

## Beginning to read Teresa

There are two complete translations of Teresa's writings available in English. The first, by E. Allison Peers, was produced just after the Second World War. It is still widely read and greatly loved. It remains in print and available in various editions.

The most recent, complete edition of Teresa writings in English was produced by *The Institute of Carmelite Studies*. This translation aims to capture both Teresa's thought and her spontaneous style in contemporary English. Each volume contains a detailed introduction to the text and there are comprehensive notes and indices to guide the reader.

A number of useful reading guides and commentaries are also available. All of these can help the reader adjust to Teresa's unique style and become familiar with the details of her thought.

All Teresa's writings, and many books about her, can be obtained from the Carmelite Book Service:

Carmelite Book Service  
Boars Hill  
Oxford  
OX1 5HB

[www.carmelite.org.uk/Books.html](http://www.carmelite.org.uk/Books.html)

Being out of copyright, some of the earliest English editions of Teresa's books are available online.

For more details go to:

Christian Classics Ethereal Library  
[www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)

Project Gutenberg  
[www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)

## What is the Carmelite Forum?

This leaflet is produced by the *Carmelite Forum of Britain & Ireland*, a joint initiative of the Order of Carmelites and the Order of Discalced Carmelites.

Members represent groups living or interested in Carmelite spirituality in the twenty-first century. These include nuns, friars and lay members of the two Carmelite Orders.

Throughout 2014 - 2015 the Forum will be celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Teresa's birth.

Planned events include:

### Opening Mass:

**Carmelite Priory,  
Kensington**

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014, 7pm**

### Academic conference:

***Teresa of Avila 1515 - 2015:  
Mystical Theology and Spirituality  
in the Carmelite Tradition***  
**St Mary's University, Twickenham**

**18 - 20<sup>th</sup> June 2015  
[www.smuc.ac.uk/inspire](http://www.smuc.ac.uk/inspire)**

### Pilgrimages:

**National Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2015  
Avila, 31<sup>st</sup> August - 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

### Closing celebration:

**Aylesford Priory, Kent  
Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015**

For more information visit:

Website: [www.teresaofavila.org](http://www.teresaofavila.org)  
Email: [info@teresaofavila.org](mailto:info@teresaofavila.org)  
Facebook: [teresa500](https://www.facebook.com/teresa500)  
Twitter: [@carmeliteforum](https://twitter.com/carmeliteforum)



[WWW.TERESAOFAVILA.ORG](http://WWW.TERESAOFAVILA.ORG)

# Teresa 500

The fifth centenary celebrations  
of the birth of St Teresa of Avila  
2014 - 2015

## I. Teresa and her Writings

The Carmelite Forum of Britain and Ireland

When St Teresa of Avila, the great Spanish mystic and reformer of the Carmelite Order died in 1582, she left the church two special legacies. The first was her fledgling new order which would continue to grow and spread throughout the world. The second was the wisdom of her unique and daring spiritual teaching, as expounded in her many writings. These too would continue to influence countless lives after Teresa's death.

Today Teresa's writings are recognised as some of the most important texts in Christian literature. Although she originally wrote them largely for her own communities, many others have benefited from her astute observations on human life, and her honest and vivid account of her experience of prayer. When Pope Paul VI declared Teresa a Doctor of the Church in 1970, he recognised that her spiritual teaching is of universal significance for the whole people of God.

This leaflet will provide a basic introduction to Teresa's writings, outlining their contents and suggesting how to begin reading Teresa.

*If I manage  
to say something well  
the sisters will understand...  
the Lord gave it to me.*

Teresa wrote four major books: *The Book of Her Life*, *The Way of Perfection*, *The Interior Castle* and *The Book of Her Foundations*.

In addition, her minor writings include poems, spiritual testimonies and a short commentary on the biblical text of the *Song of Songs*. There are also over four hundred letters which Teresa wrote to friends, family and those involved in establishing the new communities.

*What disorder  
in the way I write!*

Although Teresa was educated with the Augustinian nuns in Avila, she received no formal training as a writer. In her books, she uses the ordinary dialect of her native Castile region, often demonstrating a flexible approach to the rules of spelling and grammar, and even inventing new words to suit her purpose. Her style is far from the technical language of the universities and the formal Latin of the church.

Teresa wrote her books in the midst of her many duties as a prioress, and while busy with all the practical arrangements of establishing the new monasteries. She would write late into the night and at great speed. Often her writing was interrupted for weeks at a time as she was caught up in business affairs or struggled with ill health. She complains she has no time to check what she has written or remind herself of what she was last saying.

All this gives Teresa's writings an immediate feel; it is as if the saint is speaking spontaneously to her audience, jumping between ideas, making asides and engaging in long digressions. However, these aspects of Teresa's style can sometimes make her texts difficult to understand, as the reader struggles to follow her line of thought.

One way to approach Teresa's texts is simply to allow her to speak to us; enjoying her colloquial style, allowing her to amuse us with her dry wit, and all the time confident that she will eventually return to the matter in hand.

*God help me  
with what I have undertaken!*

### ***The Book of her Life***

This is Teresa's first attempt at writing and was produced in obedience of to her spiritual director who wished to have a detailed account of Teresa's experiences in prayer. Teresa describes both the external events of her life, and the flowering of her rich interior life of prayer. She later added a long section describing the different stages of prayer and recounting how St Joseph's, her first monastery, came to be founded.

### ***The Way of Perfection***

Teresa's writings all had to be submitted to censors to ensure that they would not fall foul of the Inquisition. While the *Book of her Life* was thus unavailable, her first community begged her to write something specifically for them, detailing her vision of the new Carmel and teaching them how to pray. In *The Way of Perfection* Teresa teaches that humility, detachment and the love of neighbour are all essential pre-requisites for prayer. She explains her vision of the sisters' task of praying for the whole church and gives a detailed commentary on the *Our Father*.

### ***The Interior Castle***

This is Teresa's most mature work and represents a synthesis of her spiritual teaching. Teresa describes the soul's journey to God in terms of someone travelling through the rooms of a castle to meet God who dwells at its centre. Although it was hastily written in Teresa's darkest hour, while she was suffering ill-health and the future of the reform was in jeopardy, it is widely regarded as her spiritual masterpiece.

### ***The Book of her Foundations***

Teresa was still writing her account of the progress of the reform when she died in 1582, having founded a total of eighteen new communities. Teresa wrote sporadically, adding sections as each new house was established. Although it is largely a factual account of the birth of the new order, Teresa cannot resist including practical advice for the new prioresses and guidelines for the spiritual life of her sisters.