

*The WAY of*  
PERFECTION



PORTRAIT BY PETER PAUL RUBENS  
ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA  
1515–1582

*Way of Perfection*  
**The WAY of  
PERFECTION**

*A conversation with God on living your spiritual life to the fullest*

SAINT TERESA OF ÁVILA

*Translated from the Autograph of St. Teresa of Jesus, including  
All the Variants from the Escorial and Valladolid Editions, by*

THE BENEDICTINES OF STANBROOK

*Revised, with Notes and an Introduction, by the*

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*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo.*

“The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever.”

—Motto of St. Teresa of Ávila

(Psalm 88:2)

The Benedictines of Stanbrook desire to express their gratitude to the V.R. Prior Benedict Zimmerman for his kindness in revising the ‘Way of Perfection’, and also for the notes and Introduction which he has added to it.

Stanbrook Abbey, Worcester.

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BOOK ENTITLED  
THE WAY OF PERFECTION

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*Composed by*  
TERESA OF JESUS

*Nun of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.  
Dedicated to the Discalced Nuns of Our Lady of  
Carmel of the Primitive Rule.*

SUBJECT MATTER OF THE BOOK

JHS

This book contains advice and counsel given by Teresa of Jesus to her sisters and daughters, the religious, of the convents which, with the help of our Lord and the glorious Virgin Mother of God, our Lady, she has founded according to the Primitive Rule of our Lady of Carmel. It is specially dedicated to the sisters of the convent of St. Joseph, Ávila, the first of her houses in which, while Prioress there, she wrote this treatise.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This title was written by the Saint herself on the first leaf of the Valladolid edition of the Way of Perfection.



## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

*Which contains reasons for writing this book.*

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The sisters of this convent of St. Joseph, having learnt that my confessor, Father Master Domingo Bañez, of the glorious Order of St. Dominic, had given me leave to write about prayer,<sup>15</sup> of which I appeared capable because of having spoken with so many spiritual and devout persons, have so importuned me that I have decided on complying with their wishes. Faulty and imperfect as my style may be, I know that the sisters' great love for me will give my words more influence with them than that of books far better written by those who know what they are writing about. Therefore I have determined to yield to the nuns' wishes and persuasions. I rely upon their prayers and on humility; perhaps by these means God may give me grace to say something useful concerning the life that ought to be led in this house and helpful to my sisters, and He may teach me, so that I may teach them.

If I fail, Father Master, who is to read these writings first, will either correct them or throw them into the fire: thus I shall have lost nothing by obeying the wishes of these servants of God, and they will discover what I really am when His Majesty does not assist me.

I intend suggesting remedies for certain minor temptations of the devil, which, because they are slight, are often disregarded; also to explain my object in founding this house, namely, to restore the perfect observance of our Rule that had been mitigated elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> I will also speak of other matters as our Lord may direct me, and as they occur to

<sup>15</sup> *Rel.* vii. 9. *Way of Perf.* xlii.

<sup>16</sup> *Life*, xxxii. 13, 14; xxxv. 13, 14; xxxvi. 27, 28.

my mind. Not knowing of what things I shall treat, I cannot arrange them in proper order. I think, after all, that this is best, as it is quite incongruous for such a person as myself to speak about such subjects. May our Lord guide me in all I do, that it may be pleasing to His holy will, for this has always been my aim, faulty as my deeds may be.

I know that on my part there is no lack of love for my sisters, nor of a desire to do all I can to help their souls to make great progress in God's service. This affection, my age, and my personal experience in various convents, may assist me to write of such lesser matters better than theologians whose more important business and powerful minds make them overlook things, insignificant in themselves, yet which may do great harm to such weak creatures as we women are. The devil employs his most subtle wiles against strictly cloistered nuns, for he sees that he requires some new sort of weapon to injure them. Wicked as I am, I have been able to defend myself but ill against him, and I wish my sisters to take warning by me. I shall only speak of what I have learnt by my own experience, have witnessed in others, or that God has shown to me during prayer.

A short time ago I was told to write a history of my life, in which I have also treated of prayer: as perhaps my confessor may not permit you to read it, I shall repeat some of it here, besides adding other things which I believe are requisite. May God direct my work, as I have begged of Him, and may He order it all for His greater glory! Amen.



## CHAPTER ONE

### *The reason why I founded this convent in such austere observance.*

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1. *Why the Convent of St. Joseph at Ávila was founded.*
2. *Reasons for the corporal austerities of this convent.*
3. *St. Teresa's grief at sin and the eternal loss of sinners.*
4. *She begs the nuns to intercede against these evils.*
5. *This, and not worldly matters, should be the  
object of our petitions.*

1. This convent was founded for the reasons already given in the work above mentioned,<sup>17</sup> and also on account of certain favours that God showed me, in which He revealed that He would be served with great fervour in this house.<sup>18</sup> I did not at first intend that such rigorous bodily austerities should be practised in it, nor that it should possess no income; on the contrary, I wished it to have sufficient means to prevent the possibility of want; which shows how weak and wicked I am, although I meant rather to do what was right than to seek for self-indulgence.<sup>19</sup>

2. Just at this time I heard of the miseries France was suffering, of the havoc the Lutherans were making there, and how this wretched sect was increasing.<sup>20</sup> It grieved me bitterly, and as if I could have done

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<sup>17</sup> *Life*, xxxii. 13. *Rel.* vii. 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Life*, xxxii. 14; xxxv. 13. *Castle*, M. VI. vi. 2; M. VII. iv. 21. *Foundations*, i. 6, 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Life*, xxxiii. 15; xxxv. 2-7.

<sup>20</sup> *Life*, xxxii. 9. *Rel.* ii. 14 *Way of Perf.* xxxv. 3. Luis de Leon relates that the mere

anything, or had been of any consequence, I cried to God and begged Him to cure this terrible evil. I felt that I would have laid down a thousand lives to save one of the many souls perishing there. Yet, as I am but a woman, feeble and faulty, it was impossible for me to serve God in the way I wished—indeed, all I cared for then, as I do now, was that, as the enemies of God are so many and His friends so few, these latter might at least be good ones. Therefore I determined to do what little was in my power, which was to follow the Evangelical counsels as perfectly as I could and to see that the few nuns here should do the same.<sup>21</sup> Trusting in the great mercy of God which never fails those who resolve to leave all things for His sake, I hoped that, as my sisters here are all that I ever wished them to be, their virtues would be strong enough to resist the influence of my defects and that I might be able to bring some comfort to our Lord. Thus, being all of us employed in interceding for the champions of the Church and the preachers and theologians who defend her, we might, to our utmost, aid this Lord of mine Who is attacked with such cruelty by those on whom He has conferred great benefits that it seems as though they would fasten Him to the Cross again, leaving Him no place to lay His head.

3. O my Redeemer! How it wearies my heart<sup>22</sup> to think of this! To what a state have Christians come! Must those who owe Thee most always treat Thee worst?—those souls to whom Thou hast shown the greatest goodness, whom Thou hast chosen for Thy friends, amongst whom Thou dost dwell, to whom Thou dost give Thyself in Thy Sacraments? Are not Thy torments at the hands of the Jews enough for them? Indeed, my Lord, we forfeit nothing in retiring from the world, for if [Christians] show *Thee* such disloyalty, what could *we* hope for? Do we merit better

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mention of the ravages committed by the heretics on the monasteries of Germany and England so wounded St. Teresa's heart as to cause her constant pain. The first and chief reason for her founding the houses of Discalced Carmelites was to repair, to some extent, these wrongs done by the heretics. (Fuente, vol. VI. 130. Note 19.)

<sup>21</sup> *Life*, xxxv. 13; xxxvi. 26; xxxix. 14. *Found.* i. 1–4. *Castle*, M. V. iv. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Psalm cxviii. 53: 'Defectio tenuit me, pro peccatoribus derelinquentibus legem tuam.'



treatment from them? Have we done more for them than Thou hast done, that they should be friends to us? How is this? What do we hope for—we, who by the mercy of God have escaped this plague-spot? For these men are already the slaves of the devil. They have earned a bitter scourging from the hands of the fiend and have justly bought eternal fire with the pleasures he has given them. That must be their fate, though it breaks my heart to see so many souls lose themselves. Would that the evil were not so great: fain would I not see more and more ruined every day.<sup>23</sup>

4. O my sisters in Christ! help me to pray to our Lord for this! This is why we live here together, why the Lord has brought you here; it must be your work, the object of your longings; your tears and prayers must beg for this and not for any worldly matters. I laugh, and yet I grieve, at the intentions recommended to our prayers,—even such matters as to ask His Majesty for success in business matters and lawsuits concerning money, and this from people who I wish would beg God for grace to trample such things underfoot. These people mean well; therefore, to tell the truth, I pray for them to God because of their piety in asking for it, although, for my part, I believe that He never listens to such prayers from me.

5. The world is in a fever<sup>24</sup>; men wish, as it were, to condemn Christ again, for they suborn a thousand false witnesses against Him: they want to level the Church with the ground—and shall we waste our time in petitioning for that which, were it granted, might cost some soul its entrance into heaven? No, sisters, this is no time to ask God for what is of little moment. Were there no need to humour the weakness of human nature, which seeks for help everywhere (and, indeed, it would be well if we could help it in any way), I should wish it to be known that these are not the matters for which God is so fervently entreated within the convent of St. Joseph.

<sup>23</sup> *Life*, xiii. 14; xxxii. 9. *Castle*, M. V. ii. 13; M. VI. i. 5, 6. *Excl.* x. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Excl.* ix. 15. 'It may be said that the fever of love or desire is no less a fever than that of temperature. One heats the soul and the other the body. Avarice is one of our fevers; impurity is our fever, luxury is another; ambition and wrath are both our fevers.' *S. Ambros. Hom. in S. Luc. lib. IV in cap. iv. sub fine.*