had longed for this day of permanency, Faustina was scared of the future and her first assignment as a sister. She was afraid of leaving her mother directress, and leaving the life of a novice, so much so that she vowed to Jesus that she would remain his novice forever, and consult him first always.⁸⁷⁵ This theme of simplicity and humility would be well developed in Sister Faustina by the end of her short life.

Section 5: Living in Vilnius (1933-1936)

Faustina's life did not get simpler after her profession of vows—in fact, it became even more difficult. Though she did not know it, these were the last five years of her life, and would often be filled with conflict. As her first assignment Sister Faustina was assigned as the gardener in Vilnius. This would be both a challenge and a great pleasure for Faustina, who was so accustomed to garden spaces and yet so unaware of *how* to professionally garden. This position meant leaving behind Father Andrzej who had been the source of such great comfort and spiritual guidance. While waiting for her new position to begin she spent her time helping in the convent garden in Cracow, and performing a month long Jesuit retreat. As she left Cracow in May of 1933, the sight of the garden filled her with grief.

I remembered all the blessings and graces bestowed on me by the Lord. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, I saw the Lord by the flower bed, and He said to me,

⁸⁷⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 250.

⁸⁷⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 228.

Do not weep; I am with you always. God's presence, which enveloped me as Jesus was speaking, accompanied me throughout the journey.⁸⁷⁶

It was fitting that the garden would bring her to tears, for it was a place that Faustina loved and where she felt loved by God. Faustina had spent much time communing with God there, and in the end saw him right in the middle of the flowerbed. Though she did not yet know it her stay in Vilnius would be the longest of any assignment, almost three years.

On her way to Vilnius Sister Faustina stopped at Czestochowa where she visited the icon of Our Lady Jane of Cora. Faustina was there for the unveiling of the icon at five in the morning; she stood there in prayerful contemplation for six hours. Later, writing in her diary, she explains that during that time “The Mother of God told me many things. I entrusted my perpetual vows to her.”⁸⁷⁷ With this comfort she moved forward into her new life. In May of 1933 Sister Faustina arrived at the scattered cluster of houses in Vilnius, holding only eighteen sisters. The scale was much smaller than what she was used to. Another great change was about to happen—it was here in Vilnius that Faustina would identify the priest of her visions. After so long without a spiritual director, Faustina would find a permanent confessor and a guide in her extraordinary spiritual life. His name was Father Sopocko and he would be just as surprised as Faustina when she explained to him his God given role as her confidant.

Sister Faustina was new to this location and job, and found her role as gardener a great challenge but one she looked forward to. Inexperienced, she turned to a professional gardener who helped her to learn the trade. In time she eased into her new routine, soon excelling at the tasks before her; she even began a greenhouse. Despite the affirmation that she had received from God it would take Sister Faustina nearly a month to open up to the new confessor of her

⁸⁷⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 259.

⁸⁷⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 260.

visions. Father Sopocko was both an educated and experienced priest. He was born in 1888 in Vilnius and studied at the Seminary there until he was ordained in June of 1914, the same month that Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife were assassinated. Father Sopocko was not left unaffected by these events. He became an army chaplain in the Polish army during the First World War serving on the south-eastern front. After he was infected with typhus, he was sent home to continue work as an army chaplain and attended university, from which he graduated in 1923. From there he continued working as a chaplain and teacher. He was released from military chaplaincy duties and began working as a spiritual director for the Seminary. He was also a confessor to local men's and women's religious congregations, including Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. Little did he know at the time that one of his confessors would change his life completely. When Sister Faustina finally spoke with Father Sopocko in the summer of 1933 there was much to be relayed. She let him know that he had been chosen by God to be her spiritual director, and told him of the task entrusted to her by Jesus: the painting of the image of Divine Mercy.⁸⁷⁸ Father Sopocko did not initially respond well to Sister Faustina's news. Sister Borgia T. of the infirmary remarked "The arrival of Sister Faustina from Plock to us in Vilnius almost deprived the convent of its confessor."⁸⁷⁹ Father Sopocko himself stated, "When she [Sister Faustina] came to Vilnius, she realized that I was the chaplain whom Jesus had showed her...I was not at all pleased, I did not want to think about it and tested Sister Faustina and did not even want to hear her confession."⁸⁸⁰ It took a psychiatric evaluation and several character references before Father Sopocko would be reassured about Faustina. He commissioned these

⁸⁷⁸ This was one of the two great missions of Sister Faustina. The other would be to establish a separate contemplative congregation of Divine Mercy as requested by Jesus, though she would not succeed in her lifetime.

⁸⁷⁹ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 156.

⁸⁸⁰ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 157.

tests in the autumn of 1933.⁸⁸¹ More than that, he tested the meaning of what Faustina was relaying to him. Specifically, he wanted to know what this image of Divine Mercy *meant* and so Faustina returned to him with a message from Jesus.

*The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls... These two rays issued forth from the very depths of My tender mercy when My agonized Heart was opened by a lance on the Cross. These rays shield souls from the wrath of My Father. Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him.*⁸⁸²

This message satisfied Father Sopocko who realized the theological significance of both the explanation and the image. The waters were baptismal waters of the Holy Spirit, and the blood was of the Passion and forgiveness of sins. Still, he was not completely satisfied. He wanted to know that some precedent had been set concerning the importance of divine mercy. He began to research whether divine mercy had ever been known as the greatest attribute of God. He found confirmation in St. Fulgentius and then in St. Augustine who on commenting on the Psalms, called divine mercy the greatest of God's gifts.⁸⁸³ Finally in January of 1934 Father Sopocko arranged for an artist, Eugene Kazmierowski, to meet with Sister Faustina so that her image could be materialized.⁸⁸⁴ Even then, after all of the testing and explanation, he still had doubts about the validity of her vision. He explained "I was not at that time convinced of the genuine nature of the revelations, and I was simply curious to see what would come of it. Kazmierowski was not a great painter, but he lived in my neighbourhood, I knew him and therefore I turned to

⁸⁸¹ O'Dell, *Apostle*, 192.

⁸⁸² Kowalska, *Diary*, 299.

⁸⁸³ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 201.

⁸⁸⁴ Sister Faustina, as a gardener, had the freedom of movement that she needed to visit the painter without arousing suspicion from the other sisters. Although special care was taken with Faustina the other sisters still recognized her as being apart, and treated her differently as a result. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 200.

him.”⁸⁸⁵ The casual attitude of Father Sopocko is worlds away from the deep satisfaction and happiness experienced by Faustina, who at that time was finally fulfilling the wishes of Jesus. This development was kept secret from the other sisters. Already the sisters under Mother Borgia began to call Sister Faustina “Chatelaine” after a character in a play about a person who was strange, and different from the others.⁸⁸⁶

In the spring of 1934 Sister Faustina was asked by Father Sopocko to write down her encounters. Her confessions were becoming lengthy and he did not have the time to sit and listen, but he could read her accounts. These writings would eventually become the published diaries that are accessible today. Sister Faustina began to write “using a fountain pen in a ledger-style ruled notebook” measuring in at six and a half by eight inches, marked at the top with a little cross.⁸⁸⁷ Father Sopocko discouraged her from mentioning the Christian names of sisters “which might give rise to unpleasantness.”⁸⁸⁸ As time passed, the aim of her diary also changed; no longer written solely for her confessor, Faustina began to write at the apparent request of Jesus who said that this work would help others.

Aside from miraculous visions and spiritual gifts, Faustina wrote about her daily trials, the suffering she bore, but also, veneration of God. She wrote poetry and songs to God expressing her love for him. On July 28th of 1934 Sister Faustina recorded the following words in her diary, as one of her first entries.

⁸⁸⁵ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 163.

⁸⁸⁶ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 437.

⁸⁸⁷ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 87.

⁸⁸⁸ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 157. This is the first instance of her writing being censored. It becomes clear when reading her diary that positive encounters include names, whereas negative encounters generally do not.

O my Jesus, because of my trust in You,
I weave thousands of garlands,
and I know That they will all blossom
When God's sun will shine on them.⁸⁸⁹

Faustina was able to express herself, on her own terms, in this diary. She often chose to express her trust and love for God in floral terms. God became the source of light and life for her blossoming garlands of trust.

Meanwhile as the painting progressed Sister Faustina was distraught that the image of Jesus was not as beautiful as she remembered; she wept at the sight of the completed painting. Father Sopocko also admitted that it “did not please” him greatly either.⁸⁹⁰ It would be several months before the matter of the painting would be revisited. Back at the convent, Faustina's life was filled with hidden sufferings that made her work increasingly difficult to complete. In August of 1934 she recorded this event.

A sudden illness—a mortal suffering. It was not death, that is to say, a passing over to real life, but a taste of the sufferings of death. Although it gives us eternal life, death is dreadful. Suddenly, I felt sick, I gasped for breath, there was darkness before my eyes, my limbs grew numb—and there was a terrible suffocation. Even a moment of such suffocation is extremely long. There also comes a strange fear, in spite of trust.⁸⁹¹

In the autumn of 1934 the nurse responsible for Faustina, Sister Chrysostom, believed Faustina to be exaggerating her condition and did not take seriously her attacks. Sister Chrysostom was a nurse by trade, but was later replaced by Sister Amelia, a woman with no medical training. Even so, when Sister Amelia was in charge she ordered an X-ray to be taken of Faustina's lungs. Dr. Zielinski, a pulmonary specialist, was called in to look at her X-rays and

⁸⁸⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 4.

⁸⁹⁰ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 165.

⁸⁹¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 321.

diagnosed her condition as advanced tuberculosis. In response to this diagnosis Faustina's superiors provided her with extra food, but no less work.⁸⁹² Tuberculosis was a disease that traversed class boundaries and struck fear into the heart of Polish people. Sufferers of this disease hid their affliction for fear of being ostracised. Ironically, the young and healthy are most often affected.⁸⁹³ In Faustina's case, her tuberculosis would never be cured; it would spread to her intestines from the salvia she swallowed. Eventually the disease would emaciate her body, until she would no longer be able to eat due to pain. Although no one, including Faustina, knew how the tuberculosis would affect her, Faustina was well aware of the sufferings she had agreed to in her life. Only Dr. Silberg, a pulmonary specialist and director of the sanatorium, seemed to appreciate the strong connection between Faustina's spiritual suffering and her physical state. He understood that her physical needs were to be carefully balanced against her spiritual needs. As such, he made special concessions for her to attend mass or take communion while she was in his care.⁸⁹⁴ He believed in the sanctity of Faustina and was stunned by the intensity of the suffering that she was able to endure without complaint.

Sister Faustina continued to grow closer to Jesus, and to Father Sopocko, as she worked in Vilnius. She was visited by the Virgin Mary, who told her that she would be tested by illness.⁸⁹⁵ This was not the end for Faustina, but the beginning of yet another trial. Sister

⁸⁹² Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 262.

⁸⁹³ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 255. Around the same time that Sister Faustina was alive a man named Maximillian Kolbe from the Polish countryside also engaged in missionary work despite having been diagnosed with advanced tuberculosis in the lungs. Like Faustina he was canonized and became a saint. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 296.

⁸⁹⁴ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 265.

⁸⁹⁵ Faustina recorded the encounter as follows, "Once, the Mother of God came to visit me. She was sad. Her eyes were cast down. She made it clear that She wanted to say something, and yet, on the other hand, it was as if She did not want to speak to me about it. When I understood this, I began to beg the Mother of God to tell me and to look at me. Just then Mary looked at me with a warm smile and said, You are going to experience certain sufferings because

Faustina's health deteriorated shortly after that vision in midsummer of 1934. Three days later, Faustina's symptoms of weakness and pain grew worse, such that she felt she was dying, and appeared that way to those around her. Father Sopocko came to her and administered the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.⁸⁹⁶ Very soon after, her condition actually began to improve. Even Faustina, for all her otherworldly communication, did not know the hour of her death, and could only respond to the illness as it came to her. Jesus visited her a few days later and assured her "My will has not yet been fully accomplished in you; you will still remain on earth, but not for long."⁸⁹⁷ Knowing that her time was short led Faustina to make good use of her remaining moments on earth. Faustina was even more committed to the missions set before her by Jesus, and to the suffering that had become her life.

In Vilnius, late in October of 1934, Sister Faustina had a vision of Jesus as Divine Mercy. The vision occurred in the garden and she claims that it lasted for about four minutes.⁸⁹⁸ There was a light cast over the city and world, and one of the girls with Sister Faustina, Imelda, saw the rays of light but not Jesus. The rest of their companions laughed and dismissed their claims but Sister Imelda was persistent in wanting to know what had transpired. Finally in November of that year Sister Faustina was asked to record and sign her recollections of that event. She stood in the presence of Sister Taida and Sister Imelda as the document was

of an illness...you will also suffer much because of the image, but do not be afraid of anything." Kowalska, *Diary*, 316.

⁸⁹⁶ The anointing of the sick is a sacrament administered near death, and is likely the final sacrament administered in someone's life; it is meant to provide spiritual and physical strength.

⁸⁹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 324.

⁸⁹⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 87.

authenticated by Sister Irene Krzyzanowska, their Vilnius Superior. This was a rare instance where Faustina's vision was partially shared by someone else.⁸⁹⁹

Christmas of 1934 was fast approaching and that year her Christmas lesson was to live with simplicity. Jesus vowed that he would continue to visit her in the form of a child until she learned humility and simplicity of heart. Hers would need to be a "spiritual childhood" just as she would experience so many other hidden, spiritual gifts and lessons. Faustina was given a thorn from the crown as Jesus as a special gift of suffering that Christmas, and received special knowledge from Jesus.

I will reveal to you a secret of My Heart: what I suffer from chosen souls. Ingratitude in return for so many graces is My Heart's constant food, on the part of [such] a chosen soul. Their love is lukewarm, and My Heart cannot bear it; these souls force Me to reject them. Others distrust My goodness and have no desire to experience that sweet intimacy in their own hearts, but go in search of Me, off in the distance, and do not find Me...I will tell you most when you converse with Me in the depths of your heart. Here, no one can disturb My actions. Here, I rest as in a garden enclosed.⁹⁰⁰

Faustina was finding rest in God, just as God was finding rest in her. Faustina strove to hide herself against the world in the flower that was God, and so did God try to hide himself in the garden of Faustina's soul. The use of floral language between Faustina and God was reciprocal, as they both used floral language to communicate with each other.

Sister Faustina took part in an eight day retreat in February of 1935. She was given permission for an hour of meditation on the Passion and for a "certain humiliation" though she was denied permission for any mortifications by Father Sopocho.⁹⁰¹ Disappointed, she heard

⁸⁹⁹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 82.

⁹⁰⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 580-581.

⁹⁰¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 369.

Jesus' voice saying "There is more merit to one hour of meditation on My sorrowful Passion than there is to a whole year of bloody scourging."⁹⁰² After that retreat, Sister Faustina received a letter, informing her that her mother was near death, and that she should come home. Mother Superior gave her permission to go and, for the first and last time, Helena Kowalska, now Sister Mary Faustina, was returning home.

Faustina arrived on Feb 16th at her childhood home. Michalenko recorded in her book that upon seeing her daughter, Marianna immediately sat upright in bed. One of her daughters asked "Mother, are you well already?" to which she replied "Yes, as soon as I saw her I got well."⁹⁰³ This miraculous healing is left out of Faustina's diaries, which recorded a much more conservative course of events, stating that her mother's health had simply "improved a bit."⁹⁰⁴ In fact, it was Faustina who was closer to death than anyone else in the room at the time. Her mother would live to be ninety and her father seventy-eight while she would die at only thirty-three.⁹⁰⁵ Being home again felt odd for Faustina; she described "how everything had changed beyond recognition during those ten years! The garden had been so small, and now I could not recognize it. My brothers and sisters had still been children, and now they were all grown up."⁹⁰⁶ The days she spent at home were filled with "much company;" there were many conversations and all of them were God centered. She and her family sang together, prayed together, and attended church together every day. When she wanted to be alone, she escaped to her childhood

⁹⁰² Kowalska, *Diary*, 369.

⁹⁰³ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 91.

⁹⁰⁴ In her diary Faustina recorded, "My mother's health had improved a bit, but the doctor gave no hope of complete recovery. After greeting each other, we knelt down to thank God for the grace of being able to be together once again in this life." Kowalska, *Diary*, 397.

⁹⁰⁵ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 93.

⁹⁰⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 399.

garden to pray, though she was not allowed to remain in solitude for long, but encouraged to speak about her experiences. It was a tearful parting when Faustina finally left, though she was thankful to be going back to her convent home, and to silence dedicated purely to God.

When Faustina returned to the convent, she learned of what had been transpiring with her image of Divine Mercy. Before leaving she had told Father Sopocko that the image of Divine Mercy was to be placed for three days in Ostra Brama (the eastern gate to the city of Vilnius) for a celebration of the closing of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption of the World. This date would coincide with the feast of Divine Mercy held on the Sunday after Easter. It so happened that Father Sopocko was invited to preach a sermon on Friday April 26th, 1935 during these celebrations. He agreed, and asked that the image of the Divine Mercy be put up as decoration in the church window near the icon of Our Lady. His request was granted by the archbishop; the picture was to be hung just as Faustina had asked though her involvement remained a secret.⁹⁰⁷

The painting was hung in preparation for the ceremony and Faustina, as chief gardener, was instructed to help the other sisters make wreaths of greens and to place flowers as decorations on the image.⁹⁰⁸ These flowers were likely meant to accentuate the spiritual message of the painting, and add a natural beauty to the image. There was much mystery around this new image and although Sister Faustina was questioned about it she remained silent. After the placement at Ostra Brama, visions of Divine Mercy came in rapid succession to Faustina.

At three o'clock on Good Friday, April 19th, Faustina witnessed Jesus dying on the Cross in the chapel, and saw the same two rays from her painting coming from Jesus' body. The

⁹⁰⁷ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 96.

⁹⁰⁸ In the text by O'Dell, greens and flowers were used to decorate the church. O'Dell, *Apostle*, 103. Michalenko described greens only. Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 97.

following day during Vespers, she described Jesus as being bright as the sun, and spreading a message of joy. As Faustina saw the painting on display she saw “a sudden movement of the hand of Jesus, as He made a large sign of the cross.”⁹⁰⁹ That evening after she had gone to sleep, she saw “the image going over the town, and the town was covered with what appeared to be a mesh and nets. As Jesus passed, He cut through all the nets and finally made a large sign of the cross and disappeared.”⁹¹⁰ As Faustina witnessed this vision, she also saw “a multitude of malicious figures burning with hatred” who despised her for the good work she had done.⁹¹¹

A week later during the actual ceremony on Friday, April 26th, Faustina witnessed Father Sopocko speak to the crowd that had gathered. As he spoke of divine mercy “the image came alive and the rays pierced the hearts of the people gathered there, but not all to the same degree. Some received more, some less. Great joy filled my soul to see the grace of God.”⁹¹² As he finished speaking, Faustina tried to leave, but was blocked by demons who threatened her with “terrible tortures.”⁹¹³ They said “She has snatched away everything we have worked for over so many years!” When she asked them where they had come from they replied “Out of human hearts; stop tormenting us!”⁹¹⁴ At that moment Faustina asked her Guardian Angel for help, and he appeared to her and said “Do not fear, spouse of my Lord; without His permission these spirits will do you no harm.”⁹¹⁵ The spirits vanished, and her Angel escorted her home. Faustina

⁹⁰⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 416.

⁹¹⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 416.

⁹¹¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 416.

⁹¹² Kowalska, *Diary*, 417.

⁹¹³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 418.

⁹¹⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 418.

⁹¹⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 419.

would continue to spread the message of Divine Mercy with the help of members of her congregation.

A New Congregation

During June of 1935 Sister Faustina was walking in the garden when she heard a message from God. She was told that she would be leaving her congregation, the very congregation she had fought so hard to enter, to establish another.⁹¹⁶ Faustina was unsure of how to react, or how to proceed. She wished that she could forgo this new request, just as she had wished to be freed from the obligation of the painting. She could not ignore this request for Jesus was persistent in his demands. He spoke to Faustina later, saying to her, “You shall live in it together with your companions. You will know the abyss of My mercy towards creators and my unfathomable goodness—and this you shall make known to the world.”⁹¹⁷ Faustina continued to pray on this matter. The following month, during the Feast of St. Ignatius, Faustina asked for help. St. Ignatius appeared to her and said “My daughter, I am not indifferent to your cause” and he led her to believe that such a congregation was possible.⁹¹⁸ An inner struggle concerning the new community would be ever present with Faustina. During the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy on August 5th of 1935 she prayed to the Virgin Mary about this matter. In response, she received yet another vision, confirming that obstacles were nothing to fear and through Jesus, victory was possible.⁹¹⁹ Although the task was clear, how she could possibly achieve it remained uncertain. Even though this *new* mission was overwhelming, Faustina was still very much involved in the

⁹¹⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 435.

⁹¹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 438

⁹¹⁸ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 103.

⁹¹⁹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 103.

message of Divine mercy. By September of the same year Faustina received another message that would eventually spread around the world: the message of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Jesus taught her how to say the prayer of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy on the beads of the rosary, how often to say the prayer and even the results of the prayer. Thankfully Sister Faustina had an excellent memory, and could remember all of these instructions. In the meantime, Father Sopocko was having a prayer card printed with the Divine Mercy Image, the one that had been painted by Eugene Kazimierowski. As Sister Faustina continued to carry out the commands she heard, or witnessed, she was experiencing growing supernatural adversity. She was plagued by demons who despised her union with Christ, and her ability to save souls.

Despite her efforts to begin this new contemplative community, Faustina could not find a priest who would help her or even give her permission to begin. Father Sopocko thought this new mission was likely a temptation, and advised her against pursuing it.⁹²⁰ Likewise the Archbishop Romuald Jalbrzykowski advised Faustina during confession in early September of 1935 “not to entertain such thoughts” of leaving her community.⁹²¹

During an eight day retreat in Cracow, starting on October 20th of 1935, the darkness of Sister Faustina returned. She felt unable to make her confession once more and as she strove to overcome her darkness she prayed.

Oh, how great is Your beauty, Jesus my Spouse! Living Flower enclosing life-giving dew for a thirsting soul! My soul is drowned in You. You alone are the object of my desires and strivings. Unite me as closely as possible to Yourself, to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. Let me live and die in You.⁹²²

⁹²⁰ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 113.

⁹²¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 473.

⁹²² Kowalska, *Diary*, 501.

Faustina used the words she loved best to describe the union with God whom she loved absolutely. Nothing but flowers could express how she felt about Jesus, her Spouse and her living flower, even in her state of darkness. While on the retreat she visited Father Sopocko, and afterward she visited her former confidant, Father Joseph Andrasz. She asked Father Andrasz what she ought to do about the task of a new congregation, and the matter of leaving her current congregation. Father Andrasz confirmed that she ought to do nothing without the express consent of her superiors, and that if it *was* the will of God, it would come to pass.⁹²³ Faustina began to grow restless and disturbed by her inability to act on Jesus' persistent requests.

As time wore on Faustina grew even more frustrated, urged by Jesus to act on one hand, and by her confessors not to on the other. This was not something she could do alone, without the support of the clergy, for beginning a new congregation was a complicated process. At this time Faustina received a vision about her future congregation; she saw a small chapel with six sisters receiving communion from Father Sopocko. In November of that year Faustina began to compose a detailed rule for the new congregation. There would be no more than ten women, all wearing secular dress, not the nun's habit; there would be no distinction between the more senior mothers and the newer sisters. They would live in separate cells but come together for meal time, prayer, and recreation. They would take simple vows, but be completely isolated from the outside world. They would serve as intercessors between God and human souls.⁹²⁴ As Faustina was writing this she heard a voice saying "Do not leave this Congregation; have mercy upon yourself, such great sufferings are in store for you...When you leave, we will destroy you. Do not torture us." Faustina looked up to see "many ugly monsters." She made the sign of the cross

⁹²³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 506.

⁹²⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 536-539.

in her mind and the monsters disappeared.⁹²⁵ That December Jesus appeared to her in her greenhouse, and he said to her again, “I wait and long for the time I shall take up residence sacramentally in your convent.” He also instructed her to inform her confessor that the image of Divine Mercy needed to be on view in the church and not in the convent, and that it should be done for the sake of many souls.⁹²⁶

Even before Faustina had come to Vilnius she had received a vision of a small church and convent, with an iron gate covered by a dark curtain. It had twelve cells, and Father Sopocho was the priest in charge.⁹²⁷ Later, when she entered the chapel in Vilnius, she had another vision where the chapel before her turned into a “state of disrepair” such that the “windows were without panes, and the doors had only frames with no panelling.”⁹²⁸ From these ruins would come the convent of her previous visions. In December of 1935 Father Sopocho, having read about this vision, brought Sister Faustina to a pile of ruins that could be the site of a new congregation. She recognized it as the site of her vision, and Jesus confirmed that these matters were then in his hands.⁹²⁹ Despite this confirmation, the responsibility of obedience was still upon Faustina, which meant that her mind was not yet at peace. Faustina managed to have a joyful Christmas all the same, and spent time in deep communication with Jesus. She explained “The interior of my soul is like a large and magnificent world in which God and I live. Except

⁹²⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 540.

⁹²⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 570.

⁹²⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 563.

⁹²⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 559.

⁹²⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 570.

for God, no one is allowed there.”⁹³⁰ As when she was a child, Faustina was happiest when she was alone with God.

Section 6: A Slow Death (1936)

The last two years of Sister Faustina’s life have been described as “a slow death.”⁹³¹ Her illness began to overtake her life more absolutely. News outside of Faustina’s life looked equally bleak; Hitler was calling himself *Führer und Reichskanzler* foreshadowing things to come.⁹³² Jewish citizens were discriminated against by German laws, a process that would only grow worse as time wore on. The *Luftwaffe*⁹³³ was organized, and unveiled to the horror of the rest of the world. In 1935 Hitler annexed the Saar region, which was occupied by the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Ireland, and France. The remilitarisation of the Rhineland happened in the following year of 1936. Both of these acquisitions were in direct opposition to the Versailles Treaty agreements. Compulsory military service was enacted for the German people that same year—war was coming again.⁹³⁴ On her deathbed, Faustina predicted that there would be a long and terrible war. Many would be killed in Poland and she was sorely distressed by the fate of her country. She also informed the sisters that despite this unrest they would not be forced to leave the convent.⁹³⁵ Despite the troubles she was facing, Faustina continued to seek a resolution to the matter of a new congregation. She visited the archbishop of Vilnius, Romuald

⁹³⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 582.

⁹³¹ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 247.

⁹³² *Führer und Reichskanzler* translates to mean Leader and Reich Chancellor in English.

⁹³³ *Luftwaffe* translates to mean Airforce in English.

⁹³⁴ O’Dell, *Apostle*, 108.

⁹³⁵ Three times the sisters were threatened eviction by the Nazis, and three times the threats were not carried out. The sisters prayed for intercession, as St. Faustina had indicated.

Jalbrzykwoski in early January of 1936 and asked him again for permission to begin a new congregation, in order to pray for the mercy of God for the world. The archbishop responded that she should wait before leaving her congregation, as God would enact his own will. She felt at peace after this conversation but only for a short while.⁹³⁶

By March of 1936 Sister Faustina continued to struggle with this mission again. Even after loving communications with Jesus, divine union with God, and visits from angels, hers was a life of suffering and sadness. These struggles within her seemed to physically deplete her strength. She records these events in her diary

I continued in this state, without a break, for many days. My physical strength declined, and though I did not speak to anyone about it, nevertheless Mother Superior [Borgia] noticed my pain and remarked that I had changed in appearance and was very pale. She told me to go to bed earlier and to sleep longer, and she had a cup of hot milk brought to me in the evening. She had a motherly heart, full of care, and tried to help me.⁹³⁷

Faustina wished to leave and to begin this new congregation and so she prayed that she would be expelled from Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy convent. She wrote “I found it impossible to leave the Congregation on my own initiative. And I was in an agony over this for more than three hours. I could not pray, but kept submitting my will to the will of God.”⁹³⁸ She requested that Jesus would enact something, a sign, to show her what to do. The next day, on March 18th, Mother Superior told her that she would be going to Warsaw and Faustina agreed with reservation. She really felt that she needed to leave the community immediately, not be transferred to a new convent. Despite these hesitations she arrived in Warsaw on March 22nd of 1936. Shortly after arriving she was transferred again to an assignment in Walendow. This was a

⁹³⁶ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 117.

⁹³⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 614.

⁹³⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 624.

country setting twenty kilometres away where she would work in the fields. The hard work led to a deterioration of her health once more.⁹³⁹ Faustina continued to commune with God on the subject of mercy in Walendow. Mercy, as she described it, “is the flower of love.”⁹⁴⁰ Later, she would add that “Love of God is the flower, mercy the fruit.”⁹⁴¹ While in Walendow she spoke with yet another confessor, Father Alysius Bukowski, who after hearing her desire to leave the convent, exclaimed “Sister, this is an illusion! The Lord Jesus cannot be demanding this. You have made your perpetual vows! You are inventing some sort of heresy!”⁹⁴² At this point, he asked her to pay no heed to her inner thoughts. He warned her that if Jesus told her something again, she was to take no action but instead to tell him. Jesus of course appeared to her again, and he instructed her to tell her confessor that the work was his, and that he was using her as a lowly instrument. Sister Faustina in turn denied Jesus’ request, stating that her confessor had forbid it.⁹⁴³ She relayed this to her confessor, who comforted her and assured her that she should be obedient always, and that she must keep her confessor informed. Faustina felt as though she was caught in the middle; this tension exacerbated her declining health. A few short weeks later Sister Faustina was transferred to Derdy because of her continued physical deterioration. In Derdy there was a country home for girls about a kilometre away. There, in the quiet of the woods Sister Faustina felt peaceful. In May of 1936 she wrote to Father Sopocko.

Our small house in Derdy is truly like from a fairy-tale. It is surrounded by a forest, and there are no other houses in the vicinity. It is peaceful and quiet. Everything contributes to recollection of the spirit; the forest birds intermit this

⁹³⁹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 122.

⁹⁴⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 651.

⁹⁴¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 948.

⁹⁴² Kowalska, *Diary*, 643.

⁹⁴³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 125.

silence and, with their twittering, they praise their Creator. I see God in everything that surrounds me!⁹⁴⁴

Even in poor health Faustina was able to appreciate God in the natural world, and observe how God's creations praised him. She would not stay there for long but was transferred again to Cracow on May 11th where doctors were more readily available.⁹⁴⁵ Sister Faustina would remain in Cracow for two years and four months, with two visits to the hospital in between. She worked in the garden, and then as a portress at the gate.

In early of August of 1936 Sister Faustina received a brochure of divine mercy written by Michael Sopocko. She recorded the event in her diary

When I received the article about Divine Mercy with the image [on the cover], God's presence filled me in an extraordinary way. When I steeped myself in a prayer of thanksgiving, I suddenly saw the Lord Jesus in a great brightness, just as He is painted, and at His feet I saw Father Andrasz and Father Sopocko. Both were holding pens in their hands, and flashes of light and fire, like lightning, were coming from the tips of their pens and striking a great crowd of people who were hurrying I know not where. Whoever was touched by the ray of light immediately turned his back on the crowd and held out his hands to Jesus. Some returned with great joy, others with great pain and compunction. Jesus was looking at both priests with great kindness.⁹⁴⁶

This vision had come at a low time for Faustina, as she was suffering again from darkness and temptation. It had become a habit of Faustina's to hide herself in the garden to cry, so as not to alert the other sisters to her grief.⁹⁴⁷ It made her very happy to see the way her confessors were being treated. In September of 1936 Archbishop Romauld Jalbrzykowski of Vilnius was visiting, and Faustina was allowed to speak with him. As expected she spoke of her

⁹⁴⁴ Mizia, *Letters*, 33.

⁹⁴⁵ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 127.

⁹⁴⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 675.

⁹⁴⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 673.

mission of establishing a new congregation. The archbishop responded favourably, but asked that she wait for a more definite sign before proceeding in any way.⁹⁴⁸ What could be more definite than a direct request from Jesus, she may have been wondering. Deflated, Faustina was sent to see a lung specialist shortly after that visit.⁹⁴⁹

Faustina was diagnosed with advanced tuberculosis in September of 1936, which was attacking her intestines. Despite her physical decline her spiritual life was very active. During her time at Cracow, Faustina's experiences were especially rich; she was privy to visions of Heaven, Hell and experienced invisible stigmata starting in late September of that year.⁹⁵⁰ She was revisited by the Virgin Mary, who impressed on her the dire need of Poland, and was asked to beg for forgiveness for Poland's ingratitude, all of which Faustina did.⁹⁵¹

By December of 1936 Sister Faustina was transferred from Cracow to the sanatorium in Pradnik for three months. She enjoyed her time there in solitude, though she suffered great physical pain. She was visited at Christmas by Sister Chrysotom who brought her apples, lemons and a small Christmas Tree, she later recalled. Faustina was allowed to go "home" to the convent for Christmas. While there she visited Father Sopocko for confession, and questioned him yet again about what she should do about the task set before her. He was, after all, the spiritual guide that had been sent by Jesus. Father Sopocko had no answers, save to say that she needed to take

⁹⁴⁸ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 130-131.

⁹⁴⁹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 131.

⁹⁵⁰ O'Dell, *Apostle*, 193.

⁹⁵¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 686. Faustina recorded the following entry in her diary a few passages later, "On one occasion, I saw the throne of the Lamb of God and before the throne three Saints: Stanislaus Kostka, Andrew Bobola and Prince Casimir, who were interceding for Poland." Kowalska, *Diary*, 689. Faustina was acutely aware of the plight of her country. Just one month later, God asked her to pray for Poland along with her fellow sisters, but Faustina did not ask permission from her supervisors to do this, and afterwards, this had caused her great grief. Kowalska, *Diary*, 714.

care of herself and get well. Faustina returned to the Sanatorium a few days after Christmas without a solution concerning her new congregation. She would spend New Year's, Easter and early spring in the sanatorium, struggling against her poor health to attend mass and receive communion. Faustina continued to strengthen her relationship with God, and by February she had become for him a "perfect and whole-burnt offering."⁹⁵² This was an offering of the will such that "No other sacrifice can compare," her life was being directed by God personally, such that she would be a "continual sacrifice."⁹⁵³

For all of the suffering in her life Faustina never omitted thanks to God. She performed an hour of adoration in thanks for the suffering she was enduring, and the strength she was given.

O my most sweet Master, good Jesus, I give You my heart. You shape and mold it after Your liking. O fathomless love, I open the calyx of my heart to You, like a rosebud to the freshness of dew. To You alone, my Betrothed, is known the fragrance of the flower of my heart. Let the fragrance of my sacrifice be pleasing to You. O Immortal God, my everlasting delight, already here on earth You are my heaven. May every beat of my heart be a new hymn of praise to You, O Holy Trinity!⁹⁵⁴

Faustina continued to present herself as a floral sacrifice for God, suffering daily for Jesus, and offering herself completely. She performed the small mortifications that she could under such strict observance from the doctors.

I can practice little things: first-sleep without a pillow; keep myself a little hungry; every day, with my arms outstretched, say the chaplet which the Lord taught me; occasionally, with arms outstretched, for an indefinite period of time pray informally. Intention: to beg divine mercy for poor sinners, and for priests, the power to bring sinful hearts to repentance.⁹⁵⁵

⁹⁵² Kowalska, *Diary*, 923.

⁹⁵³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 923.

⁹⁵⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1064

⁹⁵⁵ Kowalska, *Dairy*, 924.

That year during Lent, she was permitted to see all of the sins happening in the world.

She explains this in her diary

I experienced the overwhelming flood of chastisements and sins. In one instant the Lord gave me a knowledge of the sins committed throughout the whole world during these days. I fainted from fright, and even though I know the depth of God's mercy, I was surprised that God allows humanity to exist. And the Lord gave me to know who it is that upholds the existence of mankind: it is the chosen souls. When the number of the chosen ones is complete, the world will cease to exist.⁹⁵⁶

That Friday she experienced the gift of spiritual stigmata, with pains in her hands, feet and side. She offered up these sufferings for sinners. There in the sanatorium she continued to help the sick and dying, visiting them as often as she was permitted by the doctors. She maintained close contact with Jesus, obeying his requests of prayer, meditation and spiritual and physical suffering.

On the 27th of March Sister Faustina returned to the Lagiewniki convent. Though she was out of the Sanatorium she knew that all was not well, and that much more suffering was to come. Her physical pains came and went; all the while she offered them up to God. She prayed and sacrificed particularly for her beloved Poland at this time.⁹⁵⁷ In April Faustina made her annual three day retreat and renewal of vows. She met with Sister Mary Joseph, and they walked together in the garden. Reminiscing on her years as a novice with Sister Mary Joseph, Sister Faustina wrote "Oh, how grateful I am to her! When my soul was plunged in darkness, and it seemed to me that I was damned, she wrenched me from that abyss by the power of obedience."⁹⁵⁸ Faustina made use of the support system she found in the convent. Although she

⁹⁵⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 926.

⁹⁵⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1038.

⁹⁵⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1112.

encountered hardship from the other sisters she had also bonded with some of them. Towards the end of her life more of the sisters released their animosity towards her and grew closer to her.

When Mother General came to Cracow in May Sister Faustina took the opportunity to speak to her about leaving the congregation. Much to her surprise, her superior replied “Until the present, Sister, I have always restrained you, but now I leave you the complete freedom to do as you wish; you can leave the congregation or you can stay.”⁹⁵⁹ Sister Faustina replied “very well” but as she left the meeting, darkness came over her soul once more. Along with a sense of deep depression Sister Faustina’s state of ill health returned. She decided to do nothing, though her visions of the new congregation did not stop. In June of that year, Sister Faustina received a vision of the convent having three branches, and three different functions, all having the same goal. The first branch would be separated from the world and burnt as an offering for mercy for the world, the second branch would be joined by prayers for mercy, and the third branch would perform acts of mercy without vows. All of the world could be in this third category.⁹⁶⁰ She explained, “This Congregation of Divine Mercy will be in God's Church like a beehive in a magnificent garden, hidden and meek. The sisters will work like bees to feed their neighbours' souls with honey, while the wax will flame for the glory of God.”⁹⁶¹ It was difficult for Sister Faustina to keep all of these wonders a secret, especially as she strove so hard to fulfil the will of Jesus. Despite her increasingly clear understanding of this new congregation, she seemed unable to move it forward in any way. Faustina was always bound by a deep secrecy which limited her ability to act. Jesus had once said to her, “My daughter, it is not My will that you should tell everybody about the gifts I have granted you. I have entrusted you to the care of the friend of My

⁹⁵⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1115.

⁹⁶⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1155-1158.

⁹⁶¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 664.

Heart, and under his direction your soul will bloom. I have given him light to recognize My life in your soul.”⁹⁶² Faustina was obedient and never revealed her intentions to anyone but her superiors. Hers would always be a life of secrecy and hiddenness.

In July of 1937 Sister Faustina learned interiorly that she would be transferred to another convent. A few days later she was told of the transfer and by July 29th she was on her way to a rest home in Rabka, a village in the Carpathian Mountains. She endured much physical suffering, had sharp pains in her chest making breathing excruciating and at times she could barely move. She was often visited by Saint Joseph who gave her great comfort.⁹⁶³

Faustina returned to Cracow on the 10th of August though she still felt very ill, and was suffering greatly.⁹⁶⁴ By September of 1937 Faustina was internally transferred from her work in the garden to working at the gate, a position deemed less taxing.⁹⁶⁵ She would respond to inquiries at the gate, and let people with business inside. This position might have been less physically taxing but it was also dangerous. Faustina recorded in her diary “When I heard how dangerous it was to be at the gate these days because of revolutionary disturbances and how many evil people have a hatred for convents, I...had a talk with the Lord and asked Him to so arrange it that no evil person would dare come to the gate.”⁹⁶⁶ Although God agreed to protect her at the gate, she received no relief from her fellow sisters, who did not understand her suffering. She describes one incident involving a Sister “N.”

⁹⁶² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1163.

⁹⁶³ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 282.

⁹⁶⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1236.

⁹⁶⁵ Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 282; Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 189.

⁹⁶⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1271.

I felt so unwell that I had to ask Mother Superior to allow me to lie down. I went to ask Sister N. to take my place, and again I got a scolding: "What is this, Sister, you're so exhausted that you're going back to bed again! Confound you with all this lying in bed!" I put up with all that, but that wasn't the end. I still had to ask the sister who was in charge of the sick to bring me my meal. When I told her this, she burst out of the chapel into the corridor after me to give me a piece of her mind: "Why on earth are you going to bed, Sister." I asked her not to bother bringing me anything.⁹⁶⁷

At the gate Faustina had a rare opportunity to interact with the public. She met with the poor, and those in need of help. She was kind to them and helped as she could, despite being chastised by her fellow sisters. She recalls the day that she was forced to turn away a person in need. Afterward, she suffered greatly in mortification for three days and bitterly lamented her inability to help a "straying sheep."⁹⁶⁸

In October of that year Sister Faustina began her eight day retreat.⁹⁶⁹ She realized then that she had less than a year left on earth. She communed with God about her future as a saint, and on the seventh day of the retreat God confirmed that she would be canonized. It was important for Sister Faustina to become a saint, because for her that meant that she had loved God "with a love so great that there would be no soul who has hitherto loved" God.⁹⁷⁰ The next month, on the 10th of November she was approached by Mother Superior, who provided her a copy of the booklet *Christ King of Mercy* printed by the Cebulski Company for father Sopocko.

⁹⁶⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1268.

⁹⁶⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1305.

⁹⁶⁹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 199.

⁹⁷⁰ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1372.

This booklet featured the image of Divine Mercy received by Faustina.⁹⁷¹ Faustina was happy that the image closely resembled the original Jesus of her vision.⁹⁷²

Meanwhile, Father Sopocko was encouraging Sister Faustina to pray and sacrifice rather than act; this was of course a reference to the building of a new congregation. Sister Faustina moved through the Christmas and then New Year season growing weaker physically but growing stronger spiritually as she strengthened her union with God. Faustina acknowledged how God was so much more than she, and how he was transforming her into something beautiful and blossoming.⁹⁷³ Faustina's sufferings increased before the New Year, and soon she was too ill to get out of bed. She wrote "For a month now, I have been feeling worse. Every time I cough, I feel my lungs disintegrating. It sometimes happens that I feel the complete decay of my own corpse. It is hard to express how great a suffering this is."⁹⁷⁴ There was no relief in sight; the last year of Faustina's life would be an intensified version of this previous year.

Section 7: Saying Goodbye (1937-1938)

The chronic condition of Sister Faustina was physical as well as spiritual, arising from both natural and supernatural causes. Her physical sufferings were matched by the social reproach she received from her fellow sisters. They reprimanded her for not receiving Holy Communion on New Year's Day, though she was too ill to do so.

⁹⁷¹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 203. Mother Irene had been trusted with Faustina's mission of mercy; she was making arrangements to print the Chaplet and Litany of the Divine Mercy on a holy card with the image of Jesus. A pamphlet was also prepared called Christ the King of Mercy (*Chrystus Krol Milosierdzia*). It had been published in Cracow with the help of Mother Irene Krzyżanowska. Added to the mission of Divine Mercy was "The Hour of Great Mercy" conveyed by God to Sister Faustina as an hour where mercy is abundant, at three pm. Kowalska, *Diary*, 1320.

⁹⁷² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1299-1301.

⁹⁷³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 605.

⁹⁷⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1428.

A few days after New Year's Sister Faustina learned that "many bishops were considering the question of this Feast. Some were enthusiastic about this work of God, while others regarded it with disbelief; but in spite of everything, the result was great glory for the work of God. Mother Irene and Mother Mary Joseph...were being questioned, not so much about the work, as about myself."⁹⁷⁵ That evening Faustina received a message from God that she should not put off the sacrament of penance as her health was declining. Later that night her suffering increased and she experienced great pain in her heart, such that she woke the sister next to her. She received medication and resolved to contact a priest the following morning as she had been instructed to do. That Friday Sister Faustina suffered again with the pains of an invisible form of stigmata.⁹⁷⁶

The care Faustina received at the end of her life was disgraceful. Sister Chrysostom was in charge of caring for her, but the rumours that Faustina was faking her illness had reached her, and as a result she treated her poorly.⁹⁷⁷ In fact few of the sisters believed that Faustina was really ill or that she suffered at all, despite her diagnosis with advanced tuberculosis. The sisters began to call her a saint sarcastically, not knowing of course that Faustina *had* already been assured of sainthood by God.

As Faustina drew closer to her own death, she was increasingly concerned with helping others who were also dying. She had always had the gift of being able to "read souls," and know what was on their hearts. This had enabled her to give accurate council to those who sought her

⁹⁷⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1463.

⁹⁷⁶ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 219.

⁹⁷⁷ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 224.

out for advice.⁹⁷⁸ Faustina wanted to save other souls before it was too late, she would visit the bedsides of the dying until her superiors resisted because she was physically too weak to sustain such visits. Instead, Faustina would connect with them supernaturally or intuitively, and pray for them from her own bed. Though her body remained in bed her spirit was free to visit the sick, “For the spirit, space does not exist” Faustina explained.⁹⁷⁹ As her suffering increased and her mobility declined, Sister Faustina was able to visit chapels and churches in spirit alone.⁹⁸⁰ During her time in bed, Sister Faustina continued to write about the mercy of God. She recorded a program of sanctity, very similar to the “little way” of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, to whom she had great devotion. Like St. Thérèse Faustina emphasized the role of littleness and of love, and recognized the importance of being a flower for Jesus. The poems written by Sister Faustina echo the works of another individual writing in a state of ill health, St. Francis of Assisi, as both used poetry to express their love for God and the natural world.

Later, during the month of January, Sister Faustina felt surrounded by darkness again, and was being tempted by Satan. She had had a number of conversations with Jesus about the hour of her death and was assured that it would be a happy hour, prefaced by much suffering. Until she had suffered enough, according to God’s divine plan, she would not die.

At the very end of January Sister Faustina was able to join the dining room and chapel again, though now exempt from her usual duties. Her suffering came in many forms. Aside from physical pain she was scorned by the sisters who put more stock in her laziness than her diagnosis of tuberculosis. She began to crochet for the church altar, until even that became a

⁹⁷⁸ Kowalska, *Diary*, 919, 1290.

⁹⁷⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 835.

⁹⁸⁰ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 223.

burden to her. During this ordeal Sister Faustina remained committed to her mission, and asked that a soul be converted for every crochet hook she crocheted that day. She prayed particularly for Poland, and even while she was physically ill, she tried to take care of her country.

I saw the anger of God hanging heavy over Poland. And now I see that if God were to visit our country with the greatest chastisements, that would still be great mercy because, for such grave transgressions, He could punish us with eternal annihilation. I was paralyzed with fear when the Lord lifted the veil a little for me. Now I see clearly that chosen souls keep the world in existence to fulfill the measure [of justice].⁹⁸¹

Sister Faustina knew that her time on earth was short. She was able to see all of the phases of her life as she had experienced them: childhood, youth, vocation, apostolic work and her numerous sufferings, she felt already crucified with Jesus. On the 10th of February Sister Faustina began recording a new kind of interaction with her sisters. As she was being slowly drawn away, they were drawn towards her as an important figure on the cusp of death. Some began to come to her for advice, or to hear her speak on obedience and chosen souls. "One of the sisters" she explained "came into my cell for a little while. After a short conversation on the subject of obedience, she said to me, 'Oh, now I understand how the saints acted. Thank you, Sister; a great light has entered my soul; I have profited much.'"⁹⁸² It was becoming increasingly clear that Sister Faustina was close to death. Many sisters, though not all, began asking her for help at the time of their deaths, either by letter or in person.⁹⁸³ They knew Faustina was close with Jesus and wished to take advantage of that influence. She describes these communications

At present, I am getting letters from sisters who are in other houses and who made their novitiate with me. They often amuse me and make me laugh, as they usually go something like this: "Dear Sister Faustina, we are very sorry that you are so

⁹⁸¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1533.

⁹⁸² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1594.

⁹⁸³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1614, 1615.

gravely ill; but we are very happy that, when the Lord Jesus takes you away, you will pray for us, for you have a lot of influence with the Lord. "One of the sisters put it this way: "When you die, Sister, please take me under your special care, for certainly you can do that for me." Another sister wrote as follows: "How I am waiting for the time when the Lord Jesus will take you, because I know what will happen then; and I greatly desire death for you." I did want to ask her what she was thinking of, concerning my death, but I mortified myself and answered, "The same thing will happen to me, a sinner, as happens to all sinners, if God's mercy does not shield me."⁹⁸⁴

It seemed that Faustina was accepting these responses with humility and some humor. After not "fitting in" with sisters, they expected her to help them after her death. Sister Amelia Socha, a friend who had tuberculosis of the bones, also asked Faustina for help. Amelia wanted to die quickly so as not to burden the convent. Faustina replied that she would die a year after her. Her death came to pass a year later just as Faustina predicted. By February 20th another trial came. Jesus asked Faustina to suffer for the sake of souls. She accepted, and soon found herself in great pain.

Almost all night I was in such violent pains that it seemed all my intestines were torn to pieces. I threw up the medicine I had taken. When I bowed my head down to the ground, I lost consciousness, and I stayed like that for some time, with my head on the floor. When I came to, I became aware that my whole body was pressing on my head and face, and that I was covered with vomit. I thought it would be the end of me. Dear Mother Superior [Irene] and Sister Tarcisia were trying to help me as best they could. Jesus demanded suffering, but not death.⁹⁸⁵

The suffering of Sister Faustina increased as it grew closer to Ash Wednesday. She had already received the pain from Jesus' crown of thorns but this was only the beginning. As Lent approached she heard from Jesus, "*I am taking you into My school for the whole of Lent. I want*

⁹⁸⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1673.

⁹⁸⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1613.

to teach you how to suffer.”⁹⁸⁶ Sister Faustina was in agreement, and given the privilege of even deeper pain. Suffer she did, often with an intensity that knocked her unconscious. She recorded in her diary that in the month of March her suffering was continuous. More than simply having to endure it, she was being blamed for it by members of her congregation. Mother superior told her, “It is a lack of love of neighbor on your part, Sister, that you eat something and then suffer and disturb the others during a night’s rest.”⁹⁸⁷ During this time a doctor examined Faustina and told the infirmarian his diagnosis, however she related to Sister Faustina that “He said that it was nothing. The patient was just sulking.”⁹⁸⁸ Even in the end, there were still some who turned away from her.

A second opinion from Dr. Adam Silberg revealed the true nature of her condition, and that her health was quickly failing. He was able to prescribe medication but Faustina was obviously beyond real help or recovery at this point. He advised that she be sent to the sanatorium for treatment.⁹⁸⁹ Instead of helping her, this process taxed her patience, as the sister accompanying her was ‘vexing.’ By April Sister Faustina was back at the convent, visibly ill with a high fever. Mother Superior came to her and said “Sister, let’s make an end of this illness once and for all, one way or another. You’ll have to undergo regular treatment or something. Things can’t go on like this any longer.”⁹⁹⁰ At this time Faustina had been accepting all treatment, and all instructions of her doctors and her confessor; there was nothing else that she *could* have done. Instead of offering consolation, mother Superior seemed to be growing

⁹⁸⁶ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1626-27.

⁹⁸⁷ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 245.

⁹⁸⁸ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 246.

⁹⁸⁹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1634.

⁹⁹⁰ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 247.

impatient of Faustina's lingering illness. She described this event in her diary "I felt as though I were all alone, and various temptations attacked me. But I found peace and light in earnest prayer, and I understood that the superior only wished to test me."⁹⁹¹ Faustina was thirsty, and yet had nothing to drink, she was cold, and yet her room was not heated. She felt as though she needed to preserve herself against ill thoughts towards her fellow sisters, and bear all things with patience and gratitude as sufferings for God.

The Holy Week leading up to Easter was one of pure suffering. Barely able to attend Mass, Faustina was not able to receive the palm frond on April 10th. This would be her last and most painful holy week. The week continued with her alternately receiving communion or staying in bed as weakness overtook her. Faustina began hearing snide, sarcastic rumours from the other sisters. She recalled them saying "Sister Faustina is doing so poorly that she can hardly walk; but she may die soon because she is going to be a saint."⁹⁹² Somehow not even impending death softened their comments of Faustina. She would soon have to return to the sanatorium in Pradnik on April 21st of 1938. There, she had a private room which she would inhabit for the next two months. It was beautifully prepared with flowers, a stuffed Easter lamb and warm greetings. Unable to receive Holy Communion because of her weakened physical state, she was greeted by a seraph, Lord of the Angels, who gave her holy communion for thirteen days. A priest finally brought her Holy Communion, and then a few weeks later, she was able to attend Mass.

Sister Faustina experienced divine union with God again during the first Sunday after Easter, the Feast of Divine Mercy. There in the sanatorium Sister Faustina continued to receive

⁹⁹¹ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1648.

⁹⁹² Kowalska, *Diary*, 1672.

visions, pray for the dying, and write down her experiences. From this point on she discontinued dating her entries. We learn the power of her prayer for other people, how through her suffering she was able to stay the hand of justice and judgment and instead provide mercy. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy, prayed at the hour of mercy, was a powerful tool.⁹⁹³ Faustina was even able to have a three day retreat, before the Feast of Pentecost, under the guidance and direction of Jesus. She renewed her Holy Vows there in the sanatorium. Bedridden and unable to see the natural world, Faustina asked a favour in May of that year.

Today I remarked that I would like to see some ears of grain, but that they cannot be seen from our sanatorium. However, one of the patients heard this remark and, on the following day, he went out into the field and brought me several beautiful ears of grain. My room is always adorned with fresh flowers, but my spirit finds satisfaction in nothing. More and more, I yearn for God.⁹⁹⁴

Even the fresh flowers and grain meant to cheer the spirits of Faustina, brought her no joy. The deep darkness that she suffered could not easily be lifted, though she continued to adore God and the natural beauty of the world.

Be adored, O our Creator and Lord.
O universe, humbly glorify your God;
Thank your Creator to the best of your powers
And praise God's incomprehensible mercy.

Come, O earth, in all your fine greenery;
Come, you too, O fathomless sea.
Let your gratitude become a loving song,
And sing the greatness of God's mercy.

Come, beautiful, radiant sun.
Come, bright dawn which precedes it.
Join in one hymn, and let your clear voices
Sing in one accord God's great mercy.

Come, hills and valleys, sighing woods and thickets,
Come, lovely flowers of morningtide;

⁹⁹³ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 261.

⁹⁹⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1713.

Let your unique scent
Adore and glorify God's mercy.

Come, all you lovely things of earth,
Which man does not cease to wonder at.
Come, adore God in your harmony,
Glorifying God's inconceivable mercy.

Come, indelible beauty of all the earth,
And, with great humility, adore your Creator,
For all things are locked in His mercy,
With one mighty voice all things cry out; how great is the mercy of God.

But above all these beauties,
A more pleasing praise to God
Is a soul innocent and filled with childlike trust,
Which, through grace, is closely bound to Him.⁹⁹⁵

This poem reminds us of another who wrote such poetry to God, St. Francis of Assisi, and his Canticle Sun.⁹⁹⁶ Faustina expressed, in her diary, the tantamount connection she felt in nature together with God. She does not forget to mention the loveliness of flowers. During her stay at the Sanatorium she did more than write about nature, and flowers, she visited the garden regularly to commune with God. She recorded

After Holy Mass, I went out to the garden to make my meditation, since there were not yet any patients in the garden at this time, and so I felt at ease. As I was meditating on the blessings of God, my heart was burning with a love so strong that it seemed my breast would burst. Suddenly Jesus stood before me and said, *What are you doing here so early?* I answered, "I am thinking of You, of Your mercy and Your goodness toward us. And You, Jesus, what are You doing here?" *I have come out to meet you, to lavish new graces on you. I am looking for souls who would like to receive My grace.*⁹⁹⁷

Faustina continued to have an intimate relationship with Jesus, one that would remain until the end of her life. They spoke to each other in many gardens like old friends. During her stay Sister

⁹⁹⁵ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1750.

⁹⁹⁶ Catherine O'Dell writes of Faustina's familiarity with Francis of Assisi in her youth, as well as Francis Xavier, Elizabeth of Hungary and Anthony the Hermit. O'Dell, *Apostle*, 27.

⁹⁹⁷ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1705.

Faustina received a visit from Mother Irene, and a month later from Mother Michael to whom she wrote in a final farewell. She explained that she was not afraid of death, and though she was filled with suffering she was also filled with strength. Faustina expressed great gratitude towards Mother Michael. She continued to record poems and songs of adoration to God as she was in the last year, and even months, of her life. Sister Faustina had been giving up her will, and was now allowing God to act. By June of 1928 Faustina stopped writing in her diary.⁹⁹⁸

In the last days of her life her illness progressed rather quickly. On the 24th of August Sister Faustina became much worse, and Sister Irene came to her. The next day, on her thirty-third birthday, Father Theodore Czaputa administered the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Three days later Father Sopocko came to visit, and again on September 2nd. Finally, knowing that her condition was grave, Sister Faustina was asked if she wanted to be brought home to die in the community. She consented and two weeks later she was brought home by Sister Alfreda.⁹⁹⁹

Before leaving, Faustina's doctor, Dr. Silberg, asked if he might keep the holy card of St. Thérèse that had been hanging above her bed. He wanted to hang it over the bed of his six year old son. Although Faustina agreed, Sister Alfreda prompted the doctor to disinfect the card. Dr. Silberg replied "I have no fear of contamination. I am convinced that Sister Faustina is a saint, and saints do not contaminate."¹⁰⁰⁰ Such was the faith of this doctor, above that of her fellow

⁹⁹⁸ O'Dell, *Apostle*, 193.

⁹⁹⁹ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 267-68.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 268.

sister.¹⁰⁰¹ After a difficult journey back Sister Faustina was tended to by Sister Amelia. She could not eat at this point and so there was little to be done. On the 22nd of September she asked pardon for her shortcomings to the community, as is tradition. Father Michael Sopocko returned to her to give her Holy Communion on the 26th of September, his last visit to her. He saw that she was in no need of earthly communion at that time and believed that she was being taken care of by the angels. He wrote “She gives the impression of an unearthly being. I no longer have the least doubt that what is found in her diary, concerning Holy Communion being administered to her by an angel, is true.”¹⁰⁰²

On her deathbed, Sister Faustina spoke about the future. During her life Faustina had prayed often for Poland.¹⁰⁰³ She tried always to tip the balance away from justice and towards mercy, staying the hand of God. She knew that God had a “special love” for Poland, provided that Poland was obedient. God had prophesized to her that a “spark” that comes from Poland will prepare the world for the final coming of Christ.¹⁰⁰⁴ Though Faustina could help to keep Poland obedient, and pray for her country while she was alive, she also knew of what was to come after her death because of the visions she received. Many of the sisters turned to Faustina during her last hours, though not all. Mother Irene remarked of her “She had so much peace and unusual charm, this sick one. And how she changed! Where before she was frustrated and agitated about

¹⁰⁰¹ Dr. Adam Silberg worked at the sanatorium in Pradick; he was forty years old and had converted to Catholicism. He remained director of the City Sanatoriums from 1937-1939, and lived on the hospital premises with his wife and son.

¹⁰⁰² Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 268.

¹⁰⁰³ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1118.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Kowalska, *Diary*, 1732.

this work of Divine Mercy, in the end, she took everything calmly, relying completely on God's will."¹⁰⁰⁵

On the 5th of October Sister Faustina announced to Sister Felicia that the Lord was taking her that day. Her last confession was heard by Father Joseph. Though she asked for an injection for the incredible pain she felt; she later rejected it and chose to suffer for God instead. At 10:45 that evening, seeing that Faustina was indeed dying, Sister Liguoria ran for Mother Irene. When they returned to the room they found that Sister Faustina had died in her bed.

Sister Faustina's funeral took place two days later on October 7th during the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. It was said that almost immediately after her death she acquired an unearthly beauty.¹⁰⁰⁶ Her body was buried in the convent cemetery which itself was in the convent garden. Faustina would be laid to rest in her favourite spot, where she had spent so much of her life.¹⁰⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰⁵ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 270.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Michalenko, *Life of Faustina*, 271.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Faustina's body remained in the convent garden and cemetery for twenty eight years. Tarnawska, *Life and Mission*, 379.

SECTION FIVE: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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