

The Chicago Literary Club  
Inquisitor, Aristocrat, Mayor, and a Nun

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### Prologue

Teresa was born five hundred years ago this year in Avila, Spain. She was daring, inquisitive, humorous, controversial, and a game changer. Her quotes can be found on many spiritual websites.

Once when she was thrown off her horse and landed in a stream, she stood up and shook her fist at the heavens and proclaimed: ““God, if this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so many enemies.”

She also quipped: “God save us from gloomy saints and stupid nuns.”

And, “In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel.”

She has influenced many throughout history.

Giam Lorenzo Bernini completed his masterpiece *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* in 1652. Virgil Thomson wrote music for the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* with a libretto by Gertrude Stein. It premiered in 1934. Truman Capote’s unfinished novel was entitled “Answered Prayers,” taken from Teresa’s quote, “More tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones.” His novel was published posthumously in 1986.

As for Teresa’s work, *The Interior Castle*, is considered a mystical masterpiece. She was named a doctor of the Catholic Church in 1970, only one of four women in an august group of thirty-two men, so honored for their instructive illuminations. She

organized a reform order of women Carmelites and recruited St. John of the Cross to reform the male Carmelite order.

While all this is extraordinary, we are going to explore only one aspect of the life of Teresa Sanchez de Cepeda y Ahumada, who was born in 1515 and died in 1582. We are going to consider her radical proposal to establish a new convent in Avila for only twelve women who would live simply. This convent would be open to poor women without dowries, illiterates, and women of Jewish heritage. But the most controversial aspect of this proposal is that the townspeople of Avila would be asked to financially support the convent, not the usual rich benefactors. While this incident seems relatively insignificant, we are going to tease out themes that resonate even now: the subjugation of women, prejudice against Jews, the role of the church in society, and, most of all, the politics of poverty and wealth.

To better understand these themes in sixteenth century Spain, we're going to turn our clocks back to 1562, the year that Teresa proposed her radical idea to the citizens of Avila. This proposal was met with a storm of hostility for the following reasons:

First, Teresa was Jewish on her father's side. Her grandfather and his children were forced to march around the churches in Toledo for a minor infraction. Humiliated, her grandfather left Toledo and reestablished his profitable business of selling fine wool in Avila. Teresa's father was a devout Catholic, but there was a residue of resentment toward *conversos*, well after most Jews were evicted in 1492.

Second, rich families traditionally funded convents and monasteries and consequently controlled the church. It is estimated that the elite comprised one-fifth of Avila's population.

Third. Avila had a city council that fell under an agent of the Crown called the *corregidor*. In this debate, we'll call this figure the mayor. The city council was concerned that this new convent would draw water from the precious aqueducts, and the house, where the convent would be located, would not generate tax money.

Fourth, although the exact number of existing monasteries and convents in Avila is not known, there were numerous options for those who wished to enter religious life, including the Carmelite convent that housed up to 125 women.

Fifth, Avila was suffering from an economic downturn, throwing many weavers and other skilled workers out of work. They were barely making a living and didn't have the financial resources to support another convent. Spain, also, was suffering economic difficulties, having declared bankruptcy three times during Teresa's lifetime.

Sixth, the Spaniards had heard of a dangerous heretic named Martin Luther who believed one could talk directly to God without the intervention of priests. Perhaps Teresa held similar ideas.

Finally, many were suspicious of women and their mystical visions, as expressed by one priest who said, ". . . women are by nature weak and fragile more than any other animal."

So you might ask, who was in favor of Teresa's proposal? This is where you will become involved. You will take on the role of the citizens of Avila. Select a role for yourself, such as an aristocrat, the clergy, skilled workmen, farmers, or peasants. You will hear a debate. First, Teresa will make the proposal. The mayor, played by Jerry Loeser, will argue against it. Then Teresa's best friend, Dona Guiomar, played by Margaret McCamant, will shore up Teresa's argument. Finally, the Inquisitor will offer his own reasons why this proposal should be rejected. The Inquisitor's role is played by Todd Parkhurst. You will then hear the rebuttals. After the debate concludes, you will be asked to decide whether to allow Teresa to establish her convent in Avila and financially support it or side with the mayor and the inquisitor.

The arguments that you are going to hear are based on historical facts. In deciding the outcome of the debate, you may reasonably ask, "How much, as a citizen of Avila, will I be asked to give to support this new convent?" The records do not say but it is presumed that you would be asked to give according to your means. Finally, Avila is not Chicago. You are only allowed to vote once, and you are not allowed to do your own independent research, but base your unbiased vote on the evidence that is presented tonight.

## **Teresa's Argument**

Dear Sisters and Brothers of Avila: I come before you (this evening/morning) to defend an idea that some of you may consider radical or even outrageous. I beg your patience to hear me out. Rumors have spread throughout Avila about my modest proposal for a convent of twelve or thirteen women who would devote their lives to seclusion and prayer. Rather than seeking the support of rich benefactors, I've asked the town itself to support this new convent, which is named after St. Joseph.

I never could have anticipated that this well-meaning proposal would stir such turmoil in Avila, resulting in denunciations, lawsuits, and even a riot. My former convent's chaplain said this proposal has the same effect on Avila as if it were simultaneously struck by "plague, fire, and an invading army."

It's difficult to understand why you have so many objections. Some resent the fact that the house that we have purchased to serve as our convent will not generate tax dollars for the city. Others are concerned that the proposed convent is near the city's water supply and that will mean less water for you. The other convents in Avila are concerned that there will be less funds for themselves. And then there is the fear that should the Inquisition investigate this new convent, as I'm sure they will, these other convents will somehow be implicated or even worse, their spiritual practices, which are lax compared to the austerity that I propose, will be criticized.

Matters came to a head several days ago when the city council called an emergency meeting involving representatives of all the religious orders, and it was decided St. Joseph Convent must be dissolved. Police tried to forcefully knock down the door of the convent, but fortunately the door wouldn't budge and the four nuns in the convent, although frightened, were safe. Not content to let matters drop, Avila's city fathers have filed a suit against the convent with Madrid's Royal Council. Some of you have proposed a compromise: you'll drop the suit. In exchange, I must agree that the convent will be supported like all the others by rich benefactors. In my exhaustion, I nearly agreed to this solution but then I had a dream that my late dear friend, Peter of Alcantara, told me that I must not give in because our society is already corrupted by the rich, who give money and dictate their terms. They expect special favors. Their

daughters are admitted to convents while other worthy candidates are not, simply because their poor families don't have the money for dowries.

Let's review my proposal:

-- In this convent, the nuns will rely entirely on the fruits of their own labor and from your alms. Rich benefactors will not endow the convent and thus make excessive demands on the nuns.

-- While I will not refuse dowries, still worthy candidates without dowries will be accepted, as well as women from Jewish ancestry and illiterates. My own grandfather was denounced in Toledo and thus forced to find refuge in Avila, where he reestablished his cloth business. Lingering prejudice against those of Jewish blood is tainting our society. Our society also shuns poor, ignorant girls without dowries. I myself had originally opposed admitting young women who could not recite the office in Latin, and yet I once admitted an illiterate shepherdess -- Ana Garcia. I taught her how to read and write. I predict that after my death, she will become prioress of the Carmel Convent in Paris and Flanders and an author in her own right. Indeed, I'm laying the groundwork for a generation of scholarly, erudite nuns. So all worthy candidates, regardless of their backgrounds, will be admitted to St. Joseph.

-- There will be no consideration of lineage. I will simply be known as Teresa of Jesus. All property will be held in common. Nuns will wear brown habits of the cheapest cloth and sleep on straw-filled sacks. Genuine honor resides in a person's moral virtues and willingness to serve God.

-- Nuns would be enclosed, so as not to be entangled with worldly interests.

-- Nuns will engage in mental prayer. It is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves.

Friends, you will hear from the mayor who will ask you to consider the practicalities and the inquisitor who, no doubt, will question my sanity and disparage my spiritual practices. But you will also hear from a highly respected aristocrat and my close friend, Dona Guiomar who will vouch for my character and the wisdom of this proposal.

While I'm asking you to share whatever you have, whether its an extra blanket or food, or a few ducats, we vow to live as simply as possible. In return, we will be behold

not to the powerful and rich, who have corrupted our society, but beholden to you, the people of Avila, in our search for a true, authentic spiritual practice.

### **Mayor's Argument**

My dear friends and neighbors: As mayor, I will attempt to insert some sense into this raucous debate and controversy that has roiled our village of Avila. Should we financially support a Carmelite convent for twelve women?

Unfortunately, this comes at a time of great political instability. In 1556 Charles V relinquished his crown to his son Philip II who hoped to bring England back to the Catholic faith, destroy the influence of Luther and Calvin, and put an end to the threat of the Mohammedans whose ships have threatened the coasts of Italy. But his hopes were dashed. His English queen died. And now, Protestant heresy had spread even to Spain, and Spain's coffers have been stripped bare by the king's efforts to preserve Christendom.

We are threatened internally, as well as externally. The court's preacher was discovered to be a secret Lutheran and has committed suicide in prison. Nuns have confessed to being heretics and were strangled and burned in 1559. In 1560 twenty-nine Catholics were burned for secretly teaching Judaism.

The perils facing our great country of Spain have come to our doorsteps. We were once a prosperous stable town of 4,000 souls in 1515 when Teresa was born. Avila, as a center for wool production, is fortunate to be between the mountains in the north where the sheep spend their summers and the Southern plains of Extremadura where sheep are herded for winter. We are simple but proud people--weavers, dyers, carders, combers, spinners, fullers, as well as metal and leather artisans, and farmers. And, of course we have our aristocrats, between two and three hundred families.

But our community has changed. In the last decades, we have experienced plague, drought, famine, crop failures, and an influx of poor workers seeking employment, stretching our limited resources to serve 7,000 people. We are doing our best to repair city's roads, build new bridges, and construct aqueducts and wells. But,

economically, we are suffering. Despite our best efforts to regulate prices, wheat has doubled in cost and many poor people can't even afford to buy a morsel of bread.

We have responded to this great need by generously giving money from our limited resources to establish a hospital for the poor and to bring up impoverished children as servants.

Unfortunately, Teresa is breaking with tradition. Lay patrons endowed monasteries and convents, and the religious showed their gratitude to benefactors by offering intercessory prayers on their behalf. We now have five monasteries for men and four convents. Teresa's present convent is quite large, housing over one hundred nuns. So it's not like we need another convent. If a young woman wishes to join a convent, there are many options in Avila. Our system of endowed monasteries is working well. Be warned. Teresa's proposal is a radical and dangerous departure from our endowed religious houses. Nothing like this has been ventured in Spain before, and her proposal to establish a convent of twelve women dependent on the largess of Avila's general population is doomed to fail.

Let's be practical. 1. The nuns are living in a house and not paying rent. 2. The well for the house endangers the city's water supply. 3. Convents and monasteries in Avila need money. 4. Teresa's former convent, the Incarnation, is demoralized and stressed. 5. Teresa's convent welcomes girls who are illiterate, poor or those of Jewish blood. We don't want these women in our neighborhood.

I, personally, do not dislike Teresa. In fact, I find her to be intelligent, gregarious, and humorous. While I admire her personally, her proposal is ill-timed and poorly conceived. Since we are in severe financial straits and already have too many monasteries and convents, I urge the townspeople of Avila to reject the proposal to establish a convent that has no benefactors but us who must struggle to put bread on the table to feed our own families. We must think of ourselves first.

## **Dona Guiomar's Argument**

My name is Dona Guiomar. In many records, my name is only mentioned in passing—a female penitent counseled by the Jesuits. Others identify me as the devout widow who lives in a palace opposite the College of San Gil. Most of you know me as the devoted friend of Teresa de Ahumada. I'm here to testify on Teresa's behalf. Teresa is not a heretic, and she is certainly not deranged. She does believe in apostolic service, the power of mental prayer, asceticism, the reception of a direct religious experience without a priest, and contemplation.

I learned about her beliefs over the course of many evenings at the Convent of Incarnation. Teresa had a large private apartment at the convent with two levels connected by a staircase, and facilities for cooking and eating. Being that she was popular and witty, many of us loved to gather in her parlor and discuss the ills of society. It was here that we first discussed the idea of restoring the order's original rule that embraced simplicity and poverty. She lived in the Convent Incarnation for almost 20 years.

During this time, she became convinced that benefactors had too much control over spiritual matters. The problems that we see in Spanish society—injustices, wealth versus poverty, corruption—were prevalent in the monasteries and the convents. In addition, she suffered from spiritual aridity.

Then in 1555, Teresa, 40 years old, began to hear voices, see visions and occasionally achieved a mystical Union with God. She suffered great anxiety that these favors came from the devil, not God. Since then, Teresa has consulted many spiritual advisors. The Jesuits particularly encouraged her to continue on the path of prayer. It was at my house where she met such holy persons as Peter of Alcantara, who gave shape and meaning to her spiritual impulses.

She became convinced that many who have fallen away from the Catholic Church have done so because of the corruption in the church itself. She told me one day, "I was thinking about what I could do for God, and I thought that the first thing was to follow the call to the religious life, which His Majesty had given me."



It was out of this spiritual awakening she conceived, and her friends approved of, establishing a convent of discalced or barefoot nuns devoted to strict poverty. Teresa insisted that she and her nuns rely on the fruits of their own labor—sewing, for example—and God would move people to donate alms for their survival.

She proposed this radical solution to counter Protestants critical of the inequality and abuses in the Catholic church. There would be no social differences in her convent. All the sisters would be equal in their devotion to God and prayer.

When the idea of the convent was first proposed, I offered to fund it, but I had overextended myself at that time, and Teresa was set on establishing a convent without benefactors. I did play a crucial role in seeking approval from the holy man Pedro de Alcantara and petitioning Rome under my own name. Would I have risked my own reputation if I thought Teresa was a heretic? Certainly, not! In fact, I've personally suffered. My confessor refused to give me absolution in 1560 unless I divorced myself from this scandal.

I come before you now, with the greatest assurances that this modest proposal is blessed with God's grace. My friends, don't listen to the gossip-mongers and those who think only of themselves. Open your hearts to love. Open your hearts to twelve God-driven women who wish to live simply, work equally, and pray powerfully.

### **The Inquisitor's Argument**

My dearest friends.

As an inquisitor appointed to quell your fears and offer spiritual guidance, I've been asked to investigate the case of Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada. I hardly need to remind you about our past difficulties with heretics. In Castile, a number of alumbrados, or so-called enlightened ones, have rejected church-sanctioned devotional practices in favor of talking directly to God. Our investigations have revealed that many of these visionaries are conversos, that is, those who hold Abrahamic beliefs, or Jews, or women who claim to be lifted from this earth in rapture. Conversos have no honor, and women have no intelligence.

Do you recall Magdalena de la Cruz, a Franciscan nun in Cordoba? As a confidante of the queen, she was considered a saint. Fortunately, St. Ignatius Loyola suspected her of heresy. Magdalena claimed two devils by the names of Balban and Pitonio visited her at night under various disguises: a black bull, a camel, and even a Franciscan. She needled herself to imitate the sacred wounds of Christ. She is said to have lived on the Holy Host alone but in fact hid food in her cell. She had visions, made false prophecies, and claimed to perform miracles. And, there was even a pregnancy. Finally, she confessed to her crimes and was sentenced by the Inquisition to perpetual imprisonment in the Franciscan convent until her death in 1560. Make no mistake about it. Teresa is another Magdalene de la Cruz.

Let's not forget the wise words of the Jesuit, Padre Avellaneda, who said, "Don't waste time on women . . . but gently and firmly get away from them." Wise words, indeed! We will always be tormented with a certain type of emotional woman who imagines herself to be holy and thinks she can talk directly to God without the guidance of a spiritual advisor.

According to Teresa herself, she was praying on the Eve of All Saints in the home of the widow Dona Guiomar when a devil flew through the open window and perched on her prayer book and would not leave until she dashed the fiend with holy water. On another occasion, she told her spiritual advisor that she saw (and I quote) "a very abominable little black creature snarled as if furious at losing [that which] he had hoped to gain." She said the devil started to beat her, leaving her sore and exhausted. No one else witnessed this event; we have only Teresa's testimony. What are we to conclude?

Teresa's nuns at the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation think that she is deluded and possessed, and she has brought an atmosphere of suspicion to the convent. Perhaps she is a member of this new Lutheran sect or has returned to her Jewish roots, which she has concealed but we, of Avila, know all too well.

Teresa's family members on her mother's side are old Christians; that is, they were Christians before the expulsion of Jews in 1492. However, Sanchez, her father's family, is a common name of those who converted from Judaism to avoid expulsion. Her grandfather Juan Sanchez was tried and convicted of practicing anti-Christian

crimes and was paraded along with his children on successive Fridays in Toledo, wearing the yellow robe of shame. I don't intend to weary my patient listeners with a tedious recounting of Teresa's heritage, only to say that Teresa cannot claim *limpiez de sangre*—purity of blood—and that we must suspect her motives in opening her convents to Christian women of Jewish ancestry.

Not only must we be wary of Teresa's familial associations, but we must be alert to the fact that this religious woman has been seductively influenced by morally compromised books, that some call *Romances*, as well as many religious books that the church banned in 1559. She not only has read these books but she has even owned many of them. Be assured, my friends, we have now confiscated all of them.

In sum, we have before us an unstable woman who is delusional, espousing dangerous theological practices and reading banned books. Yes, she is a visionary, as she claims, but her visions are not from God, but from the devil.

She has come to the people of Avila asking to establish a convent for twelve women, yet she, herself, has broken her vows of obedience to the Carmelite order and has planted seeds of suspicion and discord within the confines of her own Convent of Incarnation.

I, as an esteemed member of the Dominicans, who has reviewed many cases of such deluded, misguided individuals who mean to drag all of us into the fiery pits of hell, stand before you today to denounce this handmaiden of Satan. Teresa must be stopped, and I'm counting on each and every one of you to do what is righteous.

### **Mayor (Rebuttal)**

Isn't it amazing that we are blessed with so many reformers who have endless ideas on how to spend our money? For the fact is if we each looked after our own brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles, there would be no need for charitable efforts. I realize this would be an ideal world, and we don't live in a perfect society. That is why the citizens of Avila have so generously assisted the poor despite the fact that our city is nearly bankrupt.

I don't mean to repeat what I've said earlier, but evidently my message has fallen on deaf ears. Back in 1515, when Teresa was born, wool was the backbone of Avila's

economic prosperity. Hundreds of sheep pastured to the north of us in the summer and passed through this area to the warm winter plains to the South. By 1560, almost thirty percent of our population was involved in the wool trade, whether it was sheep herding or weaving wool. It wasn't long before other countries' merchants discovered our fine wool and purchased it, leaving our weavers unemployed.

The gap between the rich and the poor has widened, but we are responding to the crisis. Don Pedro recently established a home for abandoned children who are being trained to be household servants, and he has organized emergency relief measures with the help of the nobility. Bishop Francisco Ruiz founded the Hospital of San Lazaro for the treatment of leprosy patients. The Confraternity of the Hospital of la Magdalene visits prisoners in jail and attends burials. Avila now has twelve hospitals for the poor.

Despite these measures, we are overwhelmed with the needs of the poor. One-third of our population begs for food. The price of wheat has doubled, plus we have a serious problem of drought and crop failure. We have little water, and yet Teresa wants to establish her institution near one of our few sources of water.

Everywhere we turn, we face problems more pressing than establishing yet one more convent for women. What if other nuns choose to break away from their convents and want to be supported by the town? This is just the beginning of a dangerous precedent.

For centuries, the wealthy have chosen to endow convents and monasteries. There is no conspiracy of corruption or abuse of power. Patrons leave an annual income to a religious house in exchange for burial in a particular chapel, and they mandate that prayers must be said for their souls in perpetuity. What is so abusive about this practice? If Teresa wants to establish a new convent, then I recommend that Dona Guimar and her friends endow it. Or perhaps she should turn to her own family, whose brother has reaped riches as a conquistador in the New World. Under no circumstances, should you be asked to share your limited resources for this ill-conceived charitable effort.

In short, our resources are exhausted; we've done everything possible for the poor people; we can't finance any more charities. Therefore I ask you to vote down this ill-advised scheme to open another convent in Avila.

As a side note, I want to remind you that our project for new aqueducts is moving forward, and we are looking to hire more workers. If you are more interested in making money rather than handing it out, see me after this debate. In the meantime, keep in mind this slogan, "We've done enough."

### **Dona Guiomar (Rebuttal)**

Never have I been so disappointed in the good people of Avila, spreading ugly rumors about my good friend Sister Teresa, talking about scarcity even as you hoard food, and praising yourselves for doing so many good deeds. I'm well aware that these are hard times and that you have done much to alleviate the suffering of the poor—all the more reason to welcome twelve or thirteen women in our midst who are devoted to praying for our welfare. If these women could bind the wounds of our sick, they would do, but the church has forbidden nuns to take an active part in the community. Their only recourse is to pray and pray they will do so without the distractions of material comforts and the demands of benefactors.

Why has such a modest proposal stirred such fury and controversy? The other day a mob pounded on the door of the convent, threatening to remove the nuns against their will. They've denounced the nuns for using water that is claimed by the town. Surely, the modest amount of water needed by these nuns will not disturb anyone's water supply. Some of you have expressed outrage that you will be asked to support yet another convent. We are not talking about Incarnation, a large convent with more than 100 women, but only a dozen women who wish to live cloistered lives devoted to God. Others have alluded to Teresa's Jewish background as if it were a crime. The crime was that Spain banished Jews in 1492, just because they were Jews. Many Jewish families had lived in this country for hundreds of years, and they had contributed to the wealth of this nation. When they left, Spain lost not only their wealth but also their talent and skills. Many Jews who have chosen to stay are devoted Christians who endure

suspicion and discrimination because of their Jewish heritage. Their pious daughters yearn to join convents but cannot because of this prejudice.

But this will not be the case in convents established by Teresa, who will welcome worthy candidates regardless of their background. And this extends to those girls who are illiterate and come from families so poor they cannot provide a dowry for their daughters to enter a religious institution. Not so in Teresa's convent. Teresa is a highly intelligent and gifted woman who learned to write at an early age. She has read many books and writes numerous letters and meditations. She has taken it upon her shoulders to teach her fellow nuns to read, and a number have subsequently excelled as scholars.

Don't listen to the fear mongers. Listen to your heart and you will find the courage to vote for the establishment of a convent truly devoted to God.

### **Inquisitor (Rebuttal)**

Don't let Teresa's wit fool you. Lest you be charmed by her spoken words, I wish to read from her written testimony:

"I saw an angel appear in bodily form close by my left side .... [He](#) was not large, but small, and extremely beautiful. His face was aflame with fire so much that he appeared to be one of the highest ranks of angels. In his hands, I saw a golden spear, with an iron tip at the end that appeared to be on fire. He plunged it into my heart several times, all the way to my entrails. When he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out, as well, leaving me all on fire with love for God."

I ask you, "Are these the words of a sane woman? How many people do you know who have been pierced by an angel?" There's more. She wrote: "The pain was so strong that it made me moan several times, and yet the sweetness of the pain was so surpassing that I couldn't possibly wish to be rid of it."

Obviously, this nun is mentally disturbed with evil sexual thoughts. And you want to permit this tormented soul to establish an unsupervised convent in your midst? She is mad and furthermore a heretic in suggesting that the angel who announced the coming

of the Lord to Our Blessed Virgin Mary would subsequently pierce her heart until she moaned with pleasure.

As your inquisitor and guardian of your souls, I have a duty to warn you away from such women who think they can talk directly to God without the benefit of a trained intercessor. In addition, there is the added worry that Teresa is Jewish on her father's side, with her grandfather having broken several infractions and was compelled to parade around the churches of Toledo in the shameful gowns of yellow as a penance. In light of this, the Inquisition has seized her autobiography and is keeping it under lock and key.

Teresa is deranged, ignorant, and she is a woman. She has broken vows of obedience to her own Carmelite convent, and she should not, under any circumstances, be allowed to spread her poison beyond the cell of a jail. I warn you: Should you be so misguided as to vote for Teresa's proposal, agents of the Inquisition are sitting among you and will be taking names. However, let's not end on such a harsh note. Rather, let Teresa have the last word. She once wrote: "Lord, either let me suffer or let me die."

Either way, it's time that we grant Teresa her wish.

### **Teresa of Avila's Rebuttal**

I always like having the last word. I can assure you that my words will be forthrightly honest, unlike those mouthed by the Mayor and the Inquisitor. The Mayor, in his affable manner, advised you to adopt the slogan, "You've done enough," along with an enticing invitation to participate in a public works project. Public works is a misnomer. It might be public but there isn't much work to be had unless you are related to the mayor. As for the slogan, "you've done enough," he really means he has done enough. Friends, there is so much trouble in the world, we can't ever say "we've done enough" unless we are dead and no longer alive to the suffering of those who live among us.

As for the Inquisitor, he suggests that I've committed blasphemy by suggesting that the angel who pierced my heart was the angel who visited the Virgin Mary. The explanation is simple. It wasn't the same angel.

Consider this, the inquisitor has pored over my writings and has discovered nothing that is worth burning. If he had spent as much time doing good works as he did in investigating me, he would have become a saint. Instead he is a puppet of the Spanish government, detaining people who have been accused of small infractions, seizing their property and giving it to the government, and then releasing the victims years later, broken and impoverished. How can you side with such a man?

If you are swayed by the mayor's argument, you are voting out of self interest. If you side with the Inquisitor, you are voting out of fear.

This proposal for a convent of women who wish to live simply and equally, without consideration of rank or money, is the beginning of a reform that could change the monarchy, the church, and even ourselves, if you only have the courage to vote without self-interest or fear. As I once wrote, "To have courage for whatever comes in life - everything lies in that."



## Epilogue

What was the actual outcome of this controversy?

Despite numerous attempts to shut down Teresa's convent, she prevailed. A lawsuit to remove the convent was eventually dropped. Heartened, Teresa proceeded to travel throughout the country, establishing sixteen more convents.

By 1568, however, she realized that her convents in small rural communities were not financially viable, and she had to accept benefactors' donations. As the economic situation worsened and she became older, and some argue, more practical, she accepted girls with dowries, the bigger the better, but never refused a good candidate, regardless of the lack of financial means to enter the convent. Only five years after Teresa's death, the male Discalced Carmelites stipulated a minimum dowry payment for novices, which meant novices came from wealthier families. Even more devastating, the newly written rules for this order of Carmelites were rewritten to block the entrance of descendants of Jewish *conversos*. The restrictions were so strict that Teresa herself could not have joined her own convent. Even Dona Guiomar, Teresa's faithful friend who championed reform, later requested burial inside a fashionable new monastery.

Avila continued its decline and became a backwater village, north of Madrid, for centuries. As it turned out, it was a blessing, as the town is now quaint and charming with its medieval walls and twisted streets intact, devoid of the glaring disruption of modernism. Today, Teresa is a star in Avila, where you can visit the convent of Incarnation, her first convent of St. Joseph still housing cloistered nuns, and the site of her family home, now an impressive museum. You can buy a peculiar kind of candy, called the Egg Yolks of St. Teresa and Teresa souvenirs, as well as eat at the St. Teresa of Avila sushi bar.

There was such enormous tension between the two Carmelite orders that the Pope separated them in 1580. I could not find reliable statistics on the number of members for either order. The headquarters of the Carmelite men and women in the United States is located in Darien, Illinois. The Secular Order of the Discalced

Carmelites operate the Basilica at Holy Hill, Wisconsin. There are 18 women in the Monastery of Discalced Carmelites in Des Plaines.

Two notable individuals followed in the footsteps of Teresa: St. John of the Cross who wrote on the desert of the soul and the nineteenth-century St. Therese of Lisieux who became the second woman doctor of the Catholic Church.

All of Teresa's written works were impounded by the Inquisition but not burned. While she was investigated by the Inquisitors throughout her life, she was wily enough to avoid their clutches. The Spanish Inquisition, started by Queen Isabella in 1478, was not abolished until 1834 by Isabella II.

Finally, in the 500th anniversary of this remarkable woman's birth, let's give the last word to Teresa. Her advice might particularly apply to members of the Literary Club: "Never affirm anything unless you are sure it is true."