

# The Trial of Faith of Saint Thérèse\*

*When I sing of the happiness of heaven  
and of the eternal possession of God,  
I feel no joy in this, for I sing simply of what  
I WANT TO BELIEVE<sup>1</sup> (Saint Thérèse).*

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Saint Thérèse confesses that her life has always been close to the cross of Christ: «It is true that his Cross has followed me from the cradle, but this Cross Jesus has made me love with a passion»<sup>2</sup>. Her trial of faith begins in April 1896 and coincides with the painful progression of end-stage tuberculosis. But her terminal illness and her interior darkness are not Thérèse's first bouts with suffering. Physical, psychological and spiritual sufferings had been ever present in her life, and at

\* The abbreviations used in the body of the text are as follows: LaC (THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX, *Her Last Conversations*, trans. of John Clarke, ICS Publications, Washington 1977), Ms A, B, C (*Manuscript A, B, C of Autobiography*, in: EAD., *Nouvelle édition du centenaire: édition critique des Œuvres complètes de sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face*, Cerf, Paris 1992), LT (EAD., *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, 1, trans. of John Clarke, ICS Publications, Washington 1982; EAD., *Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, 2, trans. of John Clarke, ICS Publications, Washington 1988), GC I, II (EAD., *General Correspondence*, 1, trans. of John Clarke, ICS Publications, Washington 1982; EAD., *General Correspondence*, 2, trans. of John Clarke, ICS Publications, Washington 2002), Pri (EAD., *The Prayers of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. of Aletheia Kane, ICS Publications, Washington 1997), PN (EAD., *The Poetry of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. of Donald Kinney, ICS Publications, Washington 1996), S (EAD., *Story of a Soul*, trans. of John Clarke, ICS Publications, Washington 1976), AAS (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*), ACJCL (*Archives Community of Jesus Crucified Lafayette*). Unless otherwise noted, citations and references to the original French text of Saint Thérèse are taken from, THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX, *Nouvelle édition du centenaire: édition critique des Œuvres complètes de sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face*, Cerf, Paris 1992.

<sup>1</sup> S, 214; Ms C, 7v°.

<sup>2</sup> LT 253, 13 July 1897, Thérèse to Abbé Bellière, GCII, 1139.

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ABSTRACT: Saint Thérèse of Lisieux longed to die of love; but her trial of faith during the last eighteen months of her life greatly purified her understanding of what such a death of love might mean. Thérèse's trial of faith continued until the moment of her death. Not surprisingly, this has spawned a variety of divergent interpretations by theologians concerning the significance of her trial. The present contribution undertakes to study the trial of faith of Saint Thérèse through the prism of her own description and interpretation, especially as a participation in Jesus' thirst manifested from the cross.

KEY WORDS: Dark Night; Trial of Faith; Passive Purification; Saint Thérèse; Trust; Night of Sense; Night of Spirit; Death of Love; Thirst of Jesus.