

The Way of Perfection - Preface

St. Teresa of Avila was born at Avila in Castile on the 28th March 1515. One of the more remarkable women in world history, she played a decisive role in the Catholic reform of the Church in the years following the Reformation. She was the prime mover in the full-scale reform of the Carmelite Order—a reform which, with the aid of St. John of the Cross, was extended to the friars as well.

However, it is above all as a mystic of the highest order and as a supremely reliable spiritual guide that she is known today. Although she herself was blessed with extraordinary mystical experiences (such as the piercing or transverberation of her heart, the spiritual espousals, and the mystical marriage), her spiritual guidance is sober, practical, and down to earth. By turns shrewd, simple, and passionate, often a poet, St. Teresa is a vastly experienced director of souls, never taken in by sham or disordered spirituality:

"St. Teresa's position among writers on mystical theology is unique. In all her writings on this subject she deals with her personal experiences, which a deep insight and analytical gifts enabled her to explain clearly. The Thomistic substratum may be traced to the influence of her confessors and directors, many of whom belonged to the Dominican Order. She herself had no pretension to found a school in the accepted sense of the term, and there is no vestige in her writings of any influence of the Aeropagite, the Patristic, or the Scholastic Mystical schools, as represented among others, by the German Dominican Mystics. She is intensely personal, her system going exactly as far as her experiences, but not a step further."

Thus the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*.

She died at Alba de Tormes on the 4th October, 1582. A Doctor of the Church (one of only three women to be given that title, together with St. Catherine of Siena and St. Therese of Lisieux), St. Teresa's feast day is celebrated on the 15th October.

The translation used in this edition is that commissioned and published by the English Carmelites in 1941, itself based on the Spanish text published at Burgos in 1914 and edited by P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, O.D.C..