

# A Satirical Critique

## Introduction

by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D.

### Introduction

Once in prayer Teresa heard the words, “**seek yourself in me.**” She sent them to her brother Don Lorenzo that he might reflect on them. He was not able to penetrate what lay hidden in the words so he consulted his spiritual friends.

The consultation took place at Christmas time in 1576 at the monastery of St. Joseph in Avila.

Those who took part in the discussion in the presence of the bishop of Avila and the nuns were: Julian of Avila, John of the Cross, Francisco de Salcedo, Don Lorenzo de Cepeda. Madre Teresa was not present. She was staying in Toledo.

The outcome was a decision by the bishop that those present should write out their reflections on the meaning of the words and that they be sent to Teresa for her judgment. The nuns also sent their reflections.

The style of Teresa’s response is shaped by the kind of satirical ceremony held in Spanish universities before pronouncing a doctor’s degree. These were comical sessions where the candidate became the subject of festive jest by both students and professors. Teresa stated that she had no intention of saying anything good about what had been written. Her critique of their written reflections sparkles with a kind of playful satire.

Today the only contestant’s response that has been saved is Don Lorenzo’s. The nuns of St. Joseph’s also sent their reflections. What we know of Teresa’s judgment of them is contained in her letter to Don Lorenzo, January 2, 1577: “Some of the Sisters’ replies made me laugh. Others were extremely good and have given me light on the matter.” As for Teresa’s own thoughts on the words, they may in part be found in her poem *Seeking God*. K.K.