

THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS AND OF THE HOLY FACE (1873-1897) Saint (D)

I. Life. II. Her influence after death and cult. III. Works. IV. Doctrine.

I. LIFE A) Childhood (Jan. 2, 1873-Dec. 24, 1886). During the night of Jan. 2-3, 1873, at 42 St. Blaise street in Alençon (Orne), the ninth and last child of Louis Joseph Stanislaus Martin and Marie Zélie Guérin was born. Baptized during the afternoon of the 4th in the church of Notre Dame, the baby girl received the names of Mary Frances Thérèse. According to her own testimony, Thérèse's childhood was divided into two contrasting parts: the first was joyful; the second, which followed the death of her mother (Aug. 28, 1877), was marked by sorrow and excessive sensitivity. Extraordinarily bright, she learned to pray fervently and at the age of two, made the «resolution» to become a nun. When she was about three years old she already was in the habit of «not refusing the good God anything.» After her mother's death she chose her sister Pauline as her «mother».

In Nov. 1877, Mr. Martin and his five daughters (Marie, Pauline, Leonie, Celine and Thérèse) went to live at Buissonnets (Lisieux), near an uncle Guérin. At first her sister Pauline took care of Thérèse's education; then, from Oct., 1881, until the end of Feb., 1886, the child lived as a semi-boarder in the abbey of the Benedictine nuns. On Oct. 2, 1882, Pauline entered the Carmel of Lisieux. On March 25, 1883, Thérèse fell seriously ill; this illness lasted until Sunday, May 13, when she was healed by a smile of the Virgin. On May 8, 1884, her first Communion resulted in a «fusion» with Jesus during which she asked Jesus to «take away her freedom.» On the 22, her second Communion inspired her to say and repeat «without interruption»: «It is no longer I who live; it is Jesus Who lives in me.» About the same time, during a thanksgiving, she experienced the certainty that she would have to meet with many crosses and she felt the desire for suffering. She then made the «devastating prayer» of the Imitation of Christ her own: «That the consolations of earth be changed into bitterness.» She asked to be taught a method of meditation. The spiritual retreat made in preparation for the solemn renewal of her first Communion unleashed in her «the terrible sickness of scruples» (May 21, 1885), from which she was freed by the intercession of her little brothers and sisters in heaven, but only after the entrance of Marie in the Carmel of Lisieux (Oct. 15, 1886). Her own decision to enter the Carmel of Lisieux dates from Oct. of 1882; but her plan was to remain unrealized so long as her excessive sensitivity made her break into tears so easily for futile reasons.

B) Youth (Dec. 25, 1886-Apr. 8, 1888). On Christmas eve, during the Communion of midnight Mass, Jesus made her «complete conversion» a reality «in an instant,» something that ten years of personal striving had not been able to obtain. Wishing to make of His little Thérèse «a fisher of souls,» He inspired her with «a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners.» She felt that charity took hold of her heart. Disposed to «forget herself in order to give pleasure to Jesus,» she finally experienced happiness. And she was to do so always; she had begun «the race of a giant.» Thus, without ceasing to be a calling to the contemplative life, her religious vocation was

qualified as a missionary vocation. The year 1887 was one of amazing progress. On March 19 her sister Marie took the Carmelite habit and became Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart. The preacher was Father Pichon. In May Thérèse's confessor granted her permission to receive Communion four times a week. On the 29th (Pentecost) her father gave her permission to enter Carmel at the age of fifteen.

She already knew the Imitation of Christ by heart; now she enthusiastically read the conferences of Arminjon, especially the seventh on the subject of happiness. She copied out some passages on the recognition that God will grant to His elect: «Now it is my turn!» At the Belvedere of Buissonnets with Celine, she experienced intense spiritual joys. On one Sunday in July, at the sight of an image of the crucified Christ, she felt herself invited to console Jesus and to allay His thirst by sprinkling His redeeming blood on souls. She began by committing herself to save an impenitent criminal by the name of Pranzini, who while on the scaffold, on Aug. 31, kissed the wounds of the Crucified. He was her «first son.» On Oct. 8 she finally summoned enough courage to ask her uncle and tutor, Mr. Guerin, to confirm the authorization already granted by her father; but she was refused. It was a week of «agony.» Everything changed on the 22nd, when her uncle gave his permission. Still, the Canon Delatroette, the ecclesiastical superior of the Carmel, immediately imposed an absolute veto. New anguish! On the 31st, Mr. Martin and Thérèse went to Bayeux to seek a favorable reply from the bishop, Msgr. Hugonin, who, however, did not wish to interfere with the orders of the canon. Father and daughter then decided to have recourse to the pope, and a diocesan pilgrimage made this step possible immediately.

On the morning of Nov. 4, Mr. Martin, Celine and Thérèse left for Rome; on the 20th Thérèse was at the feet of Leo XIII and, despite the prohibition of Vicar General Révérony, she presented her petition. The Vicar of Christ left the decision to her superiors, and then to God Himself. It was a first testing of her faith. Desolate, the «little ball» abandoned herself completely into the hands of Jesus. After a pilgrimage to Fourviere, on Dec. 1 the three travelers reentered Lisieux. On Christmas night Thérèse discovered the method of Jesus: to test His most faithful friends before rewarding their confidence. On Dec. 28th Msgr. Hugonin granted the desired permission; but Mother Mary Gonzaga added a delay: Thérèse's entrance would take place after Lent. On March 27 Thérèse wrote to Sister Agnes of Jesus: «I want to become a saint.»

C) *The Carmelite* (April 9, 1888-Dec. 30, 1897). 1. Her hidden life (April 9, 1888-Feb. 19, 1893). On Monday, April 9, 1888, Thérèse entered the Carmel of Lisieux. Without illusions, she found «religious life just as she had imagined it»; her «first steps met with more thorns than roses.» «Suffering extended its arms to her»; but because she recognized Jesus there, she threw herself into those arms «with love.» The prioress, Mother Mary Gonzaga, esteemed her highly and treated her accordingly with constant severity. Fortunately, a general confession made to Father Pichon (May 24-28, 1888) quieted the young postulant; the confessor assured her that she had never committed a mortal sin. But a very great sorrow awaited her: on June 23 Mr. Martin was struck by amnesia and disappeared for four days; then, on Aug. 12, he was struck by paralysis. Because of this illness, Thérèse's clothing was postponed to Jan. 10, 1889—and then «of

the Holy Face" was added to her name of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus. For five years she wrote marvelous letters to her sisters, above all to Celine, in which she expressed her love for Jesus, her understanding of suffering, and her ardent desire to save souls. In 1890 her profession too was postponed. During the canonical examination of Sept. 2, 1890, Thérèse declared: «I have come to save souls and, above all, to pray for priests.» On the evening of Sept. 7 she experienced for the first time a terrible doubt about her own vocation. Obedience caused it to disappear. On the 8, «flooded by a river of peace,» she pronounced her vows. On the 24, she took the veil. Between Oct. 8 and 15, 1891, in the midst «of interior trials of every kind, even asking herself sometimes if heaven exists,» she learned in confession, from Father Alexis, that her faults were not displeasing to God, but that God was very pleased with her. Such an assurance brought her relief and made her «bear patiently life's exile.» On Dec. 5 a holy nun, Sr. Genevieve of St. Teresa, died, and Thérèse gathered her last tear. Towards the end of the year a flu epidemic broke out and decimated the community. Thérèse was spared and had the privilege of receiving Communion every day. On May 12, 1892, Mr. Martin visited Carmel for the last time; he could only say: «Till heaven!» From now on Thérèse found her spiritual nourishment exclusively in Holy Scripture and, above all, in the Gospels. She began to paint; and on Feb. 2, 1893, she composed her first poem. During the last months of 1892 she was tried again by an overwhelming spiritual anguish, which she confided to Father Pichon, who was in Canada. Her director's animated reply is date Jan. 20, 1893.

2. *The elevator* (at least by the end of Dec, 1892). Determined to «become a great saint,» but not finding the strength to do so on her own, Thérèse still did not renounce this ideal. On the contrary, she looked in the Scriptures for «the elevator" which, by raising her up «even to Jesus» Himself, would dispense her from «climbing the rough ladder of perfection." The Old Testament gave her the answer. On an unspecified date, probably between July, 1890, and the end of Dec. of 1892, Thérèse had the joy of discovering in Proverbs (9: 4) these «words that came from the mouth of eternal Wisdom: Whosoever is a little one, let him come to Me!» Then she had the joy of finding in Isaias (66: 13, 12) the helps that God prepares for the little one who goes to Him: «As one whom the mother caresses, so will I comfort you. You shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you." Her conclusion was immediate: «The elevator that will bring me to heaven are Your arms, O Jesus!» This means of sanctification was therefore essentially mystical. Far from producing a reduced type of holiness, it was gifted with an efficacy superior to the most generous asceticism, because it raised one «even to heaven."»

3. *The novices* (end of Feb., 1893-7). Strictly personal in the beginning, this elevator theme soon assumed an apostolic value. After Mother Agnes of Jesus /her sister, Pauline/ had been elected prioress on Feb. 20, 1893, she appointed Thérèse to help Mother Mary Gonzaga in the formation of the novices. Thérèse «immediately" recognized that this work of divine cooperation was not only difficult, but impossible"; she saw that she could not accomplish the work of

Jesus if she would not place herself «in His arms.” She therefore intensified her contemplation and obtained «in addition” the gift of His own action. These were the dispositions with which, on June 29, 1894, she accepted the death of her father. On Sept. 14 she received a very great consolation: she welcomed her sister Celine (Sister Genevieve of the Holy Face) to Carmel.

4. *The offering to merciful love* (June 9, 1895). In Jan., 1895, at the order of the prioress, Mother Agnes of Jesus, Thérèse began to write the story of her soul (ms. A). In the same year, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity (June 9) brought a decisive change to her interior life. During Mass she received a new grace, one that no longer had to do directly with her aspirations or obligations, but with the very nature of God and His thoughts. She suddenly understood «more than ever how much Jesus desires to be loved.» Her immediate conclusion was that Bérulle's supreme ideal for Carmel was not enough for her. To offer self «as a victim to the justice of God in order to turn aside and to draw upon self the punishments reserved for the guilty» is wonderfully generous, but it remains inadequate to what God is, and to what God wants. Only an «offering of holocaust to merciful Love» is able to reestablish the order broken by sin, which is a refusal of that Love. Thérèse therefore will be «that happy victim” who will permit God «no longer to restrict the waves of infinite tenderness” which the contempt of sinners impedes from gushing from His heart. From this moment she determined «to live in an act of perfect love” and, precisely in virtue of this holocaust, to become a martyr of this merciful Love.

5. *The martyr* (June 9, 1895-Sept. 30, 1897). From this day on the life of Thérèse was, if we can put it this way, theocentrically anthropocentered. For, to love God as He wills, it is necessary to love this infinite Love with His very own love. Therefore the new victim of holocaust abandoned herself in such a total way to this merciful Love that from then on she intended to convince men, by her life and by her death, that

God is love and mercy. Consequently, it would be impossible to interpret correctly the meaning of the twenty-seven months that remained for her on this earth, and to measure their influence, if we were to content ourselves with describing their various elements without referring them to this overriding intention. While respecting the number of remarkable details, it is important to view this period in a unified manner, if we wish to grasp its supernatural meaning. Hence, from the moment of this offering until her last breath, the life of Thérèse developed in two contradictory directions. The matter of her martyrdom is precisely the evident incompatibility of the two, an incompatibility heroically overcome. Consecrated to merciful Love, she saw herself treated no less cruelly than if she had offered herself to divine justice. But she did not cease for this reason to persevere in her certainty and in her oblation. It is only by bringing out this dramatic state of her soul into full perspective that we can understand the capital truth of which Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face is the irrefutable witness.

a) *The Lord's first reply* (June 9, 1895-April 2, 1896). In its three principal aspects, the first reply of the Lord was completely positive. For ten months the soul of Thérèse was

inundated by «oceans of grace” and experienced unheard of expansiveness, joy and happiness. On Oct. 15, 1895, Mother Agnes of Jesus increased such happiness still more by entrusting to Thérèse a «spiritual brother,” the Rev. Maurice Belliere, who was afterwards to become a White Father. During the night of Good Friday (April 2-3, 1896) a first hemoptysis gave her hope that she would be going to heaven very soon. All this is coherent, satisfying and reassuring. Such is the atmosphere that obtains throughout the manuscript A (Story of a Soul, ch. I-VIII), consigned to Mother Agnes of Jesus on Jan. 20, 1896.

b) «*The night of nothingness*» (April, 1896-Sept. 30, 1897). Suddenly, however, «during the joyful days of Easter time,” all this disappeared. Heaven was no longer open; it was annihilated. «The thickest darkness” invaded the soul of the «happy victim.” «The thought of heaven, which had been so pleasant to her, became but a subject of strife and torment.» She heard nothing but the voices of sinners who laughed at her and promised her, after this darkness, «a night still more dense, the night of nothingness.» This drastic trial of her very faith and of her very hope was to endure until her last day.

c) *The table of sinners* (April, 1896-Sept. 1897). Nevertheless, the faith and charity of the martyr triumphed in this paradoxical reversal. As she learned from this precise experience of the sincerity of «souls who do not have faith,» Thérèse consented to sit at their table in order to obtain the grace «that all those who are not illuminated by the luminous torch of faith may finally see it resplendent.” By multiplying her acts of faith, she affirmed that «she wished to believe» and, «despite such a trial that took every joy from her,» she could «still cry out: 'For Thou has given me, O Lord, a delight in Thy doings!'" (Ps. 91: 5).

d) *Spiritual attraction* (1896 and 1897). Because Thérèse found a new motive of gratitude in this crucifying metamorphosis, she did not abandon her previous outlook. On May 30, 1896, through obedience, she received another spiritual brother, Father Adolph Roulland, of the Foreign Missions, who was to leave for China on Aug. 2. In order to help her assume all these responsibilities, a new Eucharistic grace soon came to reveal to her, over and above the solution already found regarding the relationship between contemplation and action, the law of spiritual attraction. The more a soul is united to God, the less it needs to preoccupy itself with its apostolic action. «On fire with love,» Thérèse needed to do nothing else but say to Jesus: «Draw me!» And «all the souls that she loves are drawn behind her.» No need of wonder over this! «It is a natural consequence of her attraction to» Jesus!

e) «*In the heart of the Church*» (between May 10 and Sept. 8, 1896). On May 10, 1896, a consoling dream came to calm the tempest somewhat. «The venerable Anne of Jesus, the foundress of Carmel in France,” appeared to Thérèse, announced to her her proximate death and reassured her completely: «The good God does not require more of you. He is content, very content.” Then Thérèse believed and experienced that «there is a heaven and that this heaven is peopled with souls who love her.» The good weather, however, was of short duration. A new torment was born in her soul from another source, the torment of demanding, yet impossible vocations. It was no longer enough for

her to know she was a Carmelite, the bride of Jesus, the mother of souls. She felt herself called to all the forms of the exterior and active apostolate, even the most diverse and contradictory: warrior, priest apostle, doctor, missionary, martyr, everywhere and always, from the beginning of the world «even to the consummation of the centuries.» «Follies,» certainly; but here was a question of desires so strong that they demanded a solution which was not illusory.

As she had done in the case of her «elevator,» Thérèse sought this solution in Scripture as well. But this time Scripture did not offer an adequate reply. St. Paul himself could not satisfy except by suggestion. At first glance, his description of the mystical body would give the impression that Thérèse was in error. Yet the apostle speaks of charity; under the action of the grace that was given to her, the spirit of Thérèse made the transition from created to uncreated charity. The Church was revealed to her as endowed with a heart; and it was in this heart that eternal Love, the first principal of every vocation, resides. Externally, vocations undoubtedly were many, but all were united in this Love. Therefore it is not impossible to be every thing; it is enough to be this eternal Love. Now, the offering of self to merciful Love aimed precisely at procuring this same unification. From June 9, 1895, onwards Thérèse aspired to «live in an act of perfect love.» In offering this prayer she did not as yet recognize all its ontological and missionary ramifications. These she discovered at the same moment in which God revealed the nature of the Church to her. In the heart of the Church, «her mother,» she was to be love! And in this way she would be everything; it was thus that she finally found her vocation. By means of this fusion with merciful Love, she would be able to remain a Carmelite, but also live all vocations in the Church and, by accepting them at their source, participate in their eternity.

f) *Fraternal charity* (1897). Once she had arrived at these heights, Thérèse received the «grace to understand what charity is.» Fraternal charity does not consist simply in loving one's neighbor as oneself. If anything, this was the supreme ideal before the Incarnation. But after Jesus gave «His commandment,» «it is no longer a question of loving one's neighbor as oneself, but of loving him as He, Jesus, has loved him, as He will love him until the consummation of the centuries.» This is the reason why Thérèse could affirm: «Fraternal charity is everything on earth; we love God to the degree in which we practice fraternal charity.»

g) *Her «last words»* (April 6-Sept. 30, 1897). Towards the end of Lent, 1897 (Easter fell on April 18), Mother Agnes of Jesus undertook, from April 6 on, to gather the more important statements of her younger sister; and this she was to do until the end— for Thérèse's illness was visibly worsening. In 1926 Mother Agnes was to publish these last statements under the title of Last Words, beginning with May 1 and excluding those statements that referred to her too personally. Most of them throw an exceptional light on the soul of Thérèse. For example, the entry for July 17 reads: «I feel that my mission is about to begin, the mission to make God loved as I love Him.» Yet, on Sept. 8, we are assured that her torment had not ended: «Interiorly I am always immersed in trial.» And she added «but also in peace,» showing she had never given up in the least.

h) *The prayer of the Lord* (end of June, 1897). On June 3 she was asked by Mother Mary Gonzaga to finish the account of her religious life (ms. C); Thérèse consented to reveal some of her most characteristic graces. Then, feeling that death was approaching, she was led to write down the prayer that flowed from her heart so naturally. It is the very «priestly prayer» of the Incarnate Word (Jn. 17: 4-23), which she adapted with extreme delicacy to her own person and to her own mission. This is how a soul that lived «in an act of perfect love» prayed, a soul which in all humility was obliged to confess to Jesus: «I cannot conceive of a more immense love than that which it has pleased You to lavish upon me gratuitously without any merit of mine».

i) *The lever of Archimedes* (beginning of July, 1897). This is the reason why this admirable invalid, who was at the point of death, thought less of death than of the salvation of all! She was completely exhausted, having been brought to the infirmary on July 8. She had strength to write only with a pencil. In union with the saints, «who have filled the universe with the light of Gospel doctrine,» she shared in «that divine knowledge which ravishes the great geniuses»; she recalled the memory, the ambition, the importance of Archimedes, because, inasmuch as she had «prayer as a lever» and the Omnipotent Himself «as the fulcrum,» she knew that she had been granted the means to «raise the world» as she stood on the edge of the grave..

j) *Her death* (Sept. 30, 1897). Nevertheless, she was dying. Shortly before the 11th of July the pencil fell from her hand. On the 30th she received the anointing of the sick. On Aug. 19 she received her last Communion from Hyacinth Loyson; on Sept. 29 she made her last Confession; on the 30th, after having confessed that «it is pure agony, without a minimum of consolation», she said and repeated energetically: «I do not repent of having abandoned myself to Love; quite the contrary!» And this is her witness! Her «little mother» could only think «of the martyrs in the hands of their executioner, but upheld by a divine power.» About a quarter after seven, after more than two hours of «terrible wheezing,» she looked at the crucifix, said «My God, I love You!» and died, after an ecstasy «that lasted the time it takes to say a Credo.»

II. HER INFLUENCE AFTER DEATH AND CULT. Having disappeared so quickly from the land of the living, Thérèse of Lisieux soon found herself present again in a much surer way than during her brief earthly existence. On June 9, 1897, she had promised to make «a rain of roses fall»; on July 17 she had specified, «If my desires are fulfilled, my heaven will be spent on earth until the end of the world. Yes, I want to spend my heaven in doing good upon the earth.» On Aug. 1 she had declared, «in an inspired tone»: «Ah, I know all the world will love me!» Intuition, promise, prophecy? Everything was realized in such a marvelous way that this completely unknown contemplative has become «the child loved by the world,» ... «a saint among us.» Invoked everywhere, without national, racial or religious boundaries, she has been prodigal with miracles. In twenty-five years, more than four thousand have been recorded in the volumes of *Pluies de roses* /Rains of roses/. The I World War offered innumerable occasions of beneficent interventions.

The Church was impressed. Leaving aside the canonical time limits, it hurried to glorify her. On May 8, 1908, the bishop of Bayeux agreed to work for her cause. On Feb. 10, 1910, the S. Congregation of Rites authorized her writings to be collected, and these were approved by the decree of Dec. 10, 1912. On June 10, 1914, St. Pius X signed the decree for the introduction of her cause. On Aug. 14, 1921, Pope Benedict XV proclaimed the heroicity of her virtues. On April 29, 1923, Pius XI proceeded to the beatification. On May 17, 1925, the same pontiff canonized Thérèse. And on Dec. 14, 1927, he declared this humble Carmelite nun the principal patron, together with St. Francis Xavier, of all missionaries, men and women, and of the missions all over the world.

On July 11, 1937, Card. Pacelli, as papal legate, blessed the basilica of Lisieux and delivered an extraordinarily beautiful discourse. He described Thérèse as a «little tabernacle of God living among us» and invoked her as the «immense temple of a humanity” conquered by her. On May 3, 1944, Pope Pius XII named St. Thérèse of Lisieux a secondary patroness of France, together with St. Joan of Arc. From Feb. 27 till March 8, 1947, vast Parisian crowds thronged around the casket containing the relics of «Thérèse of France.» In 1946-7 the Institut Catholique of Paris dedicated its course of history of Christian spirituality to the teachings of this new patroness. In 1947 also, for the fiftieth anniversary of her death, her casket toured all of France. Everywhere, a triumphal reception! Each one saw in her a living person, a personal friend, and prayed to her with fervent intimacy. Thérèse of Lisieux, even alone, demonstrates the truth of the Gospel truth: «He that believes in Me, although he be dead, shall live» (Jn. 11: 25).

III. WORKS. The universal triumph of Thérèse is due to her innumerable heavenly interventions, often of a miraculous nature. But the saint would not have been known outside her monastery if she had written nothing and if her basic work had not been published. Her collected writings, published as early as 1898 by Mother Mary Gonzaga under the title *Story of a Soul*, was the origin of Thérèse's influence, an influence that has been ever increasing, through the many successive editions up to 1950 and the translations into all languages. After having contributed so powerfully to the «hurricane of glory,» this work certainly deserved to be treated differently than with the contempt that the editor of the *Autobiographical Manuscripts* has recently shown: there are no sufficient reasons to accompany a critically better version with an injustice. As presented in 1946, this early collection of writings made up a sizeable volume in 8.° of pp. XXX-646, containing: 1. *The Story of a Soul*, written by herself, completed by a biographical and spiritual chapter XII, written by Mother Agnes of Jesus. 2. *The Counsels and Memoirs*, reported by the novices. 3. *Eight Prayers*, among them the *Act of offering to merciful Love*. 4. Fifty-two Letters. 5. Thirty-five Poems, and tea fragments of five *Pious Recreations*. A separate edition of the Poems (1898) contained fifty-two entries, which were reduced to thirty-three in the independent edition of 1946. It is necessary to add that the *Spirit of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus*, published in 1923 by Sister Genevieve of the Holy Face (Celine), included numerous inedited fragments.

A notable progress began in 1948 with the publication of the complete Letters (238, plus 9 childhood notes) in chronological order, from 1876 until Sept., 8, 1897. In 1956 Father Francis of St. Mary published the facsimile of the three Autobiographical Manuscripts, of which the following dates of composition are certain: ms. A (ch. I-VIII of the *Story of a Soul*), 1895; ms. B (ch. XI), between the 8th and 14th of Sept., 1896; ms. C (ch. IX-X), from June 3 to July 2 (or 10), 1897. This edition was enriched with notes and very useful illustrations; however, it unfortunately eliminated the additions dictated by Thérèse to Mother Agnes of Jesus, which were incorporated into the *Story of a Soul*, as chapter XII. It also eliminated all other complementary additions that increased the value of the previous editions. Consequently, the earlier editions are still indispensable. This last edition, reduced to the text alone and well presented typographically, has taken the place of the classic *Story of a Soul*, with the title: Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jesus *Manuscrits autobiographiques*, a small volume in 8° of pp. XXIV-352, Carmel de Lisieux, 1957. We are now waiting for the critical edition of the *Poems*, of the *Pious Recreations* and also of the *Novissima Verba* (Last Words). Previously, in 1952, Sister Genevieve of the Holy Face had published the Counsels and memoirs that belonged to her personally. In 1971, as the first volume of the complete works to be published on the occasion of the first centenary of Thérèse's birth, there appeared the *Derniers entretiens* (Last conversations), in 922 pages. IV. DOCTRINE. It is now customary to identify Thérèse and her doctrine with what is called «spiritual childhood.” The expression is equivocal, since the greater part of the interpreters give it a minimizing meaning which, we must note immediately, is completely extraneous to the thought of Thérèse. The more one studies her thought in a scientific manner, the less he feels disposed to retain this usual interpretation as conformed to historical truth. It would be better to renounce it, or at least make it exact, with a correction that touches the very substance of the matter. Let us list the four principal reasons that lead us to this conclusion:

1. One fact is certain: in all the actually published works of Thérèse we cannot find, as coming from the pen of Thérèse, either the expression «spiritual childhood” or the verse of St. Matthew, «Unless you ... become as little children” (18: 3), which, as is commonly held, should constitute the foundation of that doctrine. Such a total absence would be inconceivable if «spiritual childhood” were really the teaching of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.
2. When Thérèse speaks of her own teaching and, in a more particular way, of her personal method of sanctification, she presents it as «a completely new little way.» How would she have been able to nourish the illusion of explicit newness if she had adopted that «spiritual childhood” which is so clearly taught by the Gospel and so abundantly attested by all of tradition?
3. Although the expression is not found in the writings of Thérèse, we do know its author, the person responsible for its first appearance, and we can even specify the place and the date. It was Mother Agnes of Jesus, who, after having reflected for a long time on the doctrine that she had the task of explaining and defending, held it legitimate to condense that doctrine in this sober and lucid form. Therefore, in 1907, in preparing a new edition of the *Story of a Soul*, she did not hesitate to insert «spiritual

childhood" in that part which constituted the seed of the future Last Words (1926, July 17, p. 82). She had Thérèse give this reply destined to become famous immediately: «Mother, it is the way of spiritual childhood...» The earlier editions did not contain these words; hence they are not authentic. Actually, they express admirably the way in which Mother Agnes of Jesus, who was much more Salesian than Thérèse, understood the «way» of her younger sister. On this point Sr. Genevieve of the Holy Face, for other reasons, was wholly in accord with her. Both sisters, therefore, spoke of «spiritual childhood" at the canonical processes. It seems that no one had the idea of verifying the exactness of such an interpretation of the texts of Thérèse.

4. However little a person considers the life and works of Thérèse, in a global vision and with sufficient attention, these betray an essentially different characteristic. Rather than suggest the idea of a reduced holiness, which would be within the reach of all precisely because it is limited to the practice of the obligations of one's state, everything in Thérèse proclaims that, God being Who He is, even the most insignificant souls can aspire to the highest holiness, because God wants to make Himself their holiness. If, therefore, it did happen that Thérèse spontaneously adopted themes relative to childhood or to littleness, she did so only to discourage any form of pride or presumption, to set in vivid perspective the total and constant gratuity of the supernatural order. She did not view her «conversion» on Christmas night as her becoming a child, but as «leaving childhood» in order to become an apostle; and if she turned willingly to «little souls,» it was not to confirm them in their mediocrity, but to invite them to abandon themselves, as she had done, to Him Who has made a «great saint» of her and Who is ready to «overwhelm them with still greater favors.»

Hence there is no possibility of mistake. Nothing is little in Thérèse of Lisieux. Her spirit was nourished on Holy Scripture, on the *Imitation of Christ*, on the writings of Arminjon, on St. John of the Cross; her soul, above all, was nourished by absolute fidelity to all the initiatives of grace. By instinct, she always chose what was more elevated, more generous, more perfect. From her first Communion, which resulted in a transforming fusion, she wished to share in the divine strength. Very soon thereafter, for her to live was Christ. The divine reward waited for her in heaven; here below she made herself the contemporary of the crucified Christ. To console Him, she did not wish for any other thought but that of saving souls. It was for this that she entered Carmel; having become a contemplative, she was to be the bride of Jesus. By suffering and loving, she was to empty purgatory and fill heaven with the elect for Him. Her everyday weapons were to be prayer and sacrifice. In every sorrow that presented itself to her she recognized her Beloved. On the arms of Jesus she arrived at the summit of holiness. Her interior life was so to speak, despoiled; but she loved and within this love she held the adorable Trinity prisoner.

She knew all this. She sang about it. She lived it. In order to love this God as He deserves to be loved, and to permit Him to spread the full torrent of His love over the world, she offered herself as a victim of holocaust to merciful Love. Living then in an act of perfect love, she shared, in the heart of the Church, her mother, in the eternal Love from which all apostolates proceed. Hence she was a missionary in full measure.

From this supreme height she finally discovered the perfection of brotherly love. And although devastated in her faith and in her hope by the paradoxical trial that seemed to want to throw her into despair, still she died witnessing firmly that God, Who seemed to want to persuade her that He is Justice, is Love. It is for this reason that, passing beyond and transcending the mystery, she did not leave the earth without first having declared that heavenly happiness was to include two stages for her, namely: before being absorbed in God, she was to share in His mercy by spreading graces in our midst. And she was to keep her promise!

There is nothing more coherent, more grandiose, more significant! Essentially evangelical, theological, Christocentric, Thérèse's doctrine constitutes one of the most complete and most convincing syntheses — because it was integrally lived — of Christian truth in its purest and most profound elements. Going immediately to the heart of the matter, she gazed at the very nature of God, which is merciful Love, at the reality of the Incarnation, at the dramatic character of the Redemption, at the urgency of the cooperation of man in his own salvation, at the primacy of eternity, at the omnipotence of grace, at the inhabitation of the Trinity, at the apostolic efficacy of contemplation, at the divinization of the elect; and from this complexus she drew an «absolutely new way.» For she did not fear to offer for the triple problem of personal sanctification, of supernatural action and of the missionary apostolate a solution which was wholly mystical, and which coincided with the very nature of the Church in whose heart this divinely active contemplative was placed! Moreover, what is of greater value is that once she had reached the highest degree of her spiritual ascent, in that communion with merciful Love, Thérèse received the gift of understanding perfectly «what charity is.» Precisely because she succeeded in understanding the very nature of God, her radical theocentrism was changed into anthropocentrism. A triumph of the Gospel! «Because it is a property of love to lower itself,” Thérèse observed, God lowered Himself to man, but with the aim of transforming man into Himself.

In giving us Thérèse of Lisieux. God wished to give to the world a precursor of Vatican II. This is evident. But He has also wished to indicate in the marvelous equilibrium of her spiritual genius a powerful guarantee against all the excesses of a misunderstood aggiornamento. Anthropocentrism is legitimate «Then it derives from a primordial and constant theocentrism, when it tends to an essentially supernatural enrichment. The new omen, as Pius XI said, which God has launched in the world with Thérèse, commits all those who accept it to a most direct and sure way. By imitating this example and being inspired by this doctrine, a person veritably lives in the heart of the Church; he shares most efficaciously in its missionary activity. The more we scrutinize the life and the message of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face with rigorous objectivity, the more do we admire the exactness of the prophetic judgment that St. Pius X formulated about her long before the opening of the apostolic process: «She is the greatest saint of modern times.»

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