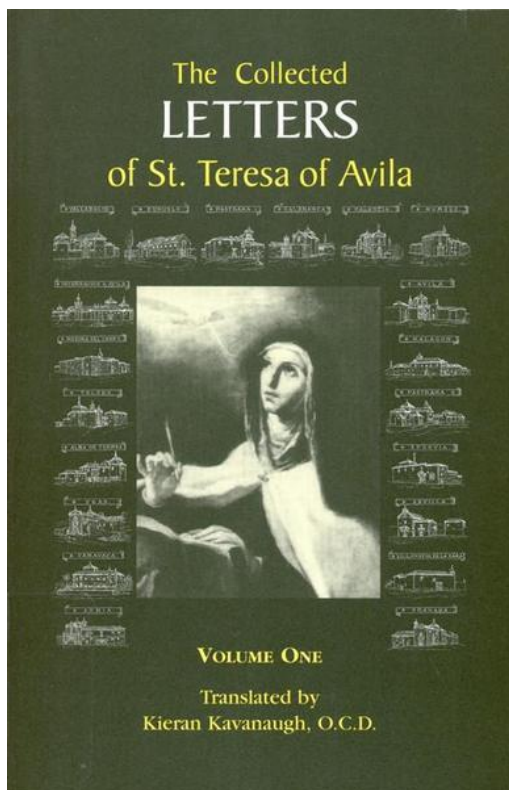


**Module MTh09: Teresa of Avila's letters as a resource to broaden our understanding of her**

We are greatly blessed that Teresa of Avila wrote a great deal, and that her major works are generally well known and give a clear picture of her story and remarkable spirituality. Her letters are less familiar. If her books were written with careful consideration of what readers and censors might think the 468 letters that have survived present a much more candid picture, throwing a fascinating light onto Teresa's personal relationships and her extraordinary skill as the project manager who brought about the foundation of 17 monasteries in the face of a frequently hostile environment.



The letters of Teresa of Avila are now generally recognised as providing an important, and somewhat different, perspective on her life than her other writings, which were directly subject to ecclesiastical censorship. Covering the last 20 years of her life, from 1568 until a few days before her death, they reveal her character and concerns in a more immediate and intimate way and, being more unembellished and straightforward in content, they help to overcome the impression given by some accounts of her life that she was some kind of counter-reformation 'created saint'.

They also help us to recognise, once again, the many challenging aspects of her genuinely 'incarnated' sanctity, whilst offering a rich mine of insights into the everyday life of her monasteries and the communication between them.

Without some knowledge of St Teresa's letters, it would be difficult to appreciate the remarkable combination of practicality, insight and holiness in this extraordinary woman. This module seeks to redress that balance.

Through the units of this module we shall try to broaden an understanding of Teresa by identifying and developing some areas of Teresa's life and work as they are represented in her letters. Some letters will be identified for particular attention as will texts that support the themes, though, as already stated, there is no large source of commentaries on the letters. However as we consider Teresa's letters we constantly develop our understanding of her as a person through her often forthright comments and by discovering more about her through her relationships with others.