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# EDITH STEIN: A STUDY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY MYSTICISM

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements

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*Ann Michele Nolan*

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For Fiona Wylie McAlpine  
no ordinary lover of the Truth

"Only God makes saints. Still, it is up to us to tell their stories. That, in the end, is the only rationale for the process of 'making saints.' What sort of story befits a saint? Not tragedy, certainly. Comedy comes closer to capturing the playfulness of genuine holiness and the supreme logic of a life lived in and through God. An element of suspense is also required: until the story is over, one can never be certain of the outcome. True saints are the last people on earth to presume their own salvation - in this life or in the next.

My own hunch is that the story of a saint is always a love story. It is a story of a God who loves, and of the beloved who learns how to reciprocate and share that 'harsh and dreadful love.' It is a story that includes misunderstanding, deception, betrayal, concealment, reversal, and revelation of character. It is, if the saints are to be trusted, our story. But to be a saint is not to be a solitary lover. It is to enter into deeper communion with everyone and everything that exists."

Kenneth L. Woodward

## ABSTRACT

Edith Stein 1891-1942, born Jewish, converted to Catholicism and ten years after her conversion became a Carmelite nun. Nine years later she was killed in the concentration camp at Auschwitz. The intentions of the Nazis at Auschwitz were clear: Edith Stein died because she was born Jewish.

For the Catholic church however, the manner of her death has qualified Edith Stein for beatification as a martyr. Catholic tradition gives the name martyr to those who have died expressly for the sake of their faith, and their love of Christ. The church's inclusion of Edith Stein among the ranks of the martyrs has placed her in an extremely controversial position: to whom is she a martyr? Did she die because she was Jewish or because she was a Catholic?

This thesis examines the development of Edith Stein's spirituality towards mystical prayer and union with God and claims that she is demonstrably a mystic. It further discusses why she is an atypical mystic in the Catholic tradition. Nonetheless, it will be shown that mystic is a more complete and authentic description of her than controversial and questionable martyr.

The thesis has three parts, and eight chapters. The first part of three chapters discusses Edith Stein's search for the truth up until the time of her conversion to Catholicism. Chapter one draws largely on her autobiography for instances of her reflections on God and spirituality. The second chapter analyses the influences on her in her academic life, of others who were or became Christians, and her own experiences of God, which culminated in reading the *Life of Teresa of Avila*, resulting in her conversion to Catholicism. An indepth analysis of the ongoing influence of Teresa of Avila on Edith Stein is presented in chapter three.

The second part of the thesis which comprises chapters four and five contains a comprehensive and critical analysis of Edith Stein's growth in Catholicism and mystical prayer. Chapter five focuses on her major

philosophical and theological works in which her understanding of the ascent to the meaning of being and mystical theology as related to her own life, is demonstrated.

The final part discusses the place of mysticism in the Catholic church. Six classic Catholic mystics are described in chapter six and in chapter seven they are compared and contrasted to Edith Stein. Chapter seven argues that on three essential points Edith Stein is a mystic, if an atypical one. These are, her conversion, her understanding and definition of mysticism itself and her controversial status of being perceived to be a martyr. Chapter eight presents an argument to show that Edith Stein is demonstrably a mystic but that the political reasons surrounding her sainthood status serve to distort a full focus on her mysticism in favour of presenting her definitively as a martyr.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am also indebted to Sister Lucia Wiederhoven OCD (formerly of Germany) of the Carmelite Monastery in Darlington for many translations of as-yet unpublished material by or about Edith Stein, as well as for her knowledge of and appreciation of the debate that surrounds Edith Stein.

From the seminars I have been invited to give at the Carmelite Monastery in Varroville, N.S.W., Australia, I have also learned much about Carmelite spirituality. Many of my insights have been tested and refined through discussions with members of this community. My special thanks to the current prioress, Sister Jennifer OCD, and former prioress, Sister Elias OCD, for allowing me, an outsider nonetheless, to lead a Carmelite life on two separate occasions. This experience has remained with me.

The community of the Carmelite Monastery in Auckland, New Zealand, have provided me with much material from their library and archives which I could not have otherwise obtained. I am very grateful to all of them for their unstinting help and support.

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To my friends of Le Béguinage - you know who you are - my grateful thanks for being with me.

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uncomplainingly undertook extra burdens to allow me time to complete the work involved in this thesis.

Finally, but most specially, I extend my gratitude to Fiona McAlpine, who read and commented on the text, and who was always there with her challenging suggestions and analytical skills, which gave precision to the ordering of my ideas and concepts. Thank God for pedants! Edith Stein would understand that.

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## INTRODUCTION.

Born into a Jewish family, Edith Stein (1891-1942) became a Catholic in 1922, entering the rigid and centralised Catholic world which had arisen in the aftermath of the first Vatican Council. In her native Germany, National Socialism and Nazi ideology were seriously threatening the Jewish community and causing alarm and division in the Christian church. Within philosophy, of which she became a student in 1913, the accepted canons of philosophical discourse, whether idealist or rationalist, were being challenged by the ideas of Edmund Husserl. Edith Stein's intellectual and religious development reflect these and many other complex pressures in her social and personal environment.

Philosophical phenomenology attracted Edith Stein because of its apparent promise to help further her search for truth and objective reality. Studying under Edmund Husserl, she gained a reputation as a philosopher in her own right through the articles on phenomenology she contributed to Husserl's *Jahrbuch*, and for organising and editing Husserl's work as his assistant from 1916 to 1918. Edith Stein's own works first began to be published in 1917. They have seldom, however, been recognised as philosophical milestones. The best known of them is her doctoral study *On the Problem of Empathy*, completed in 1916 and published a year later. It was last reprinted in 1964. Her reputation as a philosopher is based more on her important historical connections than on any of her own actual writings, but nonetheless these early philosophical works have gained her a limited place in the development of phenomenology in its German beginnings.<sup>1</sup> s After her conversion to Catholicism Edith Stein applied the phenomenological method to the study of Catholic spirituality, writing several works on the relationship between phenomenology and Thomist philosophy.

"Substantive as these philosophical and cultural contributions are, the importance of Edith Stein for the expression and development of modern Catholic spirituality lies in her work on Carmelite mystics written

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. 2nd edn. 1969. Vol. I. p.223.

after she entered the Carmelite order and adopted the name Sister Benedicta."<sup>2</sup>

However, the works from this second wave of Edith Stein's philosophical endeavours were not published or widely circulated because of the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi government, which had already in 1933 excluded Edith Stein from occupying any academic post, on the grounds of her race.<sup>3</sup> Because of her death at Auschwitz as a victim of Nazi ideology, and because she is in the process of being canonised by the Catholic church, most of the writers on Edith Stein know about and focus more on her death than on her life or her writings. Only after she was proclaimed a martyr, on 25 January 1987, has her doctoral thesis re-emerged into public prominence, along with others of her philosophical and theological works.

On the simplest interpretation, Edith Stein was gassed at Auschwitz because she was Jewish. Initially her cause for sainthood, opened in 1962, was based on proving her heroic virtue because it was assumed she was killed because of her race. Yet the circumstances of her arrest and extermination have also been considered by the Catholic church to have been a direct retaliatory action against it. It is on these grounds that the church began the process of proclaiming her a martyr.<sup>4</sup>

Since 1987, the year of her beatification,<sup>5</sup> there has been a growing interest in Edith Stein the person: the Jewess who converted to

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<sup>2</sup> Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers (eds), *Christian Spirituality*. New York: Crossroad. 1989. p 158.

<sup>3</sup> Civil Service Law 4th April 1933. This law "barred Jews from public service positions, including railways, courts, schools and universities. Jewish teachers and professors were likewise ousted from their posts." Frederick L. Schuman, *The Nazi Dictatorship*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1936. pp.319 - 321.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints*, New York: Simon & Schuster. 1990. p. 137.

<sup>5</sup> Beatification is the preliminary stage towards full canonisation. A beatified person receives the title "Blessed" (Latin *beatus*), as opposed to the full title "Saint". In 1983, during the course of Edith Stein's beatification process, the rules changed, which had implications for her process, as will be shown in Chapter Eight. Before beatification, what is known as the candidate's "cause" used to be put before the Congregation of Rites by its advocate, the Postulator. The cause is based on the candidate's posthumous "fame of sanctity" or "fame of martyrdom". Once the cause had been accepted by the Congregation and its "introduction" deemed opportune by the Pope, the Apostolic Process began. Somewhat like a legal case, the Apostolic Process investigated the evidence and called witnesses to testify to either "heroic practice of virtues" or martyrdom. The surest kind of evidence, the

Catholicism, and chose to become a Carmelite nun, and the author of significant scholarly, philosophical and religious works. Most of the writers on Edith Stein since her beatification, however, are eulogising rather than academic. Among these are members of her own family and members of the Carmelite Order. Such writers and commentators on Edith Stein are concerned to present her as an outstanding convert and practitioner of the Catholic faith. She is claimed to have been an "outstanding philosopher and famous lecturer" by Sister Teresia Renata Posselt, the first to write her biography.<sup>6</sup> Many subsequent writers relying on the statements made in this work reiterate that Edith Stein was a brilliant and renowned philosopher and phenomenologist. However, most display little knowledge of the intellectual climate in which her thinking developed, or of the actual extent of her philosophical and phenomenological scholarship.

I shall suggest that such claims made by enthusiastic and sympathetic writers amount to attempts to maximise Edith Stein's attributes and abilities in order to add to her greatness as a holy woman worthy of canonisation. To do this, I suggest, actually clouds our appreciation of the spiritual aspirations and integrity that make her outstanding as a person of faith. Edith Stein's philosophical achievements remain secondary, and at best a vehicle in her search for truth. Her continuing search for truth was conducted through philosophy because she chose to use the phenomenological method after her conversion and in the monastery. Spiegelberg rightly claims that, important though her phenomenological legacy was, especially in her magnum opus, *Finite and Eternal Being*, her strictly phenomenological work must be kept apart from her later interest in Thomas Aquinas and the subsequent transfer of her philosophical allegiance to Thomistic

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"unequivocal proof of the approval given by God to the life of the future *beatus* or *saint*", is a properly-attested miracle. Only then was the way ready for beatification, and once more at this stage the Pope had to give his approval to the decision of the Congregation of Rites. Once the candidate had been beatified, further miracles were required before full canonisation. (Summarised from *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967. Vol. I pp.55-59.) The current process is simpler and is no longer based on the courtroom model; rather, it is in the hands of a *relator* whose job is to produce a well-documented critical biography. See Woodward, *op.cit.*, pp.90-91.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Josephine Koeppel OCD, *Edith Stein: The Intellectual Mystic*, Wilmington: Michael Glazier. 1990. p.27.

philosophy. Phenomenology now came to occupy a mainly supplementary role as handmaiden to Thomism.<sup>7</sup> As Edith Stein stated:

"This is a time which is no longer content with methodical considerations. People have lost their moorings and are in search of something to hold on to. They want concrete, material truth which proves itself in actual living. They want a 'philosophy of life.' This is what they find in Thomas."<sup>8</sup>

The distinction outlined by Spiegelberg is an important one as it shows the secondary status of philosophy in Edith Stein's search for ongoing truth through the eyes of her faith.

From her baptism on 1st January 1922, Edith Stein's interior longing for God was directed towards contemplation. She wanted to become a Carmelite nun. From 1922 to 1933 however, she followed a career as a teacher and lecturer on Christian womanhood and Christian vocation, as the result of a decision made with her priestly spiritual directors to put her intellectual talents at the service of the church.

On 14th October 1933 she did finally enter the Carmelite order, a religious order committed to a life of contemplation and penance in an atmosphere of silence. While there she continued to write articles on mystical theology and to comment on doctrine within a philosophical and theological framework, until her death in Auschwitz on 9th August 1942.

Among the many attributes that have been claimed for Edith Stein - philosopher, feminist, atheist, teacher, Carmelite, writer, martyr, saint - she is rarely referred to as a mystic. And yet it is her search for truth and eternal values which she proclaimed in both word and deed that makes her outstanding in life, and a candidate for being considered as a mystic rather than as a martyr. This thesis is concerned with analysing Edith Stein's journey to truth and sees her mysticism as more true of her than her martyrdom.

The traditional Catholic description of mysticism historically has included experiences of visions, stigmata, ecstasies and miracles coming

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<sup>7</sup> Spiegelberg, *op.cit*, p.224.

<sup>8</sup> Spiegelberg, *op.cit*, p.224.

from God, accompanying lives of deep prayer focused on Christ. I will maintain that while Edith Stein's mysticism is not typical of traditional Catholicism, yet, by her own definition and descriptions of mysticism, she is a mystic, and it is this concept of mysticism which I wish to explore in this thesis. .

It will be argued that Edith Stein is a mystic in a twentieth-century sense of the words mystic and mystical journey, in that she focuses, as many commentators of this century do, on the essential hidden life of deep prayer. She accepted that the saints in the mystical tradition described their transcendental knowledge of God and Christ from within their particular cultures and the interpretation of doctrine of their times. So too she described her path to faith out of her experience and knowledge of God and the place of religion in her times. Edith Stein was an ordinary person, but her extraordinary demonstration of her commitment to union with God through the spiritual life she led distinguishes her as a mystic.

The beatification of Edith Stein under the category of martyr has clouded her essential mysticism. Mystics are much more often categorised as Religious or Holy Men and Women; these categories of saint emphasise what is called "heroic virtue" as the test of sanctity. This emphasis would fit much more the heroic virtue and spiritual integrity which make up Edith Stein's mysticism. The Vatican appears to have chosen to make her a Catholic saint for political reasons.<sup>9</sup> This move has placed her at the centre of a controversy as to whether she was killed because she was a Jew or because she was a Catholic. The momentum this controversy has gained and continues to gain serves to detract from her being perceived and appreciated as a mystic.

As far as is possible, I will use Edith Stein's own writings, reflections, letters and philosophical works to substantiate my claim. There have been difficulties in getting access to these resources. Because of copyright difficulties between the Archive in Cologne and the Archive in Belgium, where most of Edith Stein's philosophical works and unpublished correspondence are housed, it has not always been possible to obtain complete texts. So few of her published works - five out of

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<sup>9</sup> Woodward, *op.cit*, pp.129 - 151.

sixteen volumes - have been translated from German into English. For translations of the available works in German not yet translated into English, I have had to rely on private translations from a languages historian and translator from the university of Heidelberg, and other competent speakers of German.

As well, many of Edith Stein's letters have not yet been published or translated. I consulted the originals when I visited the archive in the Carmelite Monastery in Cologne, Germany, where I also interviewed the archivist, Sister Amata Neyer OCD. This interview was conducted in the German language with the assistance of an interpreter. I am relying on translators, not only for material written by or concerning Edith Stein, but also for the philosophical works by others that I shall be citing. This means I also have to live with the translators' sometimes gender-exclusive language. It does a disservice to Edith Stein's feminism to translate "Mensch" as "man" rather than as "human"; but only in some private translations have I and my translators been able to be sensitive to the nuances of the German language as we would translate it into English today. Notwithstanding these difficulties, I will draw as much as possible from Edith Stein's own works to illustrate her spiritual development.

Because the later writers Hilda Graef and Waltraud Herbstrith quote from Edith Stein's own works as much as possible, I prefer to use Graef and Herbstrith as secondary sources, rather than using her earliest biographer, the unabashed hagiographic Sister Teresia Renata Posselt, OCD. Sister Teresia Renata (who had been Mistress of Novices during the novitiate of Edith Stein at Cologne) published her biography in 1952 and dedicated it

"to the memory of a woman who radiated the light of truth in an age which loved darkness more than light."<sup>10</sup>

Posselt's writings will be more than once demonstrated in the coming pages to fall short of modern scientific or academic canons of the truth; they are dictated more by what Sister Teresia Renata doubtless saw as the common position that she and Edith Stein would occupy in the areas

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<sup>10</sup> Sister Teresia Renata de Spiritu Sancto Posselt OCD, *Edith Stein*, London: Sheed and Ward. 1952. p.vii.

of the Catholic faith and the Carmelite vocation. Viewed from today's standpoint, Sister Teresia Renata's book is a meditation, devotional reading for those who know that truth is not dependent on footnotes. Hence it is that Sister Teresia Renata will often couch things in the language of pious Carmelitism, notwithstanding the ways in which Edith Stein upheld her own persona within the monastery. Everything Edith Stein wrote was to be published as "by Edith Stein", not the more usual "by a Carmelite nun" or under her name in religion.<sup>11</sup> Throughout this biography however Sister Teresia Renata uses Edith Stein's name in religion - Sister Teresia Benedicta of the Cross - rather than referring to her as Edith Stein, a holy woman in her own right. I follow my subject, therefore, in referring to her as "Edith Stein". It was Sister Teresia Renata who in 1958 drafted an official study of Sister Teresia Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) at the request of the Archbishop of Cologne for the opening of a Cause for Beatification and Canonisation of Sister Teresia Benedicta of the Cross.<sup>12</sup>

However, even Graef and Herbstrith rely heavily on Sister Teresia Renata for certain interpretations or formulations of biographical data, and it is for this reason that it is so important that all assertions be verified, so far as is possible, from Edith Stein's own writings. In many cases I may have to extrapolate backwards in order to do this but at least I will be able to show in such cases that what Sister Teresia Renata, Graef and Herbstrith claim as Edith Stein's state of mind at a given point is not inconsistent with her own later reflections on the subject. To make a case for Edith Stein as a mystic rather than as a martyr will require the most meticulous documentation of what she herself said, did, and thought.

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<sup>11</sup> Edith Stein's name in religion was Sister Teresia Benedicta of the Cross OCD (Order of Discalced Carmelites).

<sup>12</sup> "Texts for the Beatification of Edith Stein" in *Carmelite Studies* IV(1987): p.311.

CHAPTER ONE  
SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH

Edith Stein was born in Breslau, Germany on the 12th of October 1891. She was the eleventh child of Siegfried and Auguste Stein. Four of her brothers and sisters had died before she was born, leaving her the youngest of seven children.

In July 1893, Edith Stein's father died, leaving her mother as head of the family and manager of the family sawmilling business. Edith Stein tells us that an atmosphere of the Jewish religious tradition was consciously upheld in the Stein home. Paintings on the walls depicting biblical scenes and the history of the Jewish people were in evidence. Such scenes reflected the spirit and world view of her mother who upheld an orthodox style of devout Judaism.

All the precepts of the Jewish law and the major Jewish feast days and holy days were observed by her mother and the extended family. Yet Edith Stein reports that while her own generation upheld their sense of pride in their race, they were less observant of its religious practices.<sup>13</sup> Her mother did not succeed in maintaining in her children a living faith in Judaism. Despite Edith Stein's apparent indifference to the faith her mother upheld, her relationship with her mother remained a close one.

She describes her relief when younger nieces and nephews took over liturgical roles of the youngest member of the family group on the feast of the Passover.

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<sup>13</sup> Edith Stein does not provide any specific reasons as to why she considered her generation were less observant of Jewish religious practices. From the 1880's onwards however, there was a marked cultural and economic upheaval in Germany, with a rise in anti-Semitism. The Christian Social Party of 1878 organised by Adolf Stöcker was supported by German nationalists who called for the assimilation of Jews into German Christian culture before they could be considered and accepted as Germans. Eugen Dühring proposed in 1881 that the Jews were a biological danger to German cultural identity especially those who gained entry by converting to Christianity. Jewish religious reform, inspired by the new philosophies which were impacting on German thought, was in the process of reviving Jewish religious thought. With the growing modernisation across Germany, indeed across Europe, the anti-Semitism and changes in Jewish religious thinking, it is perhaps not surprising that young Jewish people did not maintain a clear focus on their own faith.

"I welcomed the presence of nephews or nieces who could take over this role from me. As things were, the celebrations lacked some of the solemnity due them since only my mother and the younger children participated with devotion. The brothers whose task it was, as substitute for their deceased father, to recite the prayers, did so with little respect. When the elder one was absent and the younger had to represent the head of the house, he made clear his opinion that it was not to be taken seriously." <sup>14</sup>

The aridity of the Jewish religion as she experienced it at this point is further expressed in her reaction to her uncle's death in 1903. When faced with bankruptcy, this relative committed suicide. Edith attended the funeral and commenting upon the eulogy and other Jewish orations observed

"there was nothing consoling about them...nothing of faith in a personal life after death, nor any belief in a future reunion with those who had died lay behind these words. Many years later, when for the first time, I attended a Catholic funeral, the contrast made a deep impression upon me." <sup>15</sup>

This impression was based on the Catholic rite's emphasis on the divine mercy of a living personal God. Her reaction was:

"How consoling and calming were the words of the liturgy which accompanied the deceased into eternity." <sup>16</sup>

A year later another uncle also took his own life as a response to financial difficulties. The thirteen-year-old Edith became aware of the fact that a disproportionately large number of Jews were ending their lives by suicide owing to the economic war<sup>17</sup> against Jews. <sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Edith Stein, *Family*, p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid* p.81.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid* p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> Anti-Jewish feelings in Germany intensified in the 1870s. Policies which arose out of the new anti-Semitism discriminated against Jewish businesses."The new anti-Semitism [Wilhelm Marr's concept of anti-Semitism focused on biological descent whereas previously Jewish persecution was largely based on religious grounds first appeared in Central Europe after a major stock market collapse in 1873, followed by persistent economic difficulties and cultural malaise." Robert M. Seltze, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, New York: Macmillan. 1980. p. 628.

She observes again the lack of her experience of a personal, eternal God and on this occasion comments:

"I believe that the inability to face and accept the collapse of one's worldly existence with reasonable calm is closely linked to the lack of any prospect of life in eternity. The personal immortality of the soul is not considered an article of faith; all one's effort is concentrated on what is temporal."<sup>19</sup>

In this thirteenth year of her life, Edith Stein reflected on such events while she was staying with her sister Else and brother-in-law Max in Hamburg. These family members had also abandoned their Jewish religion.

Edith Stein does not say why Else and Max abandoned their Jewish faith, but comments that it was painful for her mother who attended their wedding. She tells us:

"My mother had to make some allowances which were not at all to her liking. Most painful of all was the fact that the engaged couple refused to consider a religious ceremony. Both were utter nonbelievers."<sup>20</sup>

My existence in Hamburg, now that I look back on it, seems to me to have been like that of a chrysalis in its cocoon. I was restricted to a very tight circle and lived in a world of my own even more exclusively than I had at home. I read as much as the housework would permit me. I heard and also read much that was not good for me. Because of my brother-in-law's specialisation, some of the books that found their way into his house were hardly intended for a fifteen year old girl. Besides, Max and Else were totally without belief; religion had no place whatsoever in their home."<sup>21</sup>

This observation seems to indicate that Edith Stein had the kind of freedom that allowed her to explore and follow her interests in an unsupervised way. Perhaps this awakening of a sense of intellectual freedom appeared to be in direct opposition to the mental restrictions

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18    ibid p.82.

19    ibid p.82.

20    ibid p.90.

21    ibid p.148.

that religious observance might represent, as shown by her remarks above about the Passover. She goes on to say that at this time:

"Deliberately and consciously I gave up prayer here. I took no thought of my future although I continued to live with the conviction that I was destined for something great."<sup>22</sup>

With an intellectual acceptance of the possibility of the existence of God and of eternal life, but with no confidence in them, Edith Stein consciously gave up whatever faith she had in Judaism and considered herself an atheist until the age of twenty-one. But the God that she abandoned was not a personal God; it was the God presented to her through Judaism. She had had no experience of a personal God and felt no encouragement to seek one. .Therefore because she perceived no personal deity with whom a relationship was possible, it is inevitable that prayer would diminish in meaning and relevance for her. The decision to give up formal and organised prayer and adopt what she called an atheistic stance then was a decision to discard what was not meaningful, while remaining open to discovering what was. As she describes herself:

"My passionate search for truth was actually an unending prayer."<sup>23</sup>

During her years at school her search for truth was channelled through her talent for abstract thinking and being prepared to ask questions that were important to her. She was interested in testing things for objective standards by which they could be judged. Her experience of learning at school is summed up in her comment:

"I was taken seriously in school. Perhaps I said some things in class which most of my fellow students did not understand. But I was unaware of that, nor did the teachers give any indication of having noticed other than by giving me good marks." <sup>24</sup>

### Study of the Structure of the Human Person.

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid* p.148.

<sup>23</sup> "Heil im Unheil" in Edith Stein, *Werke*. Vol.X p.142

<sup>24</sup> Edith Stein, *Family*, p.79.

In 1911, after successfully completing her school-leaving examinations, Edith Stein began her studies at the university of Breslau to prepare for her chosen career in teaching. She included psychology in her course of studies because it seemingly offered a way of seeing into the structure and the soul of the human person. This study was motivated by her search into the underlying coherence and truth of human existence.<sup>25</sup>

"Since it was the soul as centre of the human person that appeared to her as the fundamental problem, she decided that the study of experimental psychology would best help her along the way to truth."<sup>26</sup>

Her psychology of person becomes a philosophy of person, proceeding through questions related to describing the link of the essence of person with the question of an ontology of spirit, and concluding that the three-fold unity of person is made up of body-mind-spirit. However, psychology at this time was limited to the observation of exterior human acts, thus limiting reality to sensory perception. Edith Stein's search was frustrated because she felt that the quantitative and deductive approaches based on natural sciences methodology were determined to prove the soul she was investigating did not exist at all.<sup>27</sup> The idea of soul or spirit was eliminated from the positivistic and reductionist theories of her lecturers at Breslau, Honingswald and Stern. Behind Edith Stein's beginnings in psychology and through her philosophical writings, the central theme of the structure and essence of the human person underpins her thought.

Through Stern's seminar in 1912-1913, Stein was attracted to quotations from Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and became interested in the philosophical system that he founded, phenomenology. Edmund Husserl was born in Moravia on 8th April 1859. After primary and secondary education in Vienna he entered the University of Leipzig to study mathematics and physical sciences. He furthered his work in

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25 Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein*, San Francisco: Harper and Row. 1985. p. 10

26 *ibid* p.10

27 *ibid* p.10

mathematics at the University of Berlin leaving there in 1881 to return to Vienna where he completed his doctorate with a dissertation on the calculus of variations. After hearing the philosophical lectures of Franz Brentano during the years 1884 to 1886, Husserl devoted himself to philosophy. His university career took him from the University of Halle from 1887 to 1901, to Göttingen from 1901 to 1916, and ended at Freiburg im Breisgau where he was a full professor until his retirement in 1928.<sup>28</sup> Husserl's commitment from the start was a battle against relativism. In his quest for a philosophy which was a rigorous science, Husserl tried to show that his phenomenology could be transcendental and prove that certain rules were basic and essential to all human thinking. Edith Stein was inspired by Husserl's

"rediscovery of 'Spirit' towards a purified knowledge, freed from conceptual apparatus, which could get at the being of things through an intuitive perception of their essence." <sup>29</sup>

Edith Stein's interest in phenomenology grew as she became increasingly disillusioned with psychology. She comments:

"I was twenty-one years old and was full of expectations. Psychology had deceived me."<sup>30</sup>

Edith Stein therefore discontinued psychology as a discipline that could aid her in the search for truth. She said:

"All my study of psychology had persuaded me that this science was still in its infancy; it still lacked clear basic concepts; furthermore, there was no-one who could estimate such a essential foundation. On the other hand what I had learned about phenomenology, so far, fascinated me tremendously because it consisted precisely of such a labour of clarification and because, here, one forged one's own mental tools for the task at hand." <sup>31</sup>

### From Psychology to Phenomenology

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28 Summarised from Maurice Natanson, *Edmund Husserl Philosopher of Infinite Tasks*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1973. p.xiii

29 Herbstrith, op.cit, p. 11.

30 E. de Miribel, *Edith Stein*, Paris 1953.p.37

31 *Family*, p.222

It was this non-deductive approach to phenomena, this precise approach to the "things in themselves" through an intuitive perception of their essence, that was the essential attraction for Edith Stein. Psychologism she felt was too rationalistic and wanted to make objective truth dependent on the thinker, while Husserl's method seemed to offer a way of describing the givenness of intuited phenomena independent of reliance on deductions of a psychological or empirically demonstrable nature. Phenomenology was associated with the Göttingen and Munich phenomenological schools. So, drawn by Husserl's investigations into *Nature and Spirit* and his phenomenological method, Edith Stein changed universities in pursuit of the truth: she went to Göttingen.

In Göttingen in 1913, Edith Stein became part of the "Göttingen Circle", founded mainly by Husserl and Adolph Reinach, who came there in 1905. Theodor Lipps also came to Göttingen in 1905, and Hedwig Conrad-Martius joined the circle in 1910. Thinkers like Max Scheler and these younger philosophers were attracted by Husserl because of his postulations of an a priori knowledge of essences. Max Scheler was a Catholic of Jewish descent; the three younger philosophers were all Jewish, and were also asking serious questions about Christianity, as did many later members of the circle. Spiegelberg noted that the frequency of conversions by members to Christianity, particularly to Catholicism, was related to the phenomenological approach. He stated:

"The truth of the matter would seem to be that the phenomenological approach in its openness to all kinds of experiences and phenomena is ready to reconsider even the traditional beliefs in the religious field in fresh and unprejudiced manner. That Catholicism, and particularly Augustinianism with its emphasis on intuitive insight, had a marked advantage over Protestantism at the time may have been due partly to the neo-orthodox tendencies in Protestantism with their exclusive emphasis on supernatural revelation and Biblical faith."<sup>32</sup>

Another reason why Catholicism may have seemed attractive to these young people - although Spiegelberg does not mention it - was that

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<sup>32</sup> Spiegelberg, *op.cit*, Vol. I. p 173.

the intellectual ferment within Catholicism at this time, baptised "Modernism" by its opponent, Pope Pius X, was at its most widespread in Germany.<sup>33</sup> A theology which wanted to take as its starting-point "ordinary human experience and ordinary human knowledge"<sup>34</sup> would have been seen as akin to phenomenology in philosophy, and, like phenomenology, at an exciting forefront within its discipline. So the new world of phenomenology and phenomenologists provided a point of entry for Edith Stein to consider spirit, soul, person, spirituality and religion in her search for truth.

Husserl, having established a firm foundation for developing the new philosophy of phenomenology, also restored ontology to new respect. He opened up to scrutiny, both the reality of the visible objective world and the reality of the transcendent. Husserl acknowledged his respect for Thomas Aquinas regarding essence and ontology when he said that phenomenology "converges towards Thomism and prolongs Thomism"(de Miribel. p.73).

Husserl's life was completely centred in his philosophical activity focussed on the development of a rigorous science in his search for radical certitude. His passion for truth and intensity of intellect attracted and inspired his students to have confidence in examining everything from a position of impartiality and non-prejudice. As Natanson puts it, "He represented philosophy in its incorruptible essence", and his personality and teaching abilities are well summed up by Professor W.R. Boyce Gibson in his Freiburg diary of 1928:

"I wish to set on record here how immensely I am impressed with Husserl's personality. He is wonderfully good to his students, takes endless trouble to make things clear to them. He is full of the significance of his work, but with nothing petty about him.....He has strong feelings, and it is chiefly - so I gather from his conversation - the tremendous effect of the war upon his *Lebens* and *Welts-anschauung*, his inability to see Reason at work in the world (he lost one son in the war

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<sup>33</sup> "If there was any nation on earth beset with 'modernists' it was Germany. From Bonn to Braunsberg, from Münster to München, 'modernists' were the rule and not the exception...'Modernists'...were the backbone of the German theological world." Thomas Michael Loome, *Liberal Catholicism, Reform Catholicism, Modernism*, Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag. 1979. p.94.

<sup>34</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, Minneapolis: Winston Press. Study edn. 1981. p.234.

and another was blinded in one eye) that makes him regard all Lebens- and Weltanschauungen as *Privat*, and concentrate on the Pure *Apriori* Reason of Phenomenology as the sole field in which one's faith in Reason can have its perfect way. He has a strong, great personality, simple, intense, devoted. He makes a perfectly excellent host, he is a good clear lecturer but particularly efficient as leader of the Seminar."<sup>35</sup>

Husserl and his contemporaries, particularly Max Scheler, seriously challenged empiricism, relativism and the Kantian notion that the a priori was solely grounded in and belonged exclusively to the area of the rational.

The phenomenological movement as such was short lived. It seems too early in terms of history to evaluate the contribution of the phenomenological movement in the development of western philosophical thought. Over the period mentioned and up until the 1930s phenomenology was largely associated with Husserl and German thought. At this point it was in its main phase which was one of slow formation and transformation resulting from Husserl's quest for a philosophy as rigorous science. While Husserl is universally accepted as the founder of phenomenology, within thirty years his methodology and phenomenology had been absorbed and extended by existentialism.<sup>36</sup>

Husserl was so committed to a phenomenology free from unexamined propositions, that he continually rethought his phenomenological project. The result was that his works never formed a closed philosophical system. Possibly this is why other philosophers were able to choose eclectically from phenomenology to add to existentialist thought.

By the 1930s "French phenomenology developed an amazing creative vigor"<sup>37</sup> when thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gabriel Marcel attempted to integrate the insights of phenomenology with those of French existentialism. French phenomenology thus established itself as leading the development of phenomenology. Spiegelberg refers to Husserl as a "venerable

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35 Natanson, op.cit, p.XV

36 Spiegelberg, op.cit, p.21

37 ibid p.22

beginner" <sup>38</sup>of phenomenology. His contribution was not so much that his philosophy became dominant but that contemporary philosophy seeks expression in phenomenological method.

Spiegelberg argues that the coherence of the phenomenological movement in Germany has been overestimated by the French, especially the relationship between Husserl, Scheler and Heidegger. He concludes:

"Too much of the best early German phenomenology published in Husserl's yearbook has so far remained practically unknown and hence ineffective."<sup>39</sup>

These points are made to show that the philosophical context in which Edith Stein was working was very local and specific. Many of Husserl's most ardent followers at the Göttingen School, including Edith Stein, developed their own ideas and furthered their investigations on the basis of his earlier practical descriptive phenomenological method in preference to the later "idealistic" theory.<sup>40</sup>

As Herbstrith confirms, in terms of its history, by 1913 when Edith Stein arrived, the "Golden Age of the Göttingen school had already passed."<sup>41</sup> With the advent of World War I and Husserl's departure from Göttingen, the society dispersed by 1917. Notwithstanding this rise and demise of the Göttingen School, it is important to analyse its influence and relevance on Edith Stein's spiritual development as well as her philosophical development. Furthering her interest in Husserl's thought, and her knowledge of the phenomenological method, Stein read the first and second volumes of his *Logical Investigations*. She describes the first volume as being epoch-making in its criticism of the then prevailing psychologism and all relativism. It was the second volume containing Husserl's treatment

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid* p.163

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* p.xxix

<sup>40</sup> See Edmund Husserl *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, The Hague: Nijhoff. 1950, in which Husserl adopted his transcendental perspective. This preceded *Logical Investigations* (1900) and *Ideas I* (1913) but was not published during his lifetime.

<sup>41</sup> Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.14

of problems in logic with what became his phenomenological method which captured her response:

"The *Logische Untersuchungen* (Logical Investigations) caused a sensation primarily because it appeared to be a radical departure from critical idealism which had a Kantian and neo-Kantian stamp. It was considered a 'new scholasticism' because it turned attention away from the 'subject' and toward 'things' themselves. Perception again appeared as reception, deriving its laws from objects not, as criticism has it, from determination which imposes its laws on the objects."<sup>42</sup>

This comment shows she was not only clear about Husserl's thought but open to discovering the complexities of the method. Her ultimate purpose was to discover truth beyond her ambition to be a philosopher in her own right. Certainly at this point her attraction was to the method which promised access to the truth of whatever phenomenon might be being described. The confrontation of a phenomenon objectively and impartially and without ideological prejudice, was what mattered. The Husserlian method Stein sought to understand and use fitted her ideal of intellectual honesty.

### Encounter with Christianity

Max Scheler had an intellectual forum at the Munich School prior to his appearance in the Göttingen School in 1910. Scheler became popular with Husserl's students during the informal meetings and seminars which frequently occurred in cafes. At this time he was not welcome at the university, indeed, he was barred because of a scandal involving a marriage breakup.<sup>43</sup>

The students of philosophy were attracted to his original ideas, positing and probing questions of a non-intellectual nature e.g. love, hate, sympathy, sanctity. Scheler challenged the students to take account of all phenomena, on the grounds that all phenomena are valid objects for investigation. Scheler at this time was particularly concerned with questions of faith and religion. As Spiegelberg confirms:

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<sup>42</sup> *Family*, p.250

<sup>43</sup> *Family*, p.258.

"These were the years (1910-1916) when Scheler formally rejoined the Catholic church."<sup>44</sup>

Max Scheler was born a Jew, the son of a Jewish mother and a Gentile father who converted to Judaism. As a child Scheler received no formal religious instruction. Inspired to seek God by a Catholic priest who taught him, Scheler became interested in religion and was baptised a Catholic at the age of fourteen.

While still at university, Scheler married. The marriage took place in a civil ceremony as his wife had already been divorced thus placing Scheler outside the bounds of the Catholic church.

In 1907 when Scheler went to teach at the university of Munich, he became part of the Munich school of phenomenology and re-questioned his Catholicism. He described this experience saying that

"the more guilt increases, the more it is concealed from the one who is guilty, but the more humility increases, the more visible even the smallest trespass becomes."<sup>45</sup>

While still at Munich before he came to Göttingen, Scheler was divorced. His desire to become a full member of the Catholic church again permeated his philosophical ideas. During the Göttingen years Scheler's Catholicism was based on Christianity being the true and absolute religion. His conception of the human person was of one that was dependent, held in being through the Absolute Being. In Catholicism alone, he believed, was true knowledge of God and of love possible. He held the Catholic church to be divine in origin and the infallible guardian of the truth of Christ's word. In 1915 Scheler wrote:

"That in every matter concerning religion, the Church must be listened to and obeyed, that her knowledge is preferable to what the individual thinks he knows. The Church's knowledge is supreme because love is supreme."<sup>46</sup>

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44 Spiegelberg, op.cit, p. 237

45 Max Scheler, "Reue und Wiedergeburt" in *Menschen*, p.40.

46 Max Scheler, "Die Christliche Liebesidee und die gegenwaertige Welt" in *Menschen*, p.135.

Edith Stein's first encounter with the hitherto-foreign world of faith as expressed in Christianity came through the intellectual medium of the 1913 lectures given by Max Scheler for the Philosophical Society in Göttingen. He clearly had a considerable influence on Edith Stein. She describes Husserl's approach to students as being an education to "rigorous objectivity and thoroughness to a radical intellectual honesty" in abstract matters (Life : 259). Whereas she contrasts Scheler's

"practice of scattering about ingenious suggestions without pursuing them systematically [which] had something dazzling and seductive about it. Moreover, he chose topics of vital importance to his young listeners who, consequently, were easily affected by them."<sup>47</sup>

The effect of Scheler on Stein, as expressed in her own words, is one of fascination:

"In no other person have I ever encountered the 'phenomenon of genius' as clearly. The light of a more exalted world shone from his large blue eyes. His features were handsome and noble; still, life had left some devastating traces in his face."<sup>48</sup>

Edith Stein acknowledged that Scheler's influences on her included and surpassed the sphere of philosophy. First, his questions on non-rational states included the notion of sympathy, the theme of his first book.<sup>49</sup> Stein comments:

"These (questions) had special significance for me as I was just then beginning to occupy myself with the problem of empathy."<sup>50</sup>

Secondly, his interest in the discussion of religious matters, especially Catholic ideas, influenced Edith Stein's spiritual journey. It is in this

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<sup>47</sup> *Family* p.259

<sup>48</sup> *ibid* p. 259

<sup>49</sup> Max Scheler, *Phenomenology and the Theory of the Feelings of Sympathy*, published in 1913.

<sup>50</sup> *Family*, p.260

area she identified his influence on her spiritual journey when she reports:

"He was quite full of Catholic ideas at the time and employed all the brilliance of his spirit and his eloquence to plead them. This was my first encounter with this hitherto totally unknown world. It did not lead me to the faith. But it did open for me a region of 'phenomena' which I could then no longer bypass blindly. With good reason we were repeatedly enjoined to observe all things without prejudice, to discard all possible blinders. The barriers of rationalistic prejudices with which I had unwittingly grown up, fell and the world of faith unfolded before me."<sup>51</sup>

Scheler's influence affected Edith Stein's perspective on how she viewed the religious aspirations of her friends and associates. Edith Stein acknowledged that she did not resist their religious leanings but needed to give the world of faith serious thought. At this point however, this decision remained as intellectual assent only. She did not "embark on a systematic investigation of the questions of faith" because she tells us she was too busy with other matters <sup>52</sup>. Edith Stein was content, she says, to accept the stimuli coming from her surroundings but acknowledged "almost without noticing it (she) became gradually transformed"<sup>53</sup> Transformation at this point is passive and not rejected.

I have summarised Scheler's relationship and initial influence on Stein's spiritual development. In Chapter Two I will relate this to her doctoral study with reference to Scheler's ongoing influence evident in this work on empathy. Even more interesting than Scheler's influence, however, are the spiritual undertones contained in Edith Stein's work on empathy as examples of the transforming process she was undergoing while she was explicitly stating her work was purely philosophical. The direct references to God and the infinite provide clues to Stein's inner struggle to make sense of the reality of the God within.

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51    ibid p.260.

52    ibid.p.261.

53    ibid.p.261.

So far this chapter has claimed that phenomenology was the springboard for Stein's discovery of the world of faith and the eternal dimension. Because of the relationships she developed in the Göttingen circle, discussions with these philosophers and phenomenological method itself carried a greater influence on questions of faith for Edith Stein. Her search for truth through philosophy was answered for her when she found her truth in Catholicism. Edith Stein was a competent philosopher but as she continued to follow the truth to live in authenticity in relationship with God, philosophy became more and more a means to that end.

### Christological Experience

If Scheler introduced Edith Stein to Christian thought, then the Reinachs lived out what Scheler taught. Edith Stein's relationship with Adolph and Anna Reinach contributed still more to the transformation she has described. Because of his ability to relate to people, Reinach was admired by the young students. In a sense he was a mediator between the students and Husserl. Reinach adopted the function of a tutor, assisting the students to assimilate what Husserl taught by giving them much opportunity to test out their ideas and theories. Husserl also encouraged this testing but focused mainly on teaching the students to adhere strictly to the methodology of phenomenology when questioning the abstract. Edith Stein's first experience of Reinach's relational qualities is found in her description of their initial interview:

"After this first meeting, I was very happy and filled with deep gratitude. It seemed to me that no one had ever received me with such genuine goodness of heart. That close relatives, or friends one had known for years, should be affectionate in their attitude was self-evident to me. But here was something entirely different. It was like a first glimpse into a completely new world." 54

Edith Stein is not just describing the idyllic philosophical and social climate of her first semester in Göttingen, but the effect of the personality and integrity of Reinach. She was aware that his search

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54 *ibid* p.249.

into philosophical questions was intertwined with a personal search of the place and practice of religion. On meeting his wife and family Stein confirms her ongoing experiences of the love and goodness which emanated from the Reinachs.

At the end of the term in Göttingen, Stein stayed on to continue working on her thesis. Her philosophical questions became difficult and unclear to her. She described her loneliness and intellectual aridity was such that she felt despair, and questioned whether she had the ability to continue. Life was unbearable to the point that there were moments when she felt she

"could no longer cross the street without wishing I could be run over by some vehicle. And when we would go on an excursion I hoped I would fall off a cliff and not return alive." 55

She was only happy and secure when working with others and participating in Reinach's seminars. When the sessions were over her inner security would turn to a "solitary struggle which would begin all over again" (Life : 198).

Stein sought the support of Reinach in this period of intellectual and emotional struggle. She describes this support:

"I was like one reborn. All discontent with life had disappeared. I felt as though I had been rescued from distress by a good angel. By one magic word, he seemed to have transformed the monstrous offspring of my poor brain into a clear and well-organised whole."<sup>56</sup>

This trust in Reinach brought further clarity into the beginnings of her own interior transformation and religious consciousness when Adolph Reinach and his family became Christians. In the foreword to Reinach's collected works, Hedwig Conrad-Martius wrote that long before he adopted Christian language, Reinach believed that

"Humanity was exiled with Adam; and that disorder and chaos did not simply 'straighten themselves out'; an

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55    ibid p. 278.

56    ibid p.284.

awareness which weighed upon him until he embraced the faith of Christian hope."<sup>57</sup>

During his years in the Göttingen School he discussed questions of religion. Instances of his own interiority appeared in his teaching. For example in his teaching of the a priori foundation of the civil law, he included instances of purely spiritual acts as being silent prayer such that communicates to God without speech and lips. <sup>58</sup>

Anna, his wife, shared her own struggles toward faith with her husband. While he was serving at the front during the war from 1915 onwards they communicated frequently. These letters included their insights into faith. Adolph Reinach's maturing towards conversion is clear in his letter dated 23rd May 1916. He wrote to her:

"My plan is clear before my eyes; it is very modest. I should like to start from the inner experience of God, the experience of being sheltered in Him, and shall be content to show that 'objective science' cannot gainsay it.

To do such a work with humility is most important now, far more important than to fight this war. For what purpose has this horror if it does not lead to God."<sup>59</sup>

Adolph and Anna Reinach were baptised Lutherans in late 1916 when Adolph was home on leave from the army. Nearly a year later in November 1917, he was killed in action at Flanders.

Edith Stein experienced God when she visited Anna Reinach after Adolph Reinach's death in 1917. His death had serious implications for Edith Stein, not only because of the love and support she had received from him, but also because it was Reinach along with Husserl who instigated and was the core of the Göttingen philosophical circle where she developed her philosophical ideas and accepted matters of a religious nature as valid phenomena. Edith Stein went to visit Anna Reinach with the two-fold purpose of expressing her condolences and of compiling and editing Adolph Reinach's papers. Herbstrith reports

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<sup>57</sup> Adolph Reinach, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Halle: Max Niemeyer. 1921. p.xxvii.

<sup>58</sup> Adolph Reinach, "Die Apriorischen Grundlagen" in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Halle: Max Niemeyer. 1921. p.193.

<sup>59</sup> Reinach, op.cit, p. xxxi.

that "rational arguments crumbled" in the face of first-hand experience of the faith of Anna Reinach.<sup>60</sup> Instead of being crushed by the tragic loss of her husband, Anna Reinach exhibited hope and peace based on her faith in the Christian God. Herbstrith further says that Edith Stein, staggered by this woman's acceptance of this loss as God's will, stated:

"It was my first encounter with the cross and the divine power that it bestows on those who carry it. For the first time, I was seeing with my very eyes the church, born from its Redeemer's sufferings, triumphant over the sting of death. That was the moment my unbelief collapsed and Christ shone forth - in the mystery of the cross." <sup>61</sup>

However, we must remember here that Herbstrith is reporting Sister Teresia Renata, a writer who did not know Edith Stein at the time that this happened. The language is churchly, Christological; this is the natural language for Sister Teresia Renata, and may have been natural to Edith Stein at the point when she met Sister Teresia Renata after ten years in the church and a good thirteen years after Reinach's death. It is interesting to read other accounts of this transformation: Graef, for example, quotes Jan Nota S.J. in article he wrote in 1947:

"He writes that she [Edith Stein] was quite shaken by the fact that Frau Reinach, 'through her utter faith in a loving God, became a consolation to her husband's friends rather than needing herself to be consoled'."<sup>62</sup>

Graef does not load this experience with the extra, Christological dimension, but rather sees it as a first step in the "slow process of conversion" which then began in earnest, aided by the kinds of reflections Edith Stein found in Reinach's papers.

We do indeed find in Edith Stein's later writings a corroboration of her primary conception of Christ as Christ crucified and it is interesting that the suffix she took for her name in religion was "of

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<sup>60</sup> Herbstrith, *op.cit.*, p. 24

<sup>61</sup> *ibid* p.25.

<sup>62</sup> Hilda Graef, *The Scholar and the Cross*, London: Longmans. p. 24. It is however interesting to note that Nota, a philosopher of Dutch origin, did not meet Edith Stein until 1941.

the Cross." In *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* (Finite and Eternal) Being she writes that being at one with Christ entails suffering with the Crucified, yet being also redeemed with Him to arrive at a new knowledge of the love of God and at a new realisation of oneself as a redeeming force. Because God has loved us first and his love was made manifest in Christ, she says that God's love is unfolded in the person who surrenders to Him. She uses the image in John's gospel (John 7:38) "From within him there shall flow rivers of living water", to show that when we surrender to the Father, God is able to renew in us His son, with whom He is united and made at one with the Holy Spirit in one great act of love. This transformation in the person is such that the person in yielding to the power of Christ within becomes strong:

"To act in a way that is now beyond nature; he rises to the heroism of love, loving not only his friends and his brethren, but his enemies, everyone who comes his way. No longer the plaything of likes and dislikes, he is free."<sup>63</sup>

This is the changed inner world that results from the primary perception of Christ on the cross. As she says in *Kreuzeswissenschaft*: "The closer the soul moves toward Him, whom she cannot see, the more flaming her desire - in these flames too is she cleansed".<sup>64</sup> We can only gain redemptive power by sharing in Christ's life, which includes sharing in his sufferings and aligning our own to these. Anna Reinach in her surrender may well have been the first person Stein had encountered to have demonstrated such sharing, the first person to allow herself to be formed in the pattern of Christ's death and ultimately his resurrection.

Anna Reinach may well have been the seed from which Edith Stein's later reflections developed. However, it is probably telescoping history to say with Mother Teresa Renata that "Christ shone forth in the mystery of the Cross" in that one instant. As Edith Stein reflects and records, if the person of Christ is someone with whom we are intimately linked then "we cannot escape the judgment of a Person with whom we

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<sup>63</sup> Paraphrased from Edith Stein, *EES*, pp. 421 and 410

<sup>64</sup> Edith Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft* Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts. 1950 p.228

are in daily contact".<sup>65</sup> If we are shaped and formed to the Crucified Christ, we are also shaped to eternal citizenship with him. She says:

"The way of the Incarnate Son of God leads through the Cross and Passion to the glory of the Resurrection. In his company the way of every one of us, indeed of all humankind, leads through suffering and death to this same glorious goal."<sup>66</sup>

While this insight aided her to move towards faith and belief in God, she did not convert to any particular Christian church but remained aware of her own internal struggle to make sense of the existence of God and the place of God, if any, in her life. She comments on her faith development at this point stating:

"A convinced atheist learns through personal experience that there actually is a God. Now faith can no longer be eluded. Yet he can still refuse to ground himself in it or let it become effective in him, choosing instead to hold on to the 'scientific world view' that he knows an unmitigated faith would be the end of...Or again, someone can offer me affection. There is no way I can stop him from doing it, but I don't have to respond to it. I can always pull myself away."<sup>67</sup>

Here she accepts she is in relationship to God, an experience she had not previously known. She is open and responsive and any ability or desire to withdraw is now surrendered. This is evidenced in her response to reading the autobiography of Teresa of Avila, a mystic and doctor of the Catholic church.

### "That Is the Truth"

As was her custom, Edith Stein visited the farm in Bergzabern that belonged to Hedwig Conrad-Martius and her husband. In the summer of 1921 Hedwig made the comment that:

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<sup>65</sup> Edith Stein, *Writings*, p.30

<sup>66</sup> Edith Stein, *op.cit*, p.22.

<sup>67</sup> Edith Stein, "'Psychische Kausalität, Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften,'" in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, V(1922): p.228. Cited in Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p. 27

"It was natural for her [Edith Stein] to come and stay with us for weeks at a time like all the other phenomenologists. We had the same friends that she did....During Edith's last visit, we were both in the middle of a religious crisis. We stuck very close to each other like people walking along a narrow ridge, waiting for the divine summons to come at any moment. It did come, but ended up taking the two of us in two different directions." 68

Edith Stein's comment after reading Teresa's autobiography that "what she has read is the truth" she has been searching for (reported in Posselt p.64, Graef: p32, and Herbstrith p.30) demonstrates two things. First, it is a moment in the continuation of the transforming process in which she had been immersed through the influences of the people described in this chapter. Secondly, Teresa of Avila's experience confirmed for her that God is not a God of intellectual knowledge alone. God is beyond being just an idea to be analysed - God is love. God does not reveal mystery to the deductive intelligence, but to the heart that surrenders itself to him (Herbstrith p.30).

The mystical insights and experiences of Teresa finally provided those answers that Edith Stein had been hoping to find in philosophy. This Carmelite saint enabled Stein to go beyond all finite phenomena to the noumenon: the eternal, transcendent, infinite God. The quality and intensity of Teresa of Avila's description of her experience of intimacy with God showed Stein that God can be experienced in relationship. She recognised this relationship as being the truth she was searching for. Religion in this way is not just a matter of following a prescribed set of doctrines about God; it is a state of being in union with God, a state distinctive in all mystics.

The impact of reading the life of Teresa of Avila not only contributed to Stein's conversion to Catholicism in 1922, but led her towards becoming a Carmelite nun. In this context she deepened her understanding of mystical union. Her life became absorbed with the desire to be transformed into union with the Infinite. Chapter three will describe

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68 Hedwig Conrad-Martius in *Edith Stein, Briefe an Hedwig Conrad-Martius*, Munich: Kosel-Verlag, 1960, pp.65 and 72. Cited in Herbstrith, op.cit, p. 30.

in more detail the impact that Teresa of Avila had on this understanding.<sup>69</sup>

### Conclusion: Philosopher or Theologian?

The philosopher Professor Joseph Moller in 1956, at the dedication of the Edith Stein Student Wing in Tübingen, said of her:

"while never abandoning serious reflection as a Christian,[she] came to place the love of the Crucified above all philosophical investigation and debate. Though to some extent she expressed this love in words (for the words are undeniably there), so fully did she express it in action that, by comparison, the significance of her work seems to become almost insignificant."<sup>70</sup>

Professor Moller also made the important point that her "intense piety made it practically impossible for her to bring any genuine intellectual interest to the problems of theology" (Herbstrith: p.85).<sup>71</sup> When she continued writing as a Catholic, and more specifically as a Carmelite nun, Edith Stein's thinking remained largely within the methodology

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<sup>69</sup> Chapter Six will give a definition of mysticism and describe six Catholic mystics as examples typical of those in the Catholic tradition. These will be contrasted to Edith Stein to show that a) she is a mystic in the Catholic tradition, b) she is by her own definition a mystic and c) that is is atypical. Her journey to this status is not typical of these of her spiritual ancestors.

<sup>70</sup> Herbstrith, op.cit, p.79.

<sup>71</sup> According to Moller, "For all her undeniable philosophical brilliance, as far as we are concerned her [Edith Stein's]work has become remote. Philosophy has since moved in other directions. It is true that a confrontation with Husserl's thought has yet to be accomplished, but this is the later Husserl, with whom, for all intents and purposes, Edith Stein was not familiar. For her, as for Hedwig Conrad-Martius, the late Husserl remained basically unknown. Heidegger she more or less rejected, based on an overly one-sided reading of Being and Time. The further question regarding the possibility of discovering common ground between the late Husserl and the later Heidegger, in spite of all their differences, was, obviously, something that Edith Stein could not consider. Yet today, it is precisely from that angle that we have to consider the whole issue of a "philosophy of being and essence" - very differently from the way Edith Stein handled it. Today it is the acknowledgement of the limitations of historicity and language, and the further issues such a recognition raises, that seem to offer the best possibility for creating a link between phenomenological thinking and a philosophy of being. Compared to these, Edith Stein's integration of early phenomenology and Christian platonism necessarily recedes into the background. Even taking into account her thoroughgoing critique of Thomas on many individual points, her works remain too strongly apologetic of a philosophy of essence to which we ourselves can relate cautiously at best." Cited in Herbstrith, op.cit, p.85.

which she developed while in Göttingen and Freiburg. As has been claimed, her philosophical skills were secondary to her faith development and her articulation of this. To claim her as a world-renowned philosopher per se is not accurate, and adds nothing to her integrity and sanctity as a woman of faith.

I suggest that the most important fruit of Edith Stein's years in philosophical circles was the relationships she built and the influences these connections had on her spiritual growth. It is more accurate to say of Stein as Spiegelberg does that:

"Husserl's last important Göttingen student and first assistant in Freiburg has become almost a legend, largely because of her personality, her conversion to membership in the Carmelite Order, and her end in the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz." <sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Spiegelberg, op.cit, Vol. 1. p.223.

## CHAPTER TWO

### INFLUENCE OF PHILOSOPHERS

Chapter One considered some crucial philosophical and religious influences on the intellectual and spiritual development of Edith Stein. This chapter discusses the furtherance of her interest in questions relating to the structure and essence of the human person, which culminated in her decision to examine and describe the concept of empathy. The Husserlian phenomenological method, as Edith Stein understood it at this time, and the philosophical influence of Max Scheler, will also be outlined as part of this process. The discussion will conclude with Edith Stein's references to God and religion in *On the Problem of Empathy*, seeing these, in particular, as powerful examples of the influence of Max Scheler and his Catholic ideas on her reflections on God and the human person, and on her own life.

#### The influence of Husserl "The Master"

The first part of the two-fold influence which encouraged her to study empathy came from Husserl. Edith Stein confirmed:

"In his course on nature and spirit in the same year, Husserl had declared that no experience of the outside world was possible without intersubjectivity, that is, without there being a plurality of knowing individuals, bound together through reciprocal comprehension. The experience of the outside world, then, demands a preliminary experience of other individuals. Influenced as he was by the works of Theodore Lipps, Husserl called this experience 'Einfühlung'<sup>73</sup> but did not say in what it

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<sup>73</sup> The word *Einfühlung* is derived from the Greek word *em - pathos* meaning "to feel in" - *em* "in" and *παθειν* "to feel". The Greek word *pathos* is about something being very strongly emotional in the sense of being beyond the rational. The German language is close to the hearts of the people in the sense that the language contains as it were, the "feeling" of description of the experiences of the people speaking it. *Einfühlung* is an intuitive process which requires openness, listening. In other words nothing comes from the person experiencing *Einfühlung* because one is drawn to the state of the experience of *Einfühlung* by the other. One cannot will to start, as it were, the state of being in *Einfühlung* or to stay in that state. The "being there" that *Einfühlung* brings comes from outside ourselves. It is this *Einfühlung* and abandonment in the experience of it Edith Stein talks about as the quality of human experience that brings us into authentic relationship at the level of *Einfühlung*.

consisted. Therefore there was a void in that area: I determined to examine what the Einfühlung is." <sup>74</sup>

Phenomenology for Husserl was not a doctrine but a method. This method took a fresh look at everyday phenomena based on analysing "the things in themselves" on their own terms and as far as possible free from conceptual presuppositions and metaphysical deductions. His method purported to be without theoretical bias, a philosophy without assumptions. What he meant was that nothing can be accepted that has not been examined and scrutinised as to its character and recognised as a feature of experience. Husserl, like Scheler, differed from the rationalists in that while he agreed that there are a priori truths of reason, he did not accept that there was some faculty of reason that would identify such truths. He defended the view that there are necessary truths that can be established by intuition. This he summarised as "intuition of essences".

Husserl attacked psychologism, claiming the actual structure of human consciousness and essences cannot be discovered in a study of psychology because what were claimed by this discipline to be necessary truths are in fact reducible to principles which govern what we do or think. Husserl said:

"Psychologism is a form of specific relativism since it tries to argue that the meaning of truth and logical laws may change or evolve with the evolution of the actual constitution of the human mind. Whatever the form is which psychologism takes, it will deduce "the necessity of laws from the contingency of facts". <sup>75</sup>

For example, the laws of arithmetic, according to the psychologist, are empirical laws formulated on the basis of our experience of counting. For the psychologist, says Husserl, all concepts are abstractions from experience and all knowledge of the world is empirical. Freed from psychological theory, Husserl's method took the form of analysis of phenomena exploring them by untutored intuition in search of their essential connection and structures.

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<sup>74</sup> Philibert Secretan, "The Self and the Other in the Thought of Edith Stein", in *Analecta Husserliana*, VI(1977): p.88.

<sup>75</sup> Husserl, *Investigations*, p.146.

Phenomena for Husserl are purely what he called "intentional" in nature, and not something other than physical objects, nor something other than experience. Farber gives a good illustration of what Husserl meant:

"To speak of an intentional object is not the same as to speak of a 'real thing.' The tree of 'real nature' does not require a consideration of whether one properly perceives it or not, if one speaks of its sense. A perception is in itself perception of this tree, this table etc. The perceived cannot be separated from the perception so long as it is what it is. Perception is, in short, an intentional experience, and has (immanent in itself) an intentional object. It has this 'object as meant.' We say that the tree in the picture 'is' not in reality. Nevertheless there is the tree before our eyes, with its sense. There is obviously a shifting of meaning. This illustrates the significance of the distinction between the tree sheerly and the 'tree' in quotation marks. The latter is the intentional pole of the perception in question."<sup>76</sup>

Therefore Husserl's intentionality is vital to an understanding of his analysis of phenomena as the basic data of his phenomenological method.

Husserl does not present a theory of phenomena in the Kantian sense. Kant distinguished between phenomena which are given in intuition, and noumena which lie behind intuition. Husserl dissolves this distinction, insisting that phenomena are in fact things in themselves, i.e., *reality-as-intended*.

From Franz Brentano his teacher, Husserl took this Thomistic concept of intentionality, i.e. the idea that consciousness intentionally always takes an object.<sup>77</sup> To think is to think about something. This being the case, says Solomon,

"means that if our conscious acts are always directed towards objects we should not talk about conscious acts

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<sup>76</sup> Marvin Farber, *The Aims of Phenomenology*, New York: Harper and Row. 1966. pp.107-108.

<sup>77</sup> According to Thomas Aquinas we can reach beyond ourselves and participate in the being of other things; not literally but intellectually, immaterially. Thomas Aquinas speaks of *in-tentio*, of *in-tendere* i.e. "to stretch forth" thus linking the knowable with the knowers.

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* l. q. 84, a. 1; q. 85, a. 1-4.

as self-contained 'contents' that are mysteriously coordinated with the movements of our bodies."<sup>78</sup>

So consciousness is the matrix and source of all phenomena. Consciousness is not used in the psychological sense as something that happens neurologically in the brain which we perceive in having awareness. Without denying the neurological aspect of consciousness, Husserl maintained that it is in the actual structure of consciousness itself that its essential character of being the bearer of perceptual reality is located. By structure, Husserl meant that every act of thinking implies something thought of. Phenomenologically speaking, phenomena are always *intended* beyond being merely acknowledged in perception. As previously stated Husserl held the view that consciousness is always intentional, i.e. always directed towards something. It cannot be said that one should know, without knowing something. When we love, we love something; in an idea something is ideated; when we know we know something. All these are examples of intentions of "acts" of consciousness. There can be differences in intention and differences in consciousness, but there is never consciousness without an intended object of consciousness.

The reduction or "epoché" postulated by Husserl assures that the object, i.e. the phenomenon as the intentional object of experience, will allow value-free judgment. The term epoché as Husserl used it before 1925, when Edith Stein was investigating empathy, meant to "put out of action" (*Ideas* : Husserl. p.,19), or bracket out questions of existence in the sense of restraint with regard to one's own participation in or complicity with experience. We are forced to describe consciousness and its objects, rather than the world and its objects.<sup>79</sup> So epoché involves a reflective, or detached, disengaged attitude to intentional objects enabling these to be analysed in their pure states. As objects of consciousness these are thus enabled to reveal their essences in an immediate and direct manifestation, as they appear to be.

"When we grasp an essence and the necessary essential laws grounded in it (Wesenheit and Wesengesetze) then

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<sup>78</sup> Robert C. Solomon, *Introducing Philosophy*, San Diego, etc: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich. 3rd ed. 1985. p.401.

<sup>79</sup> Josef Seifert, *Back to the Things in Themselves*, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1987. p.19.

we may do so while 'bracketing' the existence of the given essence. In other words, even if we prescind from the issue of the real existence of the being in question, even if we regard this being as possibly a mere product of our dreams, the 'pure essence' (Wesenheit, Idee) of the given object becomes visible. 80

Edith Stein kept strictly to Husserl's precise method describing the 'givenness' of the intuited phenomenon of empathy.

### Scheler : Deepening Philosophy to Spirituality.

Before Husserl and Scheler, German philosophy was dominated by Kantian and neo-Kantian formalism.<sup>81</sup> Kantian formalism held that the a priori resided solely in the rational domain.<sup>82</sup> In order to establish a concept of ethics which had universal validity and purity, Kant claimed it was absolutely necessary to found ethics on a formal concept of duty based in the categorical imperative<sup>83</sup> free of all material input or content. Scheler rejected these notions of Kant's. He also criticised the opposite viewpoint of relativism which held that "There is no single correct view of reality, no single truth."<sup>84</sup>

While Scheler was in agreement with Kant over the condemnation of utilitarian ethics, he argued against the Kantian position. Scheler's example of moral acts demonstrates his position. Scheler held that each moral act realises a concrete moral value beyond merely a formal and general rule; e.g. it is an act of justice, or patience, or love. Therefore, since moral values are determined in content, they are material and must necessarily be material value-ethics. Scheler insisted that the human spiritual dimension, including the emotional faculties

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80 Seifert, op.cit, p.80.

81 Kantian formalism was the rescuing of ethics from "the relativism of a merely empirical approach by deriving it from a priori principles. But he had done so by a merely formal ethics...Kantian formalism, in an attempt to show that apriorism need not be merely formal, but that it may equally well be based on the non-formal values which thus far were the exclusive domain of empirical ethics. The synthesis was to be found in phenomenological ethics." Spiegelberg, op.cit, Vol. I. p.252.

82 Max Scheler, *Formalism*, p. 54.

83 "I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Law. Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. (trans) E.J.Paton. London: University Library. 1972. p.67.

84 Solomon, op.cit, p.203.

of the spirit such as loving or hating, has a priori aspects and that values are the a priori grounds of emotion.<sup>85</sup> He wanted to show that a significant number of feelings have an "objective" character and differ fundamentally from the merely subjective.

Scheler claimed that philosophy and psychology looked on the human heart as mute, subjective, and without direction or meaning, "a chaos of blind sentiment". In an essay written in 1916 called *Ordo Amoris*, but not published until after his death, Scheler claimed the world of values to be the most fundamental sphere of reality, which would continue if human beings ceased to be. This world, he further claimed, is independent and other, but given to human persons through the heart which is the receptacle of goods worthy of love.

The key to Scheler's solution is found in his phenomenology of feeling which uses phenomenological method

"for the purpose of breaking down the rigid distinction between reason and emotion, cognitivism and emotivism, which had put the cognition of value and particularly of non-formal or material value, into such a precarious, if not hopeless, position." <sup>86</sup>

Scheler found theoretical justification in Pascal's *ordre du coeur*, *logique du coeur*, *raison du coeur* ("order' or "logic" of the heart", based on "reasons of which the intellect is ignorant").<sup>87</sup> Scheler found Pascal's rationale for the heart owning a logic in its own right: on it are inscribed laws which derive from God's plan by which the world was built <sup>88</sup>

"that there is an eternal and absolute lawfulness of feeling, loving, and hating which is as absolute as that of pure logic, but which is not reducible to intellectual lawfulness. Pascal uses a sublime vocabulary when he speaks of those men who have partaken intuitively in this order, expressing it in their lives and teaching. He speaks of their small number as compared with the geniuses of scientific knowledge, and he believes that the rank of these men is to the rank of geniuses as the rank of geniuses is to that of average men. For Pascal,

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85 Scheler, *Formal...*p. 63.

86 Speigelberg, *op.cit*, p.293.

87 *ibid* p.293.

88 Scheler, "Ordo Amoris", p.244

the person who most perfectly comprehended and lived this *ordre du coeur* was Jesus Christ."<sup>89</sup>

This formed the basis of his examination of emotional states within a phenomenological reduction designed to free the phenomena from the conditions of experiences of such states. Luther describes the phenomenological reduction as used by Scheler in his concern to

"analyse phenomena within a phenomenological reduction, [which] is to position oneself within the sphere of concrete lived experience. This positioning of oneself within the spheres of lived experience is an effort to achieve an attitude of openness in which reality can reveal itself as it is in itself, that is, liberated or freed from factual conditions."<sup>90</sup>

Bernard Häring affirms Scheler and Stein too among the ethicists from the phenomenological school as capturing an understanding of "heart" as something beyond mere utilitarian ethics and use value, beyond the call of duty to being an intuitive grasp of otherness. He says:

"Heart" points to the person in his or her wholeness, building bridges to others, grasping the unique value of each one as a person and the manifold values embodied by persons, and thus calling for an ever new embodiment of these values in one's own life."<sup>91</sup>

Scheler used the phenomenological method to explore the concept of sympathy. By 1914 he published *Zur Phänomenologie und Theorie des Sympathiegefühls und von Liebe und Hass* which was later revised and published in 1923 as *Wesen und Form der Sympathie*. Edith Stein received insights from this work in Scheler's lectures in 1913. Edith Stein tells us she was particularly inspired by Scheler's account of non-rational states and his appeal to Pascal's authority of the heart's reason as the

"theoretical justification of the affective dimension in founding a science of the spirit."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Scheler, *Formalism*, pp. 255-256.

<sup>90</sup> A.R.Luther, *Persons in Love: A Study of M. Scheler's Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. 1972. p.14.

<sup>91</sup> Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Slough: St Paul Publications. 1978. Vol. I. p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> Secretan, op.cit, p.89.

Scheler's account of the heart's reason directly reinforced Edith Stein's interest in examining empathy as a non-rational state. Edith Stein was encouraged therefore to proceed to examine empathy which she described as

"a subject of great personal interest which would occupy me in all subsequent writings: the structure of the human person..... Of prime importance to me in investigating such questions (distinction between the act of comprehending intellectual interconnections and the simple awareness of psychic states) were the lectures and writings of Max Scheler and the works of Wilhelm Dilthey." <sup>93</sup>

At the time Scheler was researching the concept of sympathy, Edith Stein was examining the concept of empathy. They remained in close contact in their respective projects.

Scheler and Stein use the phenomenological methodology in different ways to explore the nature and essence of human values. They provided examples of states thought capable of being theoretically justified as grounded in the human spirit. As Secretan points out, both empathy and sympathy were highly topical notions beyond the Scheler-Stein relationship. Such matters were part of an atmosphere of lively debate in the philosophical circles in which Scheler and Stein moved.

The two-fold influence of Scheler and Husserl persisted while Edith Stein analysed empathy, and she maintained an intellectual relationship with each of them. The relationship between Scheler and Stein, while they differed in methodology, was a positive one. From Scheler's analysis of sympathy Edith Stein took his transcendentalist approach in the area of spiritual development. They both shared an anti-psychogenetic stance in their belief that the "otherness" of another cannot be based merely on reasoning and observation of behaviour. Both concentrated on using phenomenological methodology of peeling back layers in order to uncover essence, rather than trying to reach and defend tidy definitions. This is evident both in Edith Stein's analysis of empathy, and Scheler's examination of sympathy.

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<sup>93</sup> Edith Stein, *Family*. Herbstrith, op.cit, p. 81

Despite the differences between Scheler and Edith Stein in their conception of phenomenology and the application of its methodology, they remained in dialogue, referring to each other in their written works. The variation between Scheler and Stein can be seen in their respective conceptions of empathy. Based on the assumption that there are other conscious individuals, who as such are different from oneself, (Sympathy : p.241) Scheler held that the theory of belief and empathy

"provides a hypothesis concerning the manner in which this assumption is arrived at. It can never assure us of the legitimacy of the assumption itself. For all that the theory seeks to establish is a 'blind' belief, not a self evident intuition or even a rational postulate (such as would naturally be the outcome of the analogical argument). Hence the theory of empathy is wholly incapable of pointing to any sort of difference which may exist between that group of cases in which we wrongly impute a self or soul to something (as for example, in the 'animism' of primitives and children, and of mythology), and those other cases in which mind is actually present, as for instance in our fellowmen.

Nor can the theory [of empathy] distinguish empathy as a source of our knowledge of other minds from the merely aesthetic projection of content and character on the part of the self, into a portrait, for instance, or the embodiment of Hamlet, a personage belonging to the world of art, in the gestures of an actor. Indeed there is no telling here, which data are supposed to set off the process of empathy in oneself." <sup>94</sup>

Stein, however, claims that any knowing that is about knowledge of the other and others, and sharing in their inner worlds, can only be constituted on the base of the givenness to our consciousness of an original intuition. She therefore claims that in empathy itself:

"We are dealing with an act which is primordial as present experience, though non-primordial in content. And this content is an experience which, again, can be had in different ways such as in memory, expectation, or in fancy. When it arises before me all at once, it faces me as an object (such as the sadness I 'read in another's face'). But when I inquire into its implied tendencies (try to bring another's mood to clear givenness to myself), the content, having pulled me into it, is no longer really an object. I am now no longer turned to the content but to the object of it, am at the subject of the content in the original subject's place. And only after

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<sup>94</sup> Max Scheler, *Sympathy*, p.241

successfully executed clarification, does the content again face me as an object." <sup>95</sup>

Throughout her research into empathy Stein consulted Scheler and used some of his insights (e.g. in her remarks on the hierarchy of values from Scheler's *Der Formalismus in der Ethik*.) Edith Stein's contribution to Scheler's work was of obvious value to him. He respected her insights; and she was one of the people he invited to critique the second edition of *The Nature of Sympathy*.

"Scheler is said to have attached importance to her comments on his text of 1913, and to have treated them in the same manner as those which were sent to him by informed readers."<sup>96</sup>

### Einfühlung : Intuitive Process of "Being There".

Edith Stein's analysis of empathy and its facets identifies what can best be called a spiritual dimension. The states and feelings which are empathised in the give and take of human relationships, when voice, touch, facial expressions and silence all contribute to fill out the full dimension of being together, is what human spirit means. This state of being of empathy for Stein seems to express the "intuitive process of being there" possible amongst human beings as a manifestation of the underlying meaning she is seeking.

Edith Stein's model for understanding human connectedness is a transcendentalist one. She sees in the complex structure of *Einfühlung* a particular act of consciousness of feelings of interior sharing and being there that Lipps described as *Eins-fühlung*: the feeling of oneness that can occur between individuals. For example, I perceive a person standing very close to a cliff edge where there is a sheer drop of hundreds of feet, and I can experience a going out of myself - a kind of participation in the immediate dangerous situation of the other.

Stein agreed there is a species of interior sharing with the other in such an instance. She states:

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<sup>95</sup> Edith Stein, *Empathy*, p.10.

<sup>96</sup> Secretan, op.cit, p.88,n 5

"[Lipps] stresses the objectivity or the 'demanding' character of empathy and thus expresses what we mean by designating it as a kind of act undergone. Further, he indicates how empathy is akin to memory and expectation. But this brings us directly to a point where our ways part." 97

Stein thus refuses to equate Einfühlung (Empathy) with Eins-fühlung (feeling at one with) because she believed that a complete grasp of the subjective experience and feelings of another is not possible:

"We agree that a shift from remembered, expected, or empathised to primordial experience is possible. But we do not agree that there is a complete coincidence with the remembered, expected or empathised 'I', that they become one."98

To illustrate her understanding of empathy specifically she begins with the example of joy experienced on hearing the news of success in an examination. She describes it thus:

"I turn to the joyful event and depict it to myself in all its joyfulness. Suddenly I notice that I, this primordial remembering 'I' am full of joy. I remember the joyful event and take primordial joy in the remembered event." 99

Stein then extends the same illustration to the level of empathy, by referring to a friend who arrives full of joy to report his success in examinations also.

"I grasp his joy empathetically transferring myself into it, I grasp the joyfulness of the event and am now primordially joyful over it myself." 100

Feeling-at-one-with, here, for Stein amounts to fellow -feeling i.e. being happy over the fact of the success of the other. Empathy, however, she claims, is the joy itself intuited; i.e. the experience itself. So Stein's definition is strict in the sense that empathy is the experience of another consciousness. Stein's concept of empathy was not one that

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97 Edith Stein, *Empathy*, p.12.

98 *ibid* p. 13.

99 *ibid* p. 13

100 *ibid* p. 13-14.

was based on empirical knowledge or on the experience of the feeling of identification with; it is based on immediate intuition.

Scheler and Stein also differ on their understanding of consciousness. For Scheler, we are somewhat determined by our cultural and historical facticity in which many of our modes of relating and expressing ourselves are cast. This means therefore that our thoughts and feelings are not entirely our own because of the experiences which impact on us from our social and cultural traditions, carrying what has been determined prior to our own thoughts and feelings. For Scheler this "flux of experience" exists separately to a particular 'you' and a particular 'me' (Sympathy 9 and 31).

Stein rejected the flux of experiences theory. She claimed that it is possible, when being made conscious of a particular event, for all of us to be seized by a "same" feeling. In her example of joy she says

"it is possible for us to be joyful over the same event, though not filled with exactly the same joy. Joyfulness may be more richly accessible to the others, which difference I grasp empathically. I empathically arrive at the 'sides' of joyfulness obstructed in my own joy. This ignites my joy, and only now is there complete coincidence with what is empathised. If the same thing happens to the others, we empathically enrich our feeling so that 'we' now feel a different joy from 'I', 'you' and 'he' in isolation. But 'I', 'you', and 'he' are retained in 'we.' A 'we,' not an 'I,' is the subject of the empathising. Not through the feeling of oneness, but through empathising, do we experience others."<sup>101</sup>

The knowledge of, and the sharing in the inner worlds of others, is therefore, only possible when founded on the 'givenness' to consciousness of an original intuition, according to Edith Stein.

In his chapter on the relationship of love and fellow feeling in *The Nature of Sympathy* Scheler posits love as an act that has the person for its centre. His starting point criticises the departure of some from who departing from Greek and Christian ethics, seek to derive the facts of love and hate from fellow feeling, "through putting sympathy into the

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid* p.17

foreground and thereupon substituting benevolence in the place of love" (Sympathy p.1140).

"Love is certainly a movement towards positive value, but so far as the *nature* of love is concerned it makes no difference whether this value already exists or not. In all endeavour there is a content to be realised, which is inherent as its goal (or purpose when we will). Love does not have this at all. What does a mother seek to 'realise' when she gazes lovingly at her bonny child asleep? What is supposedly 'realised' in loving God? or in loving works of art? Love may give rise to all kinds of effort, desire, or longing for the beloved object, but these are no part of it."<sup>102</sup>

There is no sense of effort in love because if there is endeavour this suggests an end or goal to be strived for and attained.

Scheler sees that, as an emotional gesture and spiritual act, phenomenologically speaking it does not matter whether the gesture

"is mainly called forth by its object or is felt to proceed from the self. The conception of 'act' employed here does not relate to the self, but to the person, which can never be treated as an object. Love can also make itself felt as an 'attractive' or 'inviting' quality in its object, which feeling can never do."<sup>103</sup>

Scheler describes this love as the Aristotelian sense of love, when it is said in his metaphysics "God moves the world as the beloved moves the lover" (Sympathy p.142). Love above all he says is spontaneous, whereas fellow feeling

" is always a reactive condition. Thus one can only have fellow feeling for that which is *subject to feeling*, whereas love is altogether free from this limitation."<sup>104</sup>

So love is intrinsically related to value; as an act and a movement it is not reducible to a feeling, only fellow feeling,

"if it is to amount to more than mere understanding or vicarious emotion, must be rooted in an enveloping act of love. The effect of this addition is precisely what

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102 Max Scheler, *Sympathy*, p.141

103 *ibid* p.142

104 *ibid* p.142

makes it perfectly possible to sympathise with someone we do not love; the really impossible thing is for sympathy to be lacking where love is present already.

The scope of the act of love therefore determines the sphere in which fellow feeling is possible." 105

The significance of Scheler's attempt to clarify the meanings of love and sympathy are found in his claim in *Ordo Amoris* (p. 242) that, in the hierarchy of values, the highest value is the domain of religious values. He stated that these values reside in

"the holy, for in the realm of values, which mounts like a pyramid, the summit is God, the infinitely holy, Love uncreated. Of all things deserving love, He is at once the goal and the source, the beginning and the end, and our hearts are restless till they rest in him." 106

### Emergence of God and Religious Consciousness

Edith Stein does not make direct reference in her work on Empathy to the chapter on love in Scheler's book. As has been pointed out already, she was clearly influenced by his desire to give scientific validity to Pascal's heart logic. This influence was part of the two-fold motivation to analyse empathy. She clearly states herself that Scheler's influence on her life and ideas included his Catholic ideas. As one who had critiqued his book, Stein would have read and therefore been familiar with his references to God as Love uncreated.

In Stein's own work on empathy, she quotes extensively from Scheler's *Der Formalismus in der Ethik* in which there are several references to God. Stein's interest in the structure of the human person, with empathy as having an objective other, must surely have included reflections on Scheler's mention of God and religion because these would include phenomena which, as she stated, she was bound to consider.

Stein completed *On the Problem of Empathy* in 1917 in the period when these influences were strongest and when she had the most support and

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105 *ibid* p. 142-143

106 Max Scheler, "Ordo Amoris", pp.103-109.

contact with other phenomenologists and when she actually refers to questions of faith and transformation in herself. In her analysis of empathy, Stein's initial definition relates to her examination of the essence of the acts of empathy. As has been mentioned she claimed to be an atheist at this time and yet inherent in this definition is an openness towards the Infinite.

Immediately after the paragraph on empathy quoted earlier in this chapter, Stein states:

"The experience which an 'I' in general has of another 'I' in general looks like this. This is how man grasps the psychic life of his fellow man. Also as a believer he grasps the love, the anger, and the command of his God in this way; and God can grasp man's life in no other way. As the possessor of complete knowledge, God is not mistaken about men's experiences, as men are mistaken about each other's experiences. But men's experiences do not become God's own, either; nor do they have the same kind of givenness for Him."<sup>107</sup>

This demonstrates an extraordinary reflection and understanding of what knowing is in God for Edith Stein, who at this point had not exhibited an explicit religious sensibility. What this early reference to a sense of God as other, as transcendent, does seem to indicate, is that she has reflected long and seriously on the question. The influences of her colleagues, especially Reinach and Scheler, who were constantly asking questions of a religious nature and embracing Christian beliefs, shows that the depth of her reflections has taken seriously the mandate to examine phenomena of a religious nature. The last sentence of her analysis claims a sense of God's accessibility to the human person directly as subject-to-subject, suggesting God's complete intelligibility and boundless understanding and empathy. This also suggests God as Being with whom a relationship is possible.

In separating the essential from the non-essential in her description and analysis of empathy, Stein's search for truth is evident in her final comment. Rather than some definite conclusions about empathy, she is clearly confronted with another set of concepts for consideration and reflection. Stein concludes:

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<sup>107</sup> Edith Stein, *Empathy*, pp.11-12.

"There have been people who thought that in a sudden change of their person they experienced the effect of the grace of God, others who felt themselves to be guided in their conduct by a protective spirit.... Who can say whether there is genuine experience present here or whether there is that unclarity about own own motives which we found in considering the 'idols of self knowledge'? But is not the essential possibility of genuine experience in this area already given with the delusions of such experience? Nevertheless, the study of religious consciousness seems to me to be the most appropriate means of answering our question, just as, on the the other hand, its answer is of most interest for the domain of religion. However, I leave the answering of this question to further investigation and satisfy myself here with a 'non liquet,' (it is not clear)".<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *ibid* p.106.

CHAPTER THREE  
CONVERSION TO CATHOLICISM

Chapter One outlined the famous moment of epiphany of the summer of 1921, when Edith Stein stayed up all night reading the German translation of the Life of Teresa of Avila, and it is reported that she stated "That is the truth" when she finished. While the reading of the life of Teresa of Avila had a deep and abiding impact on Edith Stein, it can hardly be accurate to say that this experience was the only cause of her conversion, as Chapter One demonstrated.

This chapter will focus on Teresa's influence on Edith Stein in terms of the essential interior life of prayer, and Edith Stein's eventual choice to live this life as an enclosed nun in a Carmelite monastery. Reading Teresa however had two more immediate repercussions: as a consequence, it is reported by Posselt that Edith Stein decided to become a Catholic and that same morning went to buy a Catholic catechism and missal to begin instruction.<sup>109</sup> And becoming a Catholic gave a focus to her professional life, which had been rather aimless since she finished her doctorate and sought, in vain, the kind of academic position this would entitle her to.

After becoming a Catholic in January 1922, Edith Stein removed herself from the mainstream of scholarship to teach German and literature in Speyer at St Magdalena's, a high school for girls run by the Dominican Sisters. She based this choice on the belief that education was a form of apostolate. She also saw Speyer as a good context for growth in her interior life of prayer with the opportunity to share in the religious life of the nuns there. <sup>110</sup>

Reading Teresa was, rather, the final impetus that provided Edith Stein with the conviction to act. The life of Teresa of Avila is an honest first-

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<sup>109</sup> Posselt, op.cit, p.68.

<sup>110</sup> Graef outlines that "she [Edith Stein] would be in the peaceful atmosphere of a religious house. There she would soon accustom herself to all the externals of Catholic life, and more important still, she would come to know also the inner springs of this life as lived in the vowed dedication to God." Graef, op.cit, pp.39-40.

hand account of this woman's spiritual experiences in her struggle towards union with God. Throughout her account, she is able to laugh at herself, describe her human frailties, limitations and frustrations as well as her growth in insight, peace and holiness.

"Teresa's understanding of the soul went beyond 'phenomena', 'the upper layer of the soul's life.' For her, will, intellect, memory and the essence of the soul were all undeniable objects of experience. As for 'the most interior and personal' part of the soul, for Teresa there was no hypothetical entity scientists had posited in order to explain psychic data, but 'something that could light up inside us and become actually perceptible, even if it always did remain mysterious'." 111

I suggest in reading *The Life of Teresa of Avila*, Edith Stein became ultimately convinced that the truth she was searching for resided in this "light" in Teresa's autobiography, confirming her own experience of God as God of love, not just a God of knowledge.

Teresa was not a scholar like Edith Stein, and her writing is difficult to read in a wholly logical and rational way. The ordered categories of theological discourse were no more available to Teresa than the priestly and academic language, Latin, in which they had been formulated. While her Spanish was fluent, her writings were not well structured according to the medieval scholastic disciplines of dialectic, grammar and logic, but were rather like a stream of consciousness. The important task was for her to record her experiences rather than to develop an excellent literary text. She wrote the way she talked:

"As though her thoughts were jostling with each other for position, her sentences often become highly involved with parentheses and digressions, causing her sometimes to lose the thread - which never prevents her from leaping forward quickly and easily to a new thought," 112

Teresa offered this explanation for her diffuse, rambling way of writing and digressory tendencies:

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111 Herbstrith, op.cit, p.31

112 Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of Teresa of Avila* (trans) Kieran Kavanaugh OCD and Otilio Rodriguez OCD. Washington DC: I.C.S. Publications. 1976. Vol. I. p.28 .

"These spiritual matters for anyone who like myself has not gone through studies are so difficult to explain." 113

She went on to say:

"What I tried to explain in the previous chapters although I digressed a great deal in speaking of other things since mentioning them seemed to me very necessary..."<sup>114</sup>

"I want to explain myself further, for I believe I'm getting mixed up in many things. I've always had this fault of not knowing how to explain myself, as I have said, except at the cost of many words."<sup>115</sup>

In spite of her lack of an educated literary style, and her difficulties with language and syntax, Teresa's experiences are presented spontaneously, accurately and honestly.<sup>116</sup> The result of Teresa's experiences of spiritual ecstasy and the presence of God was an emphasis on the importance of prayer and the interior life. With her attitude of 'thy will be done', her love of God and others grew with her realisation of Divine Presence within, leading always to deeper and final union with God.<sup>117</sup> Teresa's writings, particularly her mystical ones, will be given fuller attention in Chapter Six, where she and others are presented as examples of classic Catholic mystics.

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113 Teresa, op.cit, p. 80.

114 Teresa, op.cit, p.85.

115 Teresa, op.cit, p.95.

116 Kavanaugh and Rodriguez write: "Unlike other Spanish classic authors, Teresa had no training as a writer. Her style is thoroughly spontaneous without the slightest trace of artificiality or sophistication...Within her sentences she bothers little about preserving the agreement between the parts of speech required for the sake of clarity; she shifts back and forth from singular to plural, from first person to third, from past to present and so on. Translating Teresa's sentences is often like working on puzzles, and some of the puzzles we can never be sure that we have solved." Teresa, op.cit, p.28.

117 "The whole life of Teresa is a description of Christ drawing a soul to prayer and through prayer to perfect union with Him. As we believe, Edith had already sometimes experienced a certain communion with God in prayer; she had also met the Cross and the power it gave to those who embraced it. St. Teresa showed her the perfect fulfilment of love in union with Him who had died on it, the same who had also said: 'I am the Truth' - surely here was the goal of all Edith's philosophy, not only to know, but to live the Truth in the union of love with Love." Graef, op.cit, p. 33.

Teresa's honesty and her commitment to living a transparent and authentic life amounted to a desire to be unmasked by the truth.<sup>118</sup> Her desire was such that it emerges with clarity beyond her uneducated and chaotic style of writing to connect powerfully with Edith Stein's well-ordered and logical mind. Edith Stein found Teresa's account of her religious experiences "incomparably clear, simple and sincere".<sup>119</sup>

From her status of filial kinship with the church - she described herself as a "daughter of the church" - Teresa challenged critical issues in her order and in the church. She wanted to restore genuine solitude and prayer to Carmel, not by adopting a dogmatic approach but a reaffirmation of the experiential. Her reform was born of her own experience of her struggle with prayer and the "favours" of the fruit of her prayer. Because she trusted in and was guided by God, Teresa's confidence that her reform was genuine renewal and bringing new life, was sustained. Living in the turmoil of the Counter-Reformation and Inquisition, Teresa saw that distraction, confused personal focus and lip service to the Primitive Rule of Carmel, had eroded the prayer lives of her sisters.

"The Primitive Rule of Carmel was not followed at the Incarnation. There was little silence, excessive comfort, and freedom for the wealthy, the enclosure a joke, and prayer life a farce. She herself was seldom in the convent, and when she was, she enjoyed a very attractive cell of her own, detached from the main convent, with two rooms, one above the other."<sup>120</sup>

Teresa's reform was based on the restoration of a spirituality based on

"three basic characteristics: a call to the interior life; the practice of mental prayer; and strong leanings toward higher levels of the mystical life."<sup>121</sup>

Teresa restored rituals of worship and liturgy, rules and observances of convent life, but stressed that these external practices must remain on the exterior level, and therefore, secondary to the interior life of

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118 Teresa, op.cit, p. 170.

119 Edith Stein, "Hidden Life", p.65.

120 Joseph Glynn OCD, *The Eternal Mystic*. New York: Vantage Press. 1982. p.77.

121 Teresa, op.cit, p.6.

developing an intimate and personal relationship with God.<sup>122</sup> In chapter 8 of *The Life*<sup>123</sup> she also teaches that it is necessary to surrender one's control of one's own life, in order to be transformed through relationship and union with a personal God.

The influence of Teresa of Avila on Edith Stein remained throughout her life. She was guided by Teresa's understanding of the spiritual life as structured in terms of prayer and contemplation, and the importance of advancing in prayer as the way to growth in love and union with God. Put simply, Teresa validated the hidden life of interior prayer for Edith Stein. Many of the essays and pedagogical works which she wrote as a lay woman, after she became a Catholic but before she entered religious life, are permeated with references to Teresa.

Reading Teresa encouraged Edith Stein to use the saint's method, as it were, to surrender all earthly props and inner resistances and allow God, as the source of true freedom, to take care of her and direct her life. Edith Stein demonstrated her desire to surrender and be directed by God throughout the period of family opposition to her conversion and subsequent entry into the Carmelite monastery. Reflecting on that time Edith Stein says she was able to proclaim with Teresa that:

"[I understand now] what it means for a soul to abide in truth in the presence of Truth itself. In this divine Truth I have come to know truths of the utmost importance - far better than if many scholars had explained them to me.....The truth that I said was communicated to me is Truth in itself, truth without beginning or end. From it there spring all other truths, just as all love springs from this love and all glory from this Glory. And compared to the clarity with which the Lord revealed it all to me, what I have just said is obscure indeed." <sup>124</sup>

### Growing Interiority

In her eight years as a high school teacher at the Dominican School for Girls of St. Magdalena's at Speyer, Edith Stein lived a semi-religious life. Indeed, it could be said that essentially she led a Carmelite life in the

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<sup>122</sup> Teresa, op.cit, pp.55-61.

<sup>123</sup> Teresa, op.cit, pp.65-70

<sup>124</sup> Herbstrith, op.cit, p.36.

world. She took part as much as possible in the prayer and liturgical life of the religious community there and it was at Speyer that she began to experience the meaning of religious life, as learned from Teresa of Avila. Edith Stein's reflections on her interior life state:

"Those who live the *interior life* have always experienced being drawn into their innermost parts by that which draws more strongly than the total exterior world: the invasion of a new, forceful, higher life - the supernatural, divine life."<sup>125</sup>

During her years at Speyer and afterwards, Edith Stein received spiritual direction from Father Erich Przywara and later Dom Raphael Walzer at the Benedictine Abbey at Beuron where she frequently went on retreat, immersing herself in the eremetical life she desired. Yet the hidden life of Carmel continued to attract Edith Stein in a way that the teaching apostolate of the more intellectual Dominicans she worked with did not. Nor did she choose the richness of Benedictine liturgy in spite of her positive experiences at the abbey of Beuron. Certainly Edith Stein valued what she learned about monastic observances from her visits to Beuron and her study of Benedictine spirituality and Rule. The religious name she requested - Sister Teresia Benedicta of the Cross - is testimony to the influence of St. Benedict.<sup>126</sup> I suggest that Teresa of Avila strengthened Edith Stein's desire for Carmel through her descriptions of the structure and purpose of the spiritual life lived out in that context.

Herbstrith quotes two Teresian-influenced comments Edith Stein made which she suggests indicates the ideal Edith Stein hoped to live up to

"only the person who renounces self-importance, who no longer struggles to defend or assert himself, can be large enough for God's boundless action."<sup>127</sup>

Her understanding of what religious life might mean is also expressed in her comment:

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<sup>125</sup> Edith Stein, *EES*, p.407.

<sup>126</sup> Paschal Baumstein, "Edith Stein and St. Benedict". in *Spiritual Life* (Winter 1986): p.203.

<sup>127</sup> Edith Stein, "Eine Meisterin der Erziehungs-und Bildungsarbeit: Teresia von Jesus" in *Katholische Frauenbildung im deutschen Volk* 48(February 1935): pp.122-123. Cited in Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p. 71.

"In the childhood of the spiritual life, when we first entrust ourselves to God's providence, God's guiding hand feels very strong and firm. We know as clear as day what we should or shouldn't do. But things don't stay like this forever. Anyone who belongs to Christ is destined to pass through all the stages of his life - up to and including his adulthood, and eventually, even to the way of the Cross that leads to Gethsemane and Golgotha. When that hour comes, external sufferings are nothing compared to the dark night of the soul, when the divine light stops shining and the divine voice stops speaking. It isn't that God isn't there, but that he's concealed and silent. Why, you ask. That is one of God's secrets, and no one can fully penetrate it.....Each of us is perpetually on the razor's edge: on one side, absolute nothingness; on the other, the fullness of divine life."<sup>128</sup>

The contemplative, religious life in Carmel, with its lived experience of the Teresian spirit as the way to union, with its enclosure,<sup>129</sup> and its doctrine of the "living book"<sup>130</sup>, was the essential path Edith Stein discerned for the life of authentic prayer she desired.<sup>131</sup>

### The Hidden Life

While still a postulant in the Carmel of Cologne, Edith Stein wrote an article on St. Teresa of Avila for the prioress's feast day which was on 2nd February 1934. It was later published under her own name, Edith Stein, in *Kleine Lebensbilder*, No. 84, on 15th April 1934. Dr. Gelber, editor of this article comments that it expresses

"the providential spiritual relationship of Holy Mother Teresa of Avila to her spiritual daughter Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, a relationship that becomes evident in the hagiographic writing 'Love for Love'".<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Edith Stein, "Weihnachtsgeheimnis" in *Wege zur inneren Stille*. Collected articles, (ed) W. Herbstrith. Frankfurt: Kaffke Verlag. 1978. p.12. Cited in Herbstrith, op.cit, p.71.

<sup>129</sup> Enclosure is the means for contemplatives to embody in their existence the priestly prayer of Jesus in his solitude in the desert. It is the exterior context which can enable the development of the inner enclosure, or inner cell, to develop the hidden life of union with God.

<sup>130</sup> Teresa, op.cit, p.172 God is the living book.

<sup>131</sup> Teresa's ideas on the psychology, intuition and interiority of women may well have been dear to the heart of Edith Stein as one woman who could understand another. Both had an ontology of womanness and clearly Edith Stein was impressed by Teresa's.

<sup>132</sup> Edith Stein, "Hidden Life", p.xv.

In this article Edith Stein describes the influence of Teresa on her own life as well as her understanding of the saint's place in the church. Edith Stein focuses on Teresa's references to the life of prayer and interiority. Teresa's efforts to describe her experiences of God occurred in the face of her continual struggle against the Inquisition, and her distress at the political intrigue of sixteenth-century Spain was also something Edith Stein could identify with:

"The generations after the Renaissance lived, like ourselves, amidst an explosion of knowledge, with all its consequential social, economic, and political upheavals and an often intemperate questioning of fundamental moral and religious standards; and it was against this background that the two great Carmelites struggled, as do many of our contemporaries, to restate and re-establish the spiritual values which alone give meaning to life."<sup>133</sup>

Edith Stein was similarly engaged in her own campaign to restate spiritual values in the face of the anti-Semitic and anti-Christian ideology of National Socialism under Hitler. Typically, her instrument was her pen, and these writings will be discussed in Chapter Four where the more public part of her life as a Catholic laywoman is described.

Edith Stein based her view that Teresa was exceptional, indeed "the exception to the rule"<sup>134</sup> on Teresa's unflinching courage in confronting the contradictions and paradoxes that existed in her own life, and also the tensions and conflicts the Reformation brought within the church and political situation of her times. Edith Stein writes that Teresa's endurance in prayer and action as documented in her writings "tell of the indefatigable efforts of a woman with the daring and strength of a man".<sup>135</sup> As the radical reformer that she was, Teresa was aware that she was vulnerable to attack from the Inquisition for being heretical. To protect herself she made frequent acts of submission to the church and remained in constant dialogue with approved theologians. These submissions were not of the nature of blind

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<sup>133</sup> Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold SJ, (eds), *The Study of Spirituality*, New York: Oxford University Press. 1986. p.364.

<sup>134</sup> Edith Stein, *Woman*, p.268.

<sup>135</sup> Edith Stein, "Hidden Life", p.66.

obedience to authority, but part of her manoeuvre to get her reform validated and recognised.

Always concerned with authenticity, Edith Stein links the themes of humility, obedience to spiritual direction, and love in Teresa's life to the saint's concern with orthodoxy and truth. Both Teresa of Avila and Edith Stein had a deep love of and fidelity to the church and were nourished by church teaching in their commitment to growth in authenticity. Teresa stated to her Carmelite sisters that they must

"believe firmly what Holy Mother church holds and you can be sure that you will be walking along a good path."<sup>136</sup>

"The church as "good path" for Edith Stein was her acceptance of the church as the living membership of Christ's mystical body which gave a public and objective context to private prayer. In her comments on prayer and the church she stated that

"it is not a question of placing the inner prayer free of all traditional forms as 'subjective' piety in contrast to the liturgy as the 'objective' prayer of the church. All authentic prayer is prayer of the church..."

The mystical stream that flows through all centuries is no spurious tributary that has strayed from the prayer life of the church - it is its deepest life. When this mystical stream breaks through traditional forms, it does so because the spirit that blows where it will is living in it, this Spirit that has created all traditional forms and must ever create new ones. Without him there would be no liturgy and no church."<sup>137</sup>

Here Edith Stein seems to be saying that just as authentic prayer is genuine prayer of the church, the authenticity of the church requires openness to the creative Spirit of its deepest prayer life. Teresa did not adopt an attitude of neutrality towards the changes in the church. Her attitude of critical openness was based on search for truth guided by the Spirit. This is evident in Teresa's attempt to free the Carmelite Order from any nostalgic attachments to exterior observances and to restore

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<sup>136</sup> Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, op.cit, Vol. II. p.121.

<sup>137</sup> Edith Stein, "Hidden Life", p.15.

interiority as the centering force for deepening union with God through prayer in solitude.

Growth in prayer beyond the distortion of our personal constructs is found not in the dogmatic but in our experiences of God "in the heart's quiet dialogue with God."<sup>138</sup> Edith Stein states further that "the work of salvation takes place in obscurity and stillness." Both Teresa of Avila and Edith Stein, with their commitment to an ongoing relationship, with an ever-deepening union with God as intimate friend, share the belief in the possibility of real spiritual development of individuals through prayer. Of Teresa, Edith Stein states that it was

"precisely that she [Teresa of Avila] lived in prayer and allowed herself to be drawn more deeply by the Lord into the depths of her "interior castle" until she reached that obscure room where he could say to her, 'that now it was time that she consider as her own what belonged to him, and that he would take care of what was hers...Whoever surrenders unconditionally to the Lord will be chosen by him as an instrument for building his kingdom.'" <sup>139</sup>

Surrender for Teresa is the hallmark of true prayer because it is about intimacy with God as close friend. The notion of surrender to the wisdom of this true friend appears frequently in Edith Stein's writings on Teresa of Avila as this saint informed her life and understanding of prayer and mysticism.

While Teresa of Avila and Edith Stein emerge from their cultural experiences quite differently, they are kindred spirits in that they articulated their insights and teachings after prayer and contemplation. Teresa constantly states her lack of education and opportunity to study theology but asks for acceptance of her honesty in the reporting of her experiences. She reminds the reader constantly that she always submitted her life and writings to the judgment of the church as her search was always based in a search for the truth. While Edith Stein had the advantage of education and a well-developed scholarly style of writing, in the spirit of Teresa's humility, she too submitted her writings to church authorities.

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<sup>138</sup> *ibid* p.15.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid* p.14.

Teresa showed Edith Stein that it is possible to abandon and detach oneself from dependent involvements and relations with the world, in order to deepen one's relationship and union with God. Her experiences of mystical union brought Teresa to an increasing state of constant tranquillity. As Edith Stein developed and deepened her relationship with God, her innermost source, her growth in spiritual integrity also took on mystical dimensions. A full discussion of Edith Stein's mysticism will be developed through the next five chapters, with Chapter Seven focusing specifically on Edith Stein's particular mysticism.

CHAPTER FOUR  
GROWTH IN MYSTICAL PRAYER

In the first section of this chapter I will outline the evolution that took place in Edith Stein's understanding of prayer and union with God from the time she went to Speyer until she eventually joined the Carmelite Order. I will concentrate on using Edith Stein's own insights where possible to show her growth towards mystical prayer. The sharp contrast in particular between the early years of her Catholicism and her last five years in the Carmelite monastery marks the dramatic shift in her understanding of the spiritual life.

Summing up her early years as a Catholic, Edith Stein sees her spirituality and prayer life as unbalanced. She says:

"Immediately before my conversion, and for a long time after, I thought leading a devout life meant giving up everything earthly and living in contemplation of heavenly things." 140

She did this by leading a quasi-religious life, accepting little reimbursement for her teaching other than food, lodging and her clothing, made mainly by the nuns. In the absence of any further documented reflections and descriptions by Edith Stein herself of the form this contemplation might have taken, comments made by people who are reported to have known her will be presented. Both Herbstrith and Graef have relied heavily on Sister Teresia Renata's biography for their examples of eye-witness accounts of Edith Stein's religious practices and personality as a Catholic in the early years after her conversion.

Graef, in her summary of Edith Stein's early struggle to find inner peace and freedom towards union with God, as she discovered a deeper meaning of detachment from earthly things, observes:

"This great intellectual superiority, which made itself felt despite her extremely simple and unassuming

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140 Herbstrith, op.cit, p.37

manner, might have been counterbalanced if she had been gay and lively. Indeed, she could be light-hearted at times; but this side of her nature was seldom allowed to come to the fore, and in these first years after her conversion, when she was still spiritually strained, it was practically unnoticeable."<sup>141</sup>

Herbstrith states that Edith Stein's dedication to prayer at this time brought mixed reactions:

"There were many who admired her for it, others who questioned its value."<sup>142</sup>

Graef reports that a priest who knew her, compared her prayer posture as being like

"the old representations of the Orante, except for the hands, which were, of course not stretched out. It was almost rigid, 'unloosened', as it were, and perhaps may be taken as symbolic of her spiritual life in these early years."<sup>143</sup>

Friends commenting on her life of austerity, found her "lacking in humour and often absurdly earnest"<sup>144</sup>. Graef further comments that Edith Stein seemed even more austere than the sisters themselves, "mortifying herself severely especially regarding food and drink."<sup>145</sup>

Edith Stein's religious practices also brought mixed reactions from her pupils, although she was respected for her integrity and intelligence as a teacher. Nonetheless, as a teacher she was described as "unapproachable"<sup>146</sup>, lacking in forbearance of others less gifted than herself<sup>147</sup> and given to sarcasm.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Graef, op.cit, p.41.

<sup>142</sup> Herbstrith, op.cit, p.45.

<sup>143</sup> Graef, op.cit, p.40.

<sup>144</sup> Neville Baybrooke, "Edith Stein and Simone Weil" in *Hibbert Journal* 64(1966): p.79.

<sup>145</sup> Graef, op.cit, p.40.

<sup>146</sup> *ibid* p.41.

<sup>147</sup> Graef reports that "one of [Edith Stein's] pupils, a very industrious and ambitious young girl, had injured her wrist just the day before they were to write an essay...When she told Edith Stein about it, she calmly looked at her and simply said: 'Well, then, you will try with your left hand.'" *ibid* p.42.

<sup>148</sup> Graef further reports that the same pupil "followed the advice given them [the pupils] by a previous mistress and adorned her essay with many citations.

Others however found her warm, fair, and someone who inspired their confidence. Among the many testimonies reported by Sister Teresia Renata was the comment by the Dominican Prioress who stated that Edith Stein

"quickly won the hearts of her pupils. To all of us she was a shining example whose effect we still feel today. In humility and simplicity, almost unheard and unnoticed, she went quietly about her duties, always serenely friendly and accessible to anyone who wanted her help." 149

Sister Teresia Renata's witnesses are more consistently positive about their perceptions of Edith Stein. For instance, a pupil states that, as a teacher,

"In her criticisms she was a perfect combination of kindness and fairness. We never saw her other than calm, gentle and quiet." 150

The same pupil comments that as a woman of prayer, Edith Stein's

"heart stood wide open for everything noble and beautiful to take its place beside her union with God. That is how she stands before us still." 151

Another pupil said:

"Everyone loved her and considered her the best and cleverest teacher in the school, as well as the fairest." 152

This same pupil further observed that while she trusted implicitly her as a teacher, she also felt:

"There was something about Fräulein Doktor that made here difficult to approach, she was too distant - perhaps too intelligent and tense, which made us all shy of her." 153

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Edith Stein wrote underneath: "The use of quotations proves that other people are clever." *ibid* p.42.

149 Posselt, *op.cit*, p. 70 and Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.37.

150 Posselt, *op.cit*, p.72.

151 *ibid* p.73.

152 *ibid* p.73.

153 *ibid* p.74.

It should be remembered, however, that the eye-witness accounts claimed by Sister Teresia Renata are anonymous and appear unreferenced in her biography. She had certain intentions in garnering these reports by unnamed witnesses which may well render her account historically dubious, and the data cannot be checked. It was perhaps inevitable that an enclosed Carmelite would see Edith Stein's holiness in terms of Carmelite values, to which she could adduce Edith Stein's reputation as a Catholic philosopher and the tragic circumstances of her death.

### Balance and Deeper Understanding of Union with God.

While at Speyer, Father Erich Przywara, a philosopher of religion, met Edith Stein. In 1925 he asked her to translate some of John Henry Cardinal Newman's letters and the *Disputed Questions in Truth* of Thomas Aquinas. She compared the thought of Thomas Aquinas with her intellectual world formed by Husserl's philosophy. For his 70th birthday in 1929, Edith Stein dedicated the essay *Husserl's Phenomenology and the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* to Husserl. After Easter 1931 she left Speyer to devote herself full time to writing. Her work *Investigations on Truth* written in 1931-32, is concerned with Truth as the face of being, and with being as it manifests its mind i.e. human knowledge, together with all being which has its origin as mystery in the divine Mind i.e. eternal Being, an idea she shares with Thomas Aquinas.

This work gave her a concrete introduction into the scholastic method; as well, Herbstrith picks up the important clue that through her work on Thomas Aquinas:

"Edith Stein not only strengthened her grasp of the doctrines of the faith, she also developed a new attitude to world activity."<sup>154</sup>

This new attitude counterbalanced her intense concentration on heavenly things only. Edith Stein says:

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<sup>154</sup> Herbstrith, op.cit, p.41

"I gradually learnt to see that in this world something different is required of us, and that even in the contemplative life the connection with the world is not to be severed. It was through St. Thomas that it first dawned on me that it was possible to pursue learning in the service of God, and not until then could I bring myself to go on again seriously with intellectual work."  
155

Of the necessity of openness to God's action, Edith Stein said:

"The deeper one is drawn into God, the more he needs to go out of himself - out into the world, that is, to carry the divine life into it." 156

This shows a deepened understanding of union, an understanding that was extended through her studies and translation of Thomas Aquinas, and the impression that the classic mystics had on her understanding of the relationship between the interior life of prayer and exterior action as serving union. For example, her closing question based on the *Justification of the Sinner and Grace in Christ* asks:

"Is it surprising that the investigations on Truth have these for their finale? Hardly, if one bears in mind the spirit of the whole book. It began with the first, the eternal Truth, from whom wells all creaturely being, all creaturely knowing, and it ends with the Way, who leads creaturely being and knowing, back to their union with eternal Truth. He leads them back to the cross, which is an "I" crossed out, which is an "and," the "and" of reconciliation." 157

She recognises the Way as person, the person of the crucified Christ, and is expressing her understanding and indeed desire for a deeper relationship. This is further evidenced in her article from the same year as her work on Thomas Aquinas, "The Formation of Woman's Personality" (1931), where she says:

"To become His likeness is the goal of us all. And by Him to be fashioned into this likeness, having been grafted as members into the Body (mystical Body of Christ) of which He is the Head, is the road of us all....Who yields

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155 Posselt, op.cit, p.76 and Herbstrith, op.cit, p.41

156 Herbstrith, op.cit, p. 41.

157 Edith Stein *Des hl. Thomas von Aquino Untersuchungen über die Wahrheit*. Vol. II. p 512. Cited in John M. Oesterreicher, *Walls are crumbling*, London: Hollis and Carter. 1953. p.304.

without reservation to this forming is the richer for receiving his own nature purified - more, he grows beyond it and becomes another Christ." 158

### On Woman

From the spring of 1932 until her entry into the Carmelite Monastery in Cologne on 15th October 1933, Edith Stein joined the Institute for Educational Theory in Münster as a lecturer on topics in women's education.

A thematic study of some of her pedagogical works written between 1928 and 1933 has been collected into a volume called *Essays on Woman*.<sup>159</sup> From these works it is possible to see how the thread of her deepening desire to be more Christlike and to be more fully committed to the church is central to her doctrinal concepts concerning feminism and the education of women in the Christian feminine ideal.

Edith Stein's ontology of woman incorporated fully Catholic church tradition and sacred scripture, validating the nature, role and destiny of woman as created by God. Thomas Aquinas taught that the soul is the form of the body; thus where the bodies are different the souls of necessity must be different also. Woman therefore has the right and responsibility to stamp her unique feminine nature on her activities. Edith Stein believed in the uniqueness of woman as a species. She claimed that education must take into account the unique characteristics and the intrinsic value of women. This is clear from Gelber's and Leuven's summary of her guidelines for the education of women:

"The girl must be raised to perfect humanity. For this it is necessary that she be guided to "incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ."

She must be educated to perfect womanhood. 'Since Mary is the prototype of pure womanhood, the imitation of Mary must be the goal of girls' education.'

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158 Edith Stein, "Grundlagen der Frauenbildung" in *Stimmen der Zeit* CXX(1931): p.416. Cited in. Oesterreicher, op.cit, p.305.

159 See Edith Stein, *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, Washington: ICS Publications. 1987. Vol. II.

Her uniqueness must be developed fully, for authentic educational work must consider the individuality of the person. Its goal is the person '...who is what *she* is supposed to be personally, who goes *her* way, and performs *her* work. *Her* way is not chosen in an arbitrary fashion; it is the way in which God leads her."  
160 (Edith Stein's italics)

According to Edith Stein's analysis, Mary, as the perfect model for all women, is the co-redemptrix who demonstrates the way of human participation in the redemptive action of the crucified Christ. As Mary leads us to Christ, her son, so Edith Stein stresses the fundamental call basic to all persons: the imitation of Christ. So as Christ is the head of all humanity and the whole of humanity forms the church which is the Mystical Body of Christ, women are called to equal action in the church.  
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She therefore believed every Catholic woman must be grounded in a sound spiritual life. This concept is basic to her analysis of the authentic identity of woman. Called to equal action based on a life of prayer, every Catholic woman has the capacity for good in building up the church and secular community and must necessarily be involved in the issues and concerns of her times. In 1932 in Zurich, before an assembly of Catholic academic women, she refers to Catherine of Siena writing that "out of love for the crucified Jesus we must be zealous, indeed overzealous for the Holy church."<sup>162</sup>

Without minimising the need for prayer and stillness, Edith Stein's writings and lectures at this point show a strong emphasis towards encouraging women and educators to take action against atheistic Nazism. She urges Catholic women to be more like the exceptional women Teresa of Avila, Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Siena,

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160 *ibid* p.10.

161 The editors of *Essays on Woman* point out "In her work as an instructor, Edith Stein was assigned to an educational system which was totally oriented to and co-ordinated with the intellectual needs of the masculine psyche. Any existing attempts to consider the expediency of feminine schooling as well were undertaken from the masculine point of view. Their efforts were not concerned with developing a young girl's unique nature but rather in forming her as a suitable companion of man. Edith Stein's studies are focused on her perception of the unique characteristics and the intrinsic value of woman. The author points out that it is fundamentally necessary to give a girl an all-round education suitable to her feminine uniqueness." *ibid.* pp.13-14.

162 *ibid* p.268

extraordinary witnesses to Truth and the church.<sup>163</sup> Her own action in 1933 of requesting a private audience with the Pope in the hope of encouraging him to write an encyclical against the persecution of the Jews is such an example. Yet while she urges other women to be strong witnesses, we see that her interior dissatisfaction<sup>164</sup> about this action is related to her call and response to Carmel expressed earlier, in 1928. As regards her paper *The Significance of Woman's Intrinsic Value in National Life* given in that same year Edith Stein says:

"I did not decline when the director of the Bavarian Women's Teachers' Association approached me to read this opening paper, but, nevertheless, I had strong reservations and even expressed them. Is a person who lives in the seclusion of the cloister, and who hears the surge of worldly life only from a distance, well-called to say something concerning the significance of woman in contemporary life? Even so, when I think of the quietest oasis of peace where I spent Easter week and Easter Sunday, and now see myself in this great gathering, then the contrast seems almost irreconcilable." <sup>165</sup>

In terms of woman's response, she describes women's natural capacity for interiority: as she put it, "secured in their own depth".<sup>166</sup> Her belief in woman's capacity for interior silence tells us as much about Edith Stein's own personal growth in prayer and surrender during her time at Münster as it does about her views on women:

"Every woman in the way most suitable to her, should try to find "breathing spaces" - moments in which she can return to herself and rest in God.

God is there [in these moments] and can give us in a single instant exactly what we need. Then the rest of the day can take its course, under the same effort and strain, perhaps, but in peace. And when night comes, and you look back over the day and see how fragmentary everything has been, and how much you planned that has gone undone, and all the reasons you have to be embarrassed and ashamed: just take everything exactly

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163 *ibid* p.268

164 Edith Stein is reported to have said of her approach to the Pope that: "Though it was completely in character for me to get involved in such an undertaking, I couldn't help feeling that I hadn't yet made my individual contribution. What that contribution consisted of, however I still had no idea" (unsubstantiated comment from Posselt, *op.cit*, reported in Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.64.

165 Edith Stein, *Woman*, p.279.

166 Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.54

as it is, put it in God's hands and leave it with him. Then you will be able to rest in him - really rest - and start the next day as a new life." 167

From the examples of her religious stance and apparent rigidity in the early years of her Catholicism, to her growing peace at resting in God through her years as a speaker and lecturer on women's topics and finally to Carmel, this is an obvious development in her attitude.<sup>168</sup>

### To Carmel and the Inner Life.

Edith Stein entered the Carmelite Monastery in Cologne on 15th October 1933, where she devoted herself to deepening her union with God through contemplation and relationship with the crucified Christ.

In this section I will concentrate on Edith Stein's mystical prayer, especially her prayer of atonement which as we shall see is held to be a crucial part of the evidence of her readiness to accept martyrdom. I will argue this was part of a three-fold process of deepening surrender and acceptance of closer union with God. This process, I shall further, argue, is more truly expressive of her growth in mysticism than of revealing her wish to be a martyr in the literal sense.

In Carmel she continued to articulate her spiritual journey intellectually through her philosophical and spiritual writings, the last two works being *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* (Finite and Eternal Being) which she began in 1931 and completed in 1936, and *Kreuzeswissenschaft* (Science of the Cross) which she wrote in 1940-41. The latter is an interpretation of the mystical theology of John of the Cross and of her own journey as related to her understanding of John's guidance. In Chapter Seven fuller treatment will be given to these two important works which reveal her mystical understanding. For the moment we can note the doctrine of the inner cell as taught by Catherine of Siena

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167 *ibid* p.54.

168 "In April 1933 a communication reached Pope Pius XI from Germany expressing grave concern about the Nazis' anti-Semitic aims and requesting the Supreme Pontiff to issue an encyclical on the Jewish question. The letter was written by the philosopher, Dr. Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism and later known as Sister Teresia Benedicta a Cruce of the Order of the Carmelites. Edith Stein's request was not granted." Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 1964. p.295.

and Teresa of Avila enabled Edith Stein to rely on God's will for her in the context of Carmel against the backdrop of growing Nazism and impending war. In *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* a main theme emerges:

"I know myself held in peace and security. Not the self assured security of one who stands in his own strength and on firm ground, but the sweet and blissful security of one who knows he is held in a strong arm. Nor would the child be reasonable that lives in fear that its mother might drop it. Hence in my being I find another who is not mine but the support and ground of my unsupported and groundless being." 169

This passage demonstrates how her faith has developed. As she states on the same page, "more than the way of philosophical knowledge, it gives us the God of personal nearness, the loving and merciful One, and a certainty such as no natural knowledge can give".

On 1st September 1935, the year of Edith Stein's first vows, the Nuremberg Statutes established laws discriminating against non-Aryans, particularly Jews. Jews were deprived of many legal rights, including publishing their written and art works. They were vulnerable to dismissal from jobs, and marriages with Gentiles were forbidden.<sup>170</sup> Because she was born Jewish, Edith Stein was prohibited from publishing *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* and *Kreuzeswissenschaft*. As a sign of their respect for her in the face of these restrictions, a group of German priests in Germany invited her to contribute to two volumes of work entitled *I Believe* and *I Live and You Live* published in 1937. These works were motivated by a desire to restate and reaffirm the Catholic faith and its doctrines to counter Nazi ideology.

Edith Stein wrote "The Prayer of the Church" in 1936 for the second volume of this series which she allowed to be published under own name - Edith Stein, a sign of her courage and conviction not only on her part but also on the part of the publishers in the face of anti-Semitism enshrined in German legislation at that time. This work, as an example of her growth in understanding of her union with God, is premised on her knowledge of the nothingness and transitoriness of her own being which can have life only in God. So her article "The

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<sup>169</sup> Edith Stein, *EES*, p.57.

<sup>170</sup> Lewy, *op.cit*, pp.281-282.

Prayer of the Church" stresses the idea of prayer - the means of communication and deepening union. She sees herself as a cell in the mystical body of Christ, in union with Christ, the model of one in solitary prayer, at one with the Father. As Herbstrith points out, Edith Stein discovered that:

"The more recollected the person lives in his innermost Soul, the greater the power he radiates outward and the greater the influence he exerts on others." 171

Herbstrith also makes important mention of the stress Edith Stein lays on the contribution of women of prayer who influenced both her life and that of the church. Edith Stein cites Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila, women whose apostolic fruitfulness was grounded in their life of prayer. Edith Stein uses the example of St. Teresa of Avila

"who did nothing for decades but pray in a convent cell, (and asks where did she) ever get her burning desire to defend the Church's cause of her profound insights into the problems and challenges of her time? Precisely by leading a life of prayer, by allowing herself to be drawn more and more deeply into the 'interior castle' until she reached the hidden chamber where the Lord could speak to her.....Once this had happened, it was impossible not to 'Be aflame with zeal for the Lord God of Hosts'." 172

This is a deepened aspect of her perceptions regarding prayer and action. Edith Stein's desire for union with God and surrendering to God's action in this life becomes clearer. Her conclusion in "The Prayer of the Church" indicates her understanding and belief that interior prayer and exterior action are in fact inseparable. She states:

"Every true prayer is a prayer of the Church, every true prayer has repercussions within the Church, and every prayer is, ultimately, prayed by the Church, since it is the Church's indwelling Holy Spirit that prays within each individual 'with sighs too deep for words' (Rom. 8;26). That is the mark of all true prayer 'for no one can say that Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12;3).

What else could 'the prayer of the Church' be except the mutual self-giving of God and the soul? In that full and

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171 Edith Stein, *EES*, p. 405. Cited in Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.88.

172 *ibid* p.89.

lasting union, the heart is 'lifted up' to the highest degree possible and prayer attains to its final stage....

Those who have reached this level truly are the heart of the Church; they have the high-priestly love of Jesus living within them. 'Hidden together with Christ in God,' they radiate to others hearts the divine love which fills their own, and join with Jesus in working towards the fulfilment of his one great goal: the restoration of all things to unity in God." 173

So by 1936 Edith Stein's firmly held conviction is that the true Christian apostolic life is founded on an inner life of prayer and sacrifice. She is at peace, having learnt from her own experience and relationship with God that it is possible to lead a life of a desire for perfection and union with God, whether in the world or the cloister. Human limitations exist in both places, and the challenge to respond in an attitude to surrender<sup>174</sup> to the God within remains the same.

#### Prayer Developing a Mystical Direction.

Edith Stein made her final vows as a Carmelite nun in April 1938. That same year saw Hitler's political co-ordination and strengthened remilitarisation in action, with the annexation of Austria to the Third Reich on 13th March and also of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. The German troops moved into Czechoslovakia on 1st October 1938.<sup>175</sup> Against this background of aggression and growing discrimination against the Jews,<sup>176</sup> Edith Stein's prayer and intuitive power was increasingly developing a mystical direction.

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173 *ibid* p.90.

174 "Set your heart free from everything, seek God, and you will find Him" An often stated message Edith Stein values in Teresa of Avila is quoted by Edith Stein in a letter to Mother Petra. *Briefe II*. Letter No. 278, p.118. Cited in Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p. 92.

175 England and France agreed to the annexation of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia to Germany, which was formalised on 1st October 1938 after the Munich Conference held on 29-30th September with the participation of England, France, Germany and Italy. Karl D. Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1973. p.390.

176 From January to September of 1938 the following laws discriminating against the Jews were passed in Germany: 21st January, minority rights abrogated by Rumania; revocation of the citizenship of many Jews; 26th April, directives regarding confiscation of the property of German Jews; 29th May, first law restricting the rights of Jews adopted in Hungary; 1st August, establishment of office for Jewish emigration headed by Adolph Eichmann; 17th August, Jews ordered to add 'Israel' or "Sara" to their names; 27th September, law prohibiting

By this time Edith Stein was well acquainted with the terminology of the mystical theology of John of the Cross and Thomas Aquinas. In the absence of language to describe the ineffable reality of a living God, John of the Cross takes Edith Stein beyond abstract concepts to the science of experience of God and the descriptions of such experience. He validates for her that the description of the "spiritual" is in the realm of experience rather than determined by philosophical maxims and prescriptions.

John of the Cross's use of the idea of "infused contemplation" refers to how the contemplative experiences reaching a new depth of soul in prayer. The notion of "infused" is the terminology John of the Cross adopted as the nearest psychological approximation to describe the "how" of this depth experience. His intention was to stress that "infused" is beyond ordinary language, used to explain an experience that is beyond any usual human experiences one might expect to have.<sup>177</sup>

The mystical direction Edith Stein took flowed from her desire for a special share in the sufferings of the crucified Jesus. Her mysticism is a demonstration of her embrace of and response to this mystery, her extraordinary understanding and sharing in the sufferings of Jesus.

Later in 1938 on November 9th, the pogrom of "Kristallnacht" occurred all over Germany. Jewish homes and businesses were plundered and destroyed, synagogues were burnt down and Jewish people were subjected to violence and in many instances killed. Edith Stein, through family members, visitors and correspondence, kept herself informed as much as possible of the political situation in Germany and the effects of government policies on Jews. Sister Teresia Renata and others report of Edith Stein's strong identification with her own Jewish race. On learning of the terrorism of Kristallnacht, Sister Teresia Renata reported Edith Stein as saying:

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the appearance of Jewish lawyers in German courts of law. Yisrael Gutman and Livia Rothkirchen (eds), *The Catastrophe of European Jewry*. Jerusalem: Ahva Co-operative Press. 1976. p 712.

<sup>177</sup> John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. (trans) Kieran Kavanaugh OCD and Otilio Rodriguez OCD, Washington DC: ICS Publications. 1991. p.382.

"It is the shadow of the cross which is falling on my people. If only they would see this! It is the fulfilment of the curse which my people called upon its own head. Cain must be persecuted, but woe to whoever lays hands upon Cain. Woe also to this city and this country when God's wrath descends upon them for what they are now doing to the Jews."<sup>178</sup>

The statement "it is the fulfilment of the curse which my people called upon its own head" reflects the traditional Christian attitude to the Jews as the murderers of Christ.<sup>179</sup> But supposedly coming from Edith Stein's own mouth, it seems implausible because it does not square with any of her own indubitable published works. Nor had she proselytised among her own people. Her autobiography does not show any disrespect towards the Jewish religion. When her mother died she responds to unfounded suggestions that her mother had become a catholic before her death. She wrote in a letter on 4th October 1936:

"The news of my mother's conversion is a totally unfounded rumour. I do not know who started it. My mother has remained true to her faith till the last. But because her faith and her solid trust in her God have held firm from her earliest childhood till her eighty-seventh year, because it was the last that remained alive in her even in her terrible agony, therefore I am confident that she has found a very gracious Judge and is now my most faithful helper so that I, too, may reach my goal."<sup>180</sup>

Sister Teresia Renata may have been trying to record and indicate the extent of Edith Stein's grief over Kristallnacht.

Herbstrith gives a more accurate treatment of Edith Stein's responses, drawing from Edith Stein's writings and letters. These focus on her strong desire to be one with the crucified Jesus in response to these

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<sup>178</sup> Posselt, op.cit, p.184 and Graef, op.cit, p.184.

<sup>179</sup> Both Posselt and Edith Stein would have prayed every year on Good Friday for the conversion of the Jews in the following terms: "Oremus et pro perfidis Judaeis: ut Deus et Dominus noster auferat velamen de cordibus eorum; ut et ipsi agnoscant Jesum Christum Dominum Nostrum": Let us also pray for the perfidious Jews: that our Lord and God lift the veil from their hearts so that they recognise Jesus Christ our Lord. *Liber Usualis*, Tournai: Desclée, 1956. Edn. no. 801. p. 734. One assumes that Posselt would have been rather more comfortable with this formulation than Edith Stein would have been.

<sup>180</sup> Graef, op.cit, p.145.

events. Herbstrith reminds us that as early as Easter 1933 Edith Stein clearly articulated her commitment to this. She says:

"I spoke with the Saviour to tell him that I realised it was his Cross that was now being laid upon the Jewish people, that the few who understood this had the responsibility of carrying it in the name of all, and that I myself was willing to do this, if he would only show me how. I left the service [Holy Hour at the Carmelite convent in Cologne] with the inner conviction that I had been heard, but uncertain as ever as to what 'carrying the Cross' would mean for me." 181

According to Herbstrith, in another letter to Mother Petra, written after Kristallnacht in December 1938, Edith Stein transformed her initial responses to this event "into an act of voluntary atonement."

"One thing I should tell you: when I entered, I had already chosen the religious name I wanted, and I received it exactly as I had asked for it. 'Of the Cross' I saw as referring to the fate of the people of God, which even then was beginning to reveal itself. As I understood it, anyone who recognised that this was the Cross of Christ had a responsibility to bear it in the name of all. I know a little more than I did then what it means to be betrothed to the Lord in the sign of the Cross. But it's not something that can ever be understood. It is a mystery." 182

The events of 1938 resulted in Edith Stein's going to Echt in Holland on 31st December of that year. It was felt that both the convent in Cologne and Edith Stein herself would be safer from the attention of the Nazi authorities.

Herbstrith's presentation of excerpts from Edith Stein's letter from Echt which "radiate an imperturbable peace" indicate the progression of her growing union with God through her share in Christ's sufferings. An early letter from Echt states:

"Ever since coming here, I find my predominant feeling has been gratitude: for being allowed to live here, for this being the kind of community it is. That doesn't mean I'm not constantly aware that here we have no lasting dwelling place. But as long as God's will is accomplished in me, I ask for nothing else...What I do

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181 Herbstrith, op.cit, p. 64. Herbstrith quotes this from Posselt p.100.

182 Stein, *Briefe II*, Letter 290, p. 127 Cited in Herbstrith, op.cit, p.93.

have to pray for is the ability to be faithful under all circumstances. As for the people who have heavier burdens than I do, without the benefit of being solidly rooted in the Eternal, anyone who joins me in praying for them has my heartfelt gratitude too." 183

Posselt, Graef and Herbstrith all refer to the following letter written of 26th March 1939 as an indication of her desire for unconditional surrender to God's will as she experienced it.<sup>184</sup> This response to the imminence of war and escalating persecution of the Jews offers a clarity of her understanding of God's direction in her life, a mystical intention rather than a desire for martyrdom per se:

"Dear Reverend Mother: Please permit me to offer myself to the heart of Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement for true peace, that if possible the reign of Antichrist might be broken without another world war and a new social order might be established. I would like to do it today, if I could, since it is already the final hour. I know I myself am nothing but Jesus desires it, and I am sure he is asking it of many others in these days."<sup>185</sup>

Sister Teresia Renata refers to this prayer as a precious memento of Edith Stein's obedience and loyalty of response

"to the renewed graces pouring into her soul, of her unconditioned service to Christ, of how she looked reality squarely in the face and had foreseen what later came to pass." 186

Graef relates this letter as being an intensification of Edith Stein's earlier offering of herself as a victim for her people, at the time of her entry to Carmel. Graef gives no more comment other than to treat this as an event in her narrative of Edith Stein's new beginning in the life of the Echt community.

Sister Teresia Renata attributes great weighting to a lost picture <sup>187</sup> on the back of which she claims Edith Stein had written of her desire "to

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183 Stein, *Briefe II*, Letter 300, pp. 136-137. Cited in Herbstrith, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

184 Posselt, *op.cit.*, p.212, Graef, *op.cit.*,p.188 and Herbstrith, *op.cit.*, p.95.

185 Herbstrith, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

186 Posselt, *op.cit.*, p.212.

187 This was sent on to Edith Stein along with other gifts from Echt to Westerbork, the second camp Edith Stein was taken to after her arrest. All items says Posselt were lost.

sacrifice her life for the conversion of the Jews".<sup>188</sup> This claim will be considered in Chapter Eight in relation to Edith Stein's claimed "martyrdom". The desire to offer herself as a sacrifice of atonement has received important attention by the "saint makers" in Rome as being significant evidence for it.

I will argue, on the contrary, that this desire is part of the process in Edith Stein's growth as a mystic, and demonstrates her heroic character as expressed in her openness and readiness to share in Christ's passion. Willingness to suffer in the spirit of love does not necessarily mean a desire to experience physical pain or martyrdom. Edith Stein wanted to live. Herbstrith makes the important point that:

"Edith Stein's spontaneous desire to join in atonement with the many who were offering themselves to God should remove any question about her motives for coming to Holland. It was not a flight from reality she sought, but entrance into the redeeming action of Christ."<sup>189</sup>

From the holding camp at Westerbork in 1942 one of her last written requests to the nuns in Cologne was for them to speed up the negotiations with the Swiss authorities to allow her to immigrate to a Carmel there. In other words, she took what steps she could to stay alive. Rather than offering herself for martyrdom, I believe, Edith Stein was expressing the mystical union which she had already experienced and whose depths she was entering further into. This is seen in her articulation of her last will and testament, also written in 1939. Her clarity about the 'how' of her union with the suffering Jesus becomes clear. She writes:

"I joyfully accept in advance the death God has appointed for me, in perfect submission to his most holy will. May the Lord accept my life and death for the honour and glory of his name, for the needs of his holy Church - especially for the preservation, sanctification and final perfecting of our holy Order, and in particular for the Carmels of Cologne and Echt - for the Jewish people, that the Lord may be received by his own and his kingdom come in glory, for the deliverance of Germany and peace throughout the world, and finally, for all

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<sup>188</sup> Posselt saw this as "readiness for this heroic sacrifice" as related to her death and "martyrdom". *op.cit*, p.21f.

<sup>189</sup> Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.95.

my relatives living and dead and all whom God has given me: may none of them be lost."<sup>190</sup>

Her acceptance here is not a prediction that she will die and wants to die, so much as an articulation that she is strengthened in the knowledge that she "is held in peace and security" in the heart of God. It is the fruit of deepening prayer and understanding of what the sacrifice of atonement meant for her. This is clear in a further meditation presented to the prioress, around 1939 or early 1940. Edith wrote:

"Once you are joined to the Lord, you become as omnipresent as he is. Instead of offering assistance in one particular place, like the doctor, nurse or priest, in the power of the Cross you have the ability to be everywhere at once, at every scene of misery. Your compassionate love, drawn from the Redeemer's heart, can take you in all directions, allowing you to sprinkle on every side the Precious Blood that soothes, heals and redeems.

Do you see the eyes of the Crucified looking at you with a searching gaze? They are asking you a question: Are you, in all seriousness, ready to enter once again into a covenant with the Crucified? What are you going to answer?"<sup>191</sup>

This sums up Edith Stein's grasp of the mystery of the crucifixion and resurrection as she relates it to her own life and union with God.

"Right from the beginning I've been convinced that it is only by feeling the weight of the Cross that one ever gains a *scientia crucis*. That is why I have said with all my heart: *Ave crux, spes unica!*"<sup>192</sup> (Edith Stein's italics)

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<sup>190</sup>Edith Stein's last will and testament held in Edith-Stein-Archiv, Karmel Köln. Cited in Herbstrith, op.cit, p. 95.

<sup>191</sup> Edith Stein, "Ave Crux, Spes Unica" Unpublished article, Edith-Stein - Archiv, Karmel Köln. Cited in Herbstrith, op.cit, p.96.

<sup>192</sup> *ibid* p.96.

CHAPTER FIVE

ASCENT TO THE MEANING OF BEING

Between 1933 and 1936 Edith Stein wrote her last major philosophical work, *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* (Finite and Eternal Being), her attempt to provide a synthesis between Scholasticism and phenomenology. It is a metaphysical work, where she discusses the question of being and the meaning of being. She sees that the problem of the meaning of being is inextricably linked with the search for something everlasting. In this search for meaning, human, i.e. created being, eventually encounters uncaused Being, the ground of individual and of all being. Edith Stein concluded that in finding and recognising Eternal Being, human beings simultaneously find meaning, therefore the ground of all being gives meaning to being.

In this work she takes a wider interpretation of John's gospel as signifying "In the beginning was sense, or meaning." <sup>193</sup>

If *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* marks the maturation of Edith Stein's thought, *Kreuzeswissenschaft* is considered by many to be "her most mature work" in terms of her pre-occupation with mysticism and mystical theology. *Kreuzeswissenschaft* is not a logical system, nor is it only a demonstration of her intellectual knowledge of John of the Cross. This study is concerned with a unity of faith and life lived within an understanding and acceptance of the mystery of God as central to human mystery.

This last work is considered to be existential in that it is a description of her own experience of encounter with the cross, an experience she believed was inescapable for all humankind. So the science of the cross for Edith Stein was bringing the doctrine of the cross into unity with her own life. This work was never completed, interrupted by her arrest by the Gestapo on 2nd August 1942.

These two works and a smaller article called *Wege der Gotteserkenntnis* (Ways to Know God) on Pseudo-Dionysius complete the corpus of Edith

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<sup>193</sup> "Im Anfang war der *Sinn*" (her italics). Edith Stein, *EES*, p.103.

Stein's philosophical and mystical theology. I will concentrate on the central insights expounded in *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* and *Kreuzeswissenschaft* as evidence of her growth in mysticism.

I will focus first on *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* because this is the work which marks Edith Stein's transition from philosophy to mystical theology. It is in this work in particular that her unique path towards mysticism must be seen. This chapter does not claim to be a full philosophical critique of *Endliches und Ewiges Sein*, a densely argued work of some 482 pages. Rather, this work is taken to show her fundamental pre-occupation with mysticism. Edith Stein's mystical understanding in this work and in *Kreuzeswissenschaft* is expressed through the method of philosophy because that was the method she knew, whereas visions and raptures such as experienced by her mystical ancestors were methods she did not know. From her intellectual penetration of Thomas Aquinas in *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* and John of the Cross in *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, a clear picture emerges of her understanding that she fulfils her human purpose when and only when she reaches permanent union with God.<sup>194</sup>

The question of the structure and essence of person and human nature occupied Edith Stein from the time she studied psychology through philosophy and theology. So her continuing search for the underlying ontology and unity of human person as a somatic-psychic-spiritual being whose essence is spirit occupies the central place in *Endliches und Ewiges Sein*, which concludes in her metaphysics of God as Person.

### Choice of Faith over Discursive Reasoning

This work, subtitled *Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn des Seins* (An Ascent to the Meaning of Being) is her starting point regarding the question of human existence. Our own existence she says is

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<sup>194</sup> "Wenn aber das irdische Leben endet und alles abfällt, was vergänglich war, dann erkennt sich jede Seele, wie sie erkannt ist", d.h. wie sie vor Gott ist: als was und wozu Gott sie, sie ganz persönlich, erschaffen hat und was sie in der Natur- und Gnadenordnung - und dazu gehört wesentlich: kraft ihrer freien Entscheidungen - geworden ist. Edith Stein, *EES*, p.462.

"something that is quite otherwise near to us, even inescapably near. 195

For example, she goes on to say, we know that we are alive whether we are awake, asleep, dreaming, experiencing emotional feelings, e.g. joy, pain. So the knowledge of being alive is not dependent on what we are doing and being. This knowledge then is innate and the very certainty of our being is, in a way, inseparable from us and original to us.

This certainty that I am is initially unreflected. But when the mind reflects and considers what is this being I am conscious of, at once two things become evident, that of being and non-being.

The being in which I exist changes with time; i.e. it is a being there now "present" between a no longer being there, "past", and a future, i.e. not being there yet. This awareness of being and not-being suggests the idea of infinite or pure Being, whose existence is unchanging and therefore not determined by past or future.

Edith Stein concluded that uncaused, unchanging being whose existence is eternal, and changing being, which exists in time, are ideas which the mind does not borrow from somewhere else, but comes to realise in and by itself. 196

Her analysis of the human experience of the finitude of the I demonstrated that the so-called independent ego, being ephemeral, necessitated a search for an uncaused First Being. This ongoing search for eternal, uncaused Being is so important to Edith Stein, and so directly linked to understanding the ground of the coherence of human existence, that her inquiry frequently returns to the question, "What is human being?"

In experiencing ourselves as being in time in a constant movement from past, in present and into future, we experience what is potential becoming actual; and as time continues to move, what is actual goes back into potentiality. So as human being has its existence in time, we

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195 *ibid* p.34f

196 *ibid* p.37

experience both becoming and dying; that we are mortal in the face of eternal, unchanging Being.

Yet human being is not yet complete, and therefore experiences becoming. This cannot be separated from being even though becoming is a transitory state, because this state of becoming can only be known through and with being. It is not possible to deny the state of being as separate and distinct from becoming; because to do so would necessarily have to deny the possibility of becoming and therefore end in nothingness.

So held-in-being, becoming and unbecoming must come from something that is outside ourselves. The "I" or ego then has experiences of life and the content of life through potentiality to actuality but cannot claim itself to have arrived and therefore to control its own beginning, and so is confronted with impotence and vulnerability. So Edith Stein concluded that finite being

"is put into existence and sustained there at every moment, thus the being of the "I" is received being. My being, as I find it and find myself in it is a "nothinged being": I do not exist of myself, and of myself I am nothing." 197

Every moment I stand before nothingness and am dependent on being continued anew with being. So my frail being is closer to being than to nothingness, because it not only responds to being in the very instant but is actually sustained there. My being therefore desires not only indefinite and eternal continuation of its own being, but wants the totality of the fullness of being; i.e. being which amounts to changeless, eternal being.

Because of the nothingness and transitoriness of the being of the ego, Edith Stein realises that:

"Temporal being is a movement of existence; an always new shining (Aufleuchten) of actuality. The being that is temporal does not possess its being, but is being given its being again and again. In this way we are confronted with the possibility of a beginning and ending in time. Here we find a description of one sense

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197 *ibid* pp.34-44.

of finitude: that which does not possess its being but needs time to arrive at being, would be accordingly the finite. Even in case it would be kept without end in being, it would not yet be infinite in the full sense of the word. Authentically infinite is that which cannot end, because it does not receive being, but it possesses being, is Lord of being, is Being itself. We call it the eternal Being. This being does not need time, but is also Lord of time. Temporal being is finite, eternal Being is infinite. But finitude means more than temporality, and eternity means more than impossibility of ending in time. That which is finite needs time to become that what it is (das-was). And that is a thing-like limitation. That which is put into being, is being put into being as something. As something which is not nothing, but also not everything. And that is the other sense of finitude: to be something and not everything. Accordingly eternity, as full possession of Being means: there is nothing one is not, i.e. to be all."<sup>198</sup>

Aware of human finitude yet certain about being kept in being in every moment, Edith Stein also discovers that ultimate meaningfulness is distanced from human meaningfulness and that ultimate meaningfulness is found in Eternal Being which keeps finite human being and human meaningfulness in being. She is also aware that this conclusion is attainable through two paths: through philosophy and discursive reasoning, and through faith which gives a certitude beyond natural knowledge and also gives the possibility of a relationship of personal nearness with God. Edith Stein saw the latter as the truer way. Uncaused and eternal Being is God, the ground of her finite and transitory being.

She is aware that human finite minds cannot fully grasp God's eternal being and ultimate meaning because God's ultimate purposes are distinct from human ones. She justifies her preference for the way of faith, as Graef shows:

"The security of being, which I sense in my transitory being, points to an immediate anchoring in the last support and ground of my being..This is, indeed, only a very dark sensing, which one can hardly call knowledge..This dark sensing gives us the Incomprehensible One as the inescapably near One, in whom we "live and move and have our being", yet as the Incomprehensible One. Syllogistic thinking formulates exact notions, yet even they are incapable of

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<sup>198</sup> From Edith Stein, *EES*, p.60. Cited in John Nota, "Edith Stein and Martin Heidegger" in *Carmelite Studies* IV(1987): p.56.

apprehending Him who cannot be apprehended; they rather place Him at a distance, as happens with everything notional. The way of faith gives us more than the way of philosophical knowledge: it gives us the God of personal nearness, the loving and merciful One, and a certainty such as no natural knowledge can give. Yet even the way of faith is a dark way."<sup>199</sup>

Graef goes on to make the important point that while this is true "a scholastic philosopher would probably object very strongly to this preference for 'sensing' as opposed to proof by reasoning, and to the mixing up of the spheres of faith and philosophy." She claims of Edith Stein that "it is the preference of 'modern', and moreover the feminine mind to which the objectivity and clear-cutness of Aristotle and Thomas remained foreign."<sup>200</sup>

I believe rather that this is not a categorical philosophical statement, but a description of her mystical journey through a philosophical mode. Right in her introduction to *Endliches und Ewiges Sein*, Edith Stein states her standpoint. She claims that the separation of philosophy and theology, with philosophy claiming independence from the uncreated Creator of all reason and thought, fallaciously takes true philosophy away from being founded on eternal principles. God is her eternal principle.

In the second part of *Endliches und Ewiges Sein*, Edith Stein considers human meaning and destiny. She concludes that God's uncreated and eternal Being meant that God was beyond time and not subject to past, present and future. Rather God viewed the states of time simultaneously.<sup>201</sup> So here too we get her understanding of God's providence and what that means to her. She says:

"I am more and more firmly convinced that my whole life, including the smallest details, is part of God's providence..I look forward joyously to the beatific vision in heaven, when the meaning of all happenings will become clear, not only the happenings of individual lives but of all mankind, and even beyond that, the meaning of the totality of all being."<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> From Edith Stein, *EES*, p.57f. Cited in Graef, op.cit, p.151.

<sup>200</sup> Graef, op.cit, p. 151.

<sup>201</sup> Edith Stein, *EES*, p.112

<sup>202</sup> *ibid* pp.109-110.

She further concluded in the section on the Image of God that each person created in God's image is also unique and that the ultimate meaning a human being can find is the fulfilment of his or her purpose in reaching permanent union with God.

She describes the soul as being the central place of encounter with God and the dwelling place of God where union is possible. She talks about the soul as the "dark ground" which rises to the daylight of consciousness in the life of the Ego. Because the ego can be influenced by behaviour one has the power to co-operate in the formation of my soul Edith Stein writes:

"The personal I is truly at home in the innermost part of the soul. *If* it lives here, then it disposes of the gathered strength of the soul and can use it freely. Then it will be closest to the meaning of all happenings and open to the demands that are made on it, and will be best prepared to gauge their importance and bearing. But there are few people who live in such recollection. In most of them the I is situated rather at the surface; occasionally, it is true, it is shaken by 'great events' and drawn into its depth; then it will seek to live up to the event by behaving adequately; but after a more or less prolonged sojourn there it will return to the surface. Indeed, that which comes in from outside is often of a kind to allow itself to be dealt with fairly adequately from a superficial, or at least not very profound level. It does not require the last depth in order to be more or less understood, nor is it necessary to respond to it by deploying one's whole strength. But if a person lives recollectedly in his depth, he will also see the 'small things' in their wider relationships. Only such a person can estimate their importance - measured by ultimate standards - in the right way and regulate his behaviours accordingly. Only in this is the soul on its way to the final forming and to the perfecting of its being....It is from the interior too, that one's own being radiates....The more recollectedly a man lives in the interior of his soul, the stronger will be the radiation that emanates from him and exercises its spell on others."<sup>203</sup>

To reach permanent union with God is only possible after death, when transitory and ever-perishing being is discarded and when unconditional love is attained. This enables full participation in God's

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<sup>203</sup> *ibid* p.404f. Cited in Graef, *op.cit*, pp.159-160.

love which is infinite and limitless love.<sup>204</sup> The way to grow in union is to enter into the inner sanctuary of the soul. The withdrawal into the interior of the soul, because it is the place where God dwells, is the place of grace which helps us to be surrendered to God's will and detach ourselves from all created and earthly things which conspire to distract us from growing towards our purpose of union. As Graef quotes from her:

"This withdrawal into the innermost part of the soul is no sterile preoccupation with oneself. 'This it is, that the adepts of the interior life have experienced at all times: they were drawn into their inmost part by something that drew them more strongly than the whole external world; they experienced there the irruption of a new, powerful, higher life..Mystical grace gives as experience what faith teaches: the indwelling of God into the soul.'"<sup>205</sup>

By drawing on the idea that grace is experienced in the indwelling on the soul, Edith Stein puts God's kingdom within the centre of our being, thus uniting the kingdom within with the kingdom above. The kingdom above is not bound by space, so the God within is not bound by space. Rather the soul is the space or place of encounter whereby freedom to surrender one's will to the divine will can grow because of the power of God's grace, and grow in love and capability of union with God. Edith Stein accepts that when one is empowered by God, it is possible to do things beyond what one might have thought possible. She gives an interesting example as follows:

"The command of the Lord: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' binds without conditions and modification. My 'neighbour' is not the person I 'like'. It is everyone who comes near me, without exception. And again we are told: 'You can, because you shall.' The Lord Himself demands it, and He does not demand the impossible. On the contrary, He makes possible what would naturally be impossible. Saints who trust in this sufficiently to resolve on loving their enemies in a heroic way, have been made to realise that they had the freedom to love."<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> *ibid* pp.461-462.

<sup>205</sup> *ibid* p.407. Cited in Graef, *op.cit*, p. 160.

<sup>206</sup> *ibid* p.410. Cited in Graef, *op.cit*, pp.161-162.

This example is an interesting one in light of her desire to be an atoning sacrifice for peace, which is a desire to unite her own sufferings with the sufferings of the crucified Christ as the ultimate goal of her path to union with God. Towards the end of this section, Graef rightly claims, she continues giving more theological and mystical analyses of many of the philosophical analogies and images she describes. Her understanding of the Trinity for example is a further, powerful demonstration of her mystical insights. Graef feels the Edith Stein's concentration on St. Augustine and St. Thomas regarding Trinity would have benefitted from the inclusion of the "whole rich tradition of the Greek Fathers, in whose theology the image, the *Eikon*, plays such an important part."<sup>207</sup> On the contrary, I suggest that her conclusions reflect her mystical analysis very strongly. In the Trinity, God is manifest most truly and most fully. She says:

"God is utter generosity - The Father stripping Himself of His Nature, as it were, for the sake of His Son, and yet losing nothing; the Father and the Son giving Themselves to the Holy Spirit, and yet retaining the fullness of divine Nature; each Person being in Himself and yet wholly in the Others. A thing so inward is spirit - an inwardness entirely non-spatial - that in going out of itself it remains within itself. And this going out of itself is of its very nature, for spirit is selfless, not in that it has no self, rather in that it gives itself completely, without losing it, becoming manifest in this very generosity. Insofar as he is spirit, the image of the Triune God, man goes outside of himself to enter an opening world, without, however, leaving himself - for this is the way of spirit."<sup>208</sup>

Edith Stein continues her discussion pointing out that body and spirit are united and inseparable, with the capability of the spirit illuminating from the dark ground of matter out of which it must arise. She distinguishes between spirit and soul in order to synthesise their intrinsic togetherness:

"Though the 'soil' in which the spirit is planted remains 'dark,' yet it is given man as material to be shaped, to be illumined, to be drawn upward by the spirit - that is, by the soul at its innermost - and this ascent is his life-long task. Never can his spirit be forever quite of the body, a body assured of

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<sup>207</sup> Graef, op.cit, p. 162.

<sup>208</sup> Summarised from Edith Stein, *EES*, pp.333-335.

resurrection, and even in this life it is never mere 'stuff'; it is always 'my' body, as nothing external is mine. I live in it, as in my native abode, and therefore the shiver that runs down my back, the pressure in my hand, the pain in my tooth, are just as truly part of my life as my thought and my joy. True, they are entirely different from the voluntary act of thinking or from the joy that rises from my inner depth; still, I am in them. What concerns my body concerns me....

As the instrument of my deeds, my body belongs to the unity of my person.

It is in the soul that the spiritual and the sensual meet and are woven one into the other. For it is man's to be neither beast nor angel, because he is both in one, 'conscious clay'; hence his sensuality is other than the beast's and his spirituality other than the angel's. The ways of the soul, in which our whole being is centred, are three. As sense-soul, it dwells in the body, in all its members and parts, being dependent on it and in turn sustaining and shaping it. As spirit-soul, it mounts above itself, looking into a world beyond itself, into a world of things, events, persons and entering into conversation with it. As soul in the strict sense, it dwells in itself - there the personal 'I' is at home, there is gathered together everything that comes from the world beyond it, there we are confronted with that world and take a stand, there we win from it what becomes our personal possession."<sup>209</sup>

Edith Stein concludes that by nature, human beings are the likeness and image of the Trinity of God, Son and Holy Spirit. Notwithstanding Graef's comments on the Greek Fathers, Edith Stein describes her conclusion speaking of:

"threefold development of the spiritual and intellectual [*geistig*] life outwardly in rational knowledge, feeling and willing, which are yet one as the development of the mind, and through their being mutually conditioned. We have, on the other hand, a threefold inner life, a being aware of one's own being according to knowledge in the primary form of memory, which is at the same time the primary form of knowledge, a feeling oneself and a voluntary affirmation of one's own being. The inner being of the spirit, its going outward and the discussion between interior and exterior are the fundamentals of the spiritual life."<sup>210</sup>

As Graef rightly points out, Edith Stein's final analysis of the image of the Trinity "is no longer philosophy, it is mystical theology". It expresses too her understanding of the union into which she wanted to pour herself when she prayed to have a full participation in the

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<sup>209</sup> Summarised from Edith Stein, *EES*, pp 342-344.

<sup>210</sup> Edith Stein, *EES*, p.418. Cited in Graef, *op.cit*, pp. 162-163.

sufferings of Jesus Christ. It is a mystical understanding. Edith Stein says:

"The soul 'surrenders herself to the paternal will of God which, as it were, engenders the Son in her anew. She unites herself with the Son and desires to disappear in Him, so that the Father may see nothing in her save the Son. And their life unites itself to the Holy Spirit, it becomes an outpouring of divine love."<sup>211</sup>

Her final section, which covers the mystery of Christ as the Word made flesh, "ends with a view of humanity, and indeed of all creation, as the Mystical Body of Christ; for 'as the head of mankind, which itself combines the higher and the lower, Christ is the Head of all creation'."<sup>212</sup> Says Edith Stein:

"Every human being is meant to be a member of Christ's body, to partake in His divine life through free personal surrender...each one who belongs to Christ carries the kingdom of heaven invisibly in his heart."<sup>213</sup>

Roman Ingarden, a former member of the Göttingen School and phenomenologist who took this branch of philosophy to Poland, made some telling comments regarding *Finite and Eternal Being* which are quoted by Herbstrith. Ingarden was well acquainted with Edith Stein and they corresponded for a long time after she became a nun. Herbstrith comments that in this work "there are many instances where she simply incorporated traditional theological arguments without question."<sup>214</sup> Ingarden, according to Alois Dempf, claimed that he saw these instances as

"a tragic finale on the part of the author, 'by which he specifically refers to her abandonment of the Husserlian method in its strict objectivity. No longer adhering to the chief phenomenological principle, 'Nothing may be accepted in philosophy for which absolute evidence cannot be produced based on foregoing analytical procedures,' Edith Stein began to appropriate traditional Catholic positions without prior evaluation."<sup>215</sup>

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211 Edith Stein, *EES*, p.421. Cited in Graef, *op.cit*, p.163.

212 Graef, *op.cit*, p.165

213 Edith Stein, *EES*. p. 474-479.

214 Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.84.

215 Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.84.

Another comment made on *Finite and Eternal Being* by Jan H. Nota S.J., Edith Stein's friend and Professor of Philosophy and Phenomenology at McMaster University in Canada, is in the same vein. He states in his analysis of Stein and Heidegger:

"Excuse me for quoting this theological thought from Edith Stein. I could not resist the temptation to show that there are more ways in feminist theology than what some feminist theologians would make us believe. They would say that Edith Stein is a philosopher. And rightly so. But this woman-philosopher knew more about theology than many professional theologians of her and our time and, moreover, she wrote from experience and lived it. Her philosophy cannot be separated from her religion."<sup>216</sup>

Whether Edith Stein was the kind of theologian Nota talks about or not I cannot say. But these two comments from fellow philosophers confirm my point that philosophy was for her primarily the vehicle for the articulation of her mysticism.

### Science of the Cross.

The bridal union of the soul with God, won through the cross, is the central theme of Edith Stein's last work *Kreuzeswissenschaft* (Science of the Cross) written between 1941-1942. It is acclaimed by many writers (Posselt, Nota, Graef, Herbstrith, to name a few), to be more than simply an analysis of John of the Cross, but a statement of how she lived out her own science of the cross. Beyond this idea, none of these writers, with the exception of Graef, actually critiques or explains the content of this work.

Graef makes the important observation that the structure of the soul, and its relation to spirit and body and the human personality as discussed by Edith Stein in *Endliches und Ewiges Sein*, was in the realm of mystical theology. She comments that Edith Stein

"had analysed the image of God in the soul, and had mentioned the theological concept of person. But she had treated it all in philosophical contexts - where it was

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<sup>216</sup> Nota, op.cit, p.60.

far less appropriate - and took no notice of the fact that the doctrine of the Image had become one of the main bases for the interpretation of the mystical life."<sup>217</sup>

I take this to mean that Graef, who translated *Kreuzeswissenschaft* from German into English, grasped the profundity of this work as the interpretation of the mystical life, and in particular Edith Stein's mystical life, and in this respect more important than *Endliches und Ewiges Sein*. One of the editors of *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, Fr. Romaeus Leuven OCD, states:

"The whole work is devoted to the development of this idea [i.e. the concept of the Cross and a school of the Cross, that is to say, life under sign of the Cross]; hence it appears as a penetrating interpretation of the doctrine of the Cross, as a personal confession and also as a modern presentation of the Father of the Carmelite Friars.

This interpretation is all the more profound since the author, obeying the powerful religious aspiration of her soul, herself took the road described by the saint; because as a Carmelite she became familiar with his language and because she herself was a remarkable thinker with great psychological and educational experience.

Her work is also a personal confession, because this work does not express the tradition of the Order but is the attempt of a daughter of Carmel to explain the life and teaching of her spiritual Father from her own point of view."<sup>218</sup>

Dr. Lucy Gelber, the other editor, also comments on the intimate link between Edith Stein's words and her lived spirituality. She says in relation to this task:

"For Edith Stein this task meant that she would show, through the meditation of the writings, the life and the spiritual evolution of St. John of the Cross, that this work and this life melt into the most complete unity under the sign of Redemption.

Nevertheless, the indirect end Edith Stein had in mind when writing her work was to interpret in her own personal way the laws which govern spiritual being and life.'

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<sup>217</sup> Graef, op.cit, p.208.

<sup>218</sup> Edith Stein, *Science*, p.xi.

...Whilst studying the thought of another intent on following its development she finds herself irresistibly drawn to furnishing a personal work." 219

Edith Stein in her introduction states her justification and purpose of what she means by a Science of the Cross. She states:

"If we speak of a *Science of the Cross* this is not to be understood in the ordinary meaning of science: it is no mere theory, i.e. no combination of - really or supposedly - true axioms, no ideal structure of thought. It is, indeed, known truth, a theology of the Cross, but it is living, actual and active truth: it is placed in the soul like a seed, strikes root and grows, giving the soul a certain character and forming it in all it does or leaves undone, so that its own being shines forth and is recognised in it. In this sense we speak of a science of sanctity, and this is how we understand the science of the Cross. This form and force living in the depth of the soul nourish the philosophy of this man and the way in which God and the world present themselves to him, and thus they can be expressed in a theory."<sup>220</sup>

The soul's bridal union won through Christ's death on the cross is won for all eternity and the union lost in Eden is restored and sealed with the crucifixion. Edith Stein asks the question: how is it possible that union is reached and paradise restored through the cross? Like John of the Cross she uses paradoxical imagery. The places of falling and lifting up are the same, the tree of Paradise and the tree of Golgotha are one. Paradise lost and paradise gained arises out of the fact that the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil could only be gained by disobedience to God i.e. gained by choosing evil. It was only by Christ's taking upon himself the evil of suffering and death that, out of sin, he was made the instrument of redemption. Redeemed humanity then has a transformed understanding of good and evil and sinfulness.

To be rid of sin through participation in the passion and resurrection of Christ becomes the goal of those who seek perfect union with God through Christ. John of the Cross uses the metaphor of the Dark Night as the cleansing process towards union. The first step in the dark night is to put away all the things of the senses which are incompatible with divine light. Edith Stein describes the dark night as:

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219 *ibid* pp.xvi-xvii.

220 *ibid* p.l.

"The school of all virtues. To remain faithful to the spiritual life without finding consolation and refreshment in it is a training in resignation and patience. Thus the soul attains to a pure love of God, acting solely for his sake..."

The soul has escaped and reached the way of the spirit, which is also called the way of proficient or illuminative way, where God wants to instruct it himself without its own activity. Now the soul is in a state of transition; contemplation gives it purely spiritual joys in which the purified senses also begin to share."<sup>221</sup>

In her discussion of the poetic symbolism and imagery of John of the Cross, her central theme is to always relate everything to mystical union where God and the soul are one destined to remain forever in eternal love. This she says is the goal of humanity, and so stresses the total embrace of the cross in order to allow divine light and divine life into the dark crevices of our being, in order to bring us into eternal life with the risen Christ.

Edith Stein explains that by means of nothingness and aridity, God infuses into human soul's his abiding love and peace. The loving union between the soul and God which begins on earth is imperfect and incomplete, and is only perfected in heaven. We get her understanding of death when she says:

"Therefore the death of such souls is the more lovely and sweet the more the whole earthly life has been spiritualised. Their death is caused through the most sublime impulses and the most blissful encounter with divine love; it reminds one of the swan who sings most lovely when approaching death."<sup>222</sup>

While describing the death of John of the Cross as an example of a soul radiating with divine light with all darkness gone, Edith Stein was interrupted by the S.S. who arrived to arrest and deport her.

Edith Stein's science of the cross as a living participation in Christ's redemptive action was completed in Auschwitz. It is not the event of being murdered in the gas chambers there that makes Edith Stein a

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<sup>221</sup> *ibid* p.37.

<sup>222</sup> Edith Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, (trans) Sr. Lucia Wiederhoven in *Werke I*, p.40.

model of martyrdom. It is her commitment to growth in prayer and the spiritual life as her path to mystical union that gives us access to her heroic character. The next two chapters argue that Edith Stein is to be best regarded as a mystic on these grounds.

CHAPTER SIX  
MODELS OF MYSTICISM

Mysticism as a phenomenon and as a word is commonly understood to mean "the immediate feeling of the unity of self with God"<sup>223</sup>, based on the belief that it is possible for the human soul to be united with Ultimate Reality, the deity, the Absolute.

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines mysticism as:

"Belief in the possibility of union with the Divine nature by means of ecstatic contemplation; Reliance on spiritual intuition as the means of acquiring knowledge of mysteries inaccessible to the understanding." <sup>224</sup>

As a recent source puts it:

"The aim of the mystics, then, is to establish a conscious relation with the Absolute, in which they find the personal object of love. They desire to know, only that they may love, and their desire for union is founded neither on curiosity nor self-interest. That union which they seek is 'the supernatural union of likeness, begotten of love, which is the union of the human will with the divine'."<sup>225</sup>

It is not possible to provide an accepted definitive set of qualifying criteria to determine who or who is not a mystic, because opinions differ as to what does and what does not, constitute mysticism. In any case, these definitions are neither precise nor absolute because the meaning of mysticism continues to expand to include such phenomena as altered states of consciousness brought on by drugs, and experiences of other realities such as described in episodes labelled as schizophrenia.

This study will regard as pseudo-mystical, para-psychological phenomena, clairvoyance, magic and drug-induced "trips". Such

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<sup>223</sup> Margaret Smith, "The Nature and Meaning of Mysticism" in Richard Woods OP(ed), *Understanding Mysticism*, London: Athlone Press. 1981. p.20.

<sup>224</sup> Shorter Oxford Dictionary pp.1380-1381.

<sup>225</sup> Smith, op.cit, p.20.

altered states of consciousness all have an end in themselves, whereas traditional Christian mysticism is essentially God-centred rather than self-centred. The religious traditions that have their roots in the Old Testament, namely Judaism, Islam and Christianity, all share the same monotheism and believe that because God is living, personal communion and relationship of the human spirit with God is possible, indeed is the Ground of Reality, .

For a twentieth-century description of traditional God-centred mysticism I have drawn on the works of Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), a contemporary of Edith Stein. Underhill was one of the few western writers at this time who focused on mysticism. As such she remains a basic source even today, acknowledged by Christian traditions from Orthodox to Protestant. Drawing her insights from the Christian mystical tradition, Evelyn Underhill went beyond describing the lives of Christian mystics to include an exploration of the spiritual life itself. She based this on her central insight that mysticism as a phenomenon of religion was not extraordinary to the spiritual life. She penetrated beyond the external phenomena to the heart of mysticism, namely that it is an unfolding of an innate tendency in persons who wish to achieve fullness of their humanity by participating in the spiritual life, which is a journey of communion towards God, a union of love.

In defence of the importance of the spiritual life, Evelyn Underhill claimed that anyone who is committed to wanting union with God will take the path of the mystic. The potential of persons to lead spiritual lives carries with it the potential to have experiential knowledge of God, not apart from or outside the ordinary things of life, but in them. God then is accessible to human consciousness in the spiritual life as lived out by ordinary men and women. It will further be shown that Underhill's understanding of mysticism was close to Edith Stein's. Smalley states that:

"From the moment of its appearance (*Mysticism* <sup>226</sup>was published in 1911) Evelyn Underhill was irrevocably identified in her own mind as well as in public estimation as an advocate of the mystical apprehension of Reality, presented as the basal underlying and giving

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226 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, London: Methuen. 1911.

meaning to every valid religious system, but finding its least inadequate expression in the history and doctrines of Christianity."<sup>227</sup>

Evelyn Underhill joins Edith Stein's world in that her spiritual development was dependent on German Catholicism. Under the guidance of Baron Friedrich von Hügel, a Catholic academic, philosopher and theologian, Evelyn Underhill was led from monism to being spiritually Christocentric. She said:

"Somehow by his prayers or something, the Baron *compelled* [her italics] me to experience Christ. He never said anything more about it - but I know humanly speaking he did it. It took about 4 months- it was like watching the sun rise very slowly - and then suddenly one knew what it was."<sup>228</sup>

Also, von Hügel's philosophical framework challenged her to see an alternative to her early monistic view. Von Hügel emphasised the church as vehicle for the sacramental, was more importantly a vehicle of "great interconnection of souls" (Greene : p.11).

"In the age of subjectivism, arid intellectualism, and rampant individualism, von Hügel's philosophy with its emphasis on the transcendence of God, the organic interpenetration and connection of souls, and the availability of the Divine through institutions, nature and sacrament, presented Underhill with a different philosophic starting point, one much more amenable to her experience." <sup>229</sup>

Evelyn Underhill desired to lead a spiritual life. In 1907 her vague theism was replaced with a definite and clear decision to enter the Catholic church. As Smalley states:

"the effect of Evelyn's spiritual pilgrimage may be gauged from a letter written 4 years later. "The modernist storm broke; with the result that now, being myself 'Modernist' on many points, I can't get in without suppressions and evasions to which I can't quite bring

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<sup>227</sup> Susan J. Smalley, "Evelyn Underhill and the Mystical Tradition" in Benjamin Drewery and Richard J. Bauckham(eds), *Scripture, Tradition and Reason*, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark. 1988. p.269.

<sup>228</sup> Susan J. Smalley, op.cit, p. 274.

<sup>229</sup> Dana Greene(ed), *Evelyn Underhill: Modern Guide to the Ancient Quest for the Holy*. New York: State of University of New York Press. 1988. p.11.

myself...So here I am, going to Mass of course, but entirely deprived of sacraments."<sup>230</sup>

In that same year she married Hubert Stuart Moore. She delayed her entry into the Catholic church because of her husband's opposition to her decision and because of the Pope's condemnation of modernism.<sup>231</sup> As Evelyn Underhill saw herself as a modernist, this ultimately precluded her from joining the Catholic church. While as Greene states, Evelyn Underhill found God through Catholicism "and believed the mysteries were best preserved there" (Greene : 7), after many years of relying on her own personal religious expression, she did eventually become and remain an Anglican.

Evelyn Underhill's central insight then according to Greene is that mysticism

"is an experience of the interconnectedness and relationality of all reality. By describing and analysing that experience, she established the fact of mysticism and offered her beleaguered contemporaries a fresh approach to religion itself. Religion was not to be associated principally with doctrinal adherence, institutional affiliation or ethical living, but with personal engagement with the Absolute. This engagement she analogised as love and characterised as producing a changed consciousness and transformed life."<sup>232</sup>

Over the ten-year friendship between Evelyn Underhill and Baron von Hügel, her definitive work on mysticism was constantly revised as her own spirituality developed and progressed to an ever-deepening understanding of mysticism.

*Mysticism* includes an analysis of the way of the mystic, namely the inner journey towards detachment from the world and realisation of the potential of the soul. This potential enables the soul to transcend

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<sup>230</sup> Smalley, op.cit, p. 269.

<sup>231</sup> The movement called *Modernism* was named so "because its adherents sought to adapt Catholicism to what was valid in modern thought, even at the risk of introducing some discontinuity between new forms of belief and the Church's past teachings." It was condemned in three separate ecclesiastical documents: the *Lamentabili* of the Holy Office (1907), the encyclical letter *Pascendi* of Pope Pius X (1907), and the *Oath Against Modernism* (1910). From Richard P. McBrien, op.cit, p. 218.

<sup>232</sup> Greene, op.cit, p. 20.

knowledge of created things and advance into the realm of intuited and inexpressible knowledge of the uncreated, which is knowledge of God as a state of being, the essence of the nature of the soul. In 1928 this work was published in German.<sup>233</sup>

The relationship between the two writers was mutually beneficial, for Friedrich von Hügel, in the preface to the 2nd edition of his major work on mysticism,<sup>234</sup> quotes from Evelyn Underhill's book *Jacopone da Todi* and acknowledges her valuable input into his analysis of the subject of mysticism. There had been, however, another English influence on Von Hügel's spirituality: John Henry Cardinal Newman. Indeed, Newman and von Hügel are linked by a recent writer as the two "foundations of modern Catholic spirituality".<sup>235</sup>

"Von Hügel himself was deeply involved in the disquietudes of the late 19th and early 20th century over the relationships of Catholic tradition and modern thought - especially science, personalist philosophy, and historical consciousness. Both figures, [Newman and von Hügel] moreover were ecumenical in spirit and tone: for Newman ecumenicity came naturally, as his own evangelical and Anglican heritages always remained strong (as seen in his *Apologia pro vita sua*); for von Hügel, this openness to other traditions, came from his sensed vocation to recover the Catholic tradition in all its plurality by allowing it to dialogue with modern thought and with other Christians and non-Christian traditions."<sup>236</sup>

Both von Hügel's and Newman's works were held in those university libraries in the places where Edith Stein lived in Germany and were thus readily accessible to Edith Stein. We can show that Edith Stein must have been directly influenced by Newman, since she translated into German his letters and journals from 1801 to his conversion in 1845. Although, in the current state of Edith Stein research, it is not possible to say with any certainty whether Edith Stein had read any of von Hügel's works or not, it seems unlikely that a person with her

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<sup>233</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mystik: Eine Studie Über die Natur und Entwicklung der religiösen Bewußtseins im Menschen*. (trans) Helene Meyer-Frank and Heinrich Meyer-Benfrey. Munich: Reinhardt. 1928.

<sup>234</sup> Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element in Religion*. Vol. I. London. J.M. Dent and Sons. 2nd edn. 1923. pp.xiv and xviii.

<sup>235</sup> David Tracy in Dupré and Saliers, op.cit, p. 143.

<sup>236</sup> Dupre and Saliers, op.cit, p.144.

intellectual interests could have remained unaware of one of the great figures of early twentieth-century German Catholicism.

As Evelyn Underhill was favourably mentioned by von Hügel and her book available in German, it is very likely that Edith Stein did read Evelyn Underhill's treatise on mysticism. As a feminist of long standing (in 1918 she had joined the Deutsche Demokratische Partei, which held liberal views on the place of women in German society), Edith Stein should have been particularly attracted to Evelyn Underhill because she was a spiritual writer who was also a woman.

Edith Stein shared with both Newman and von Hügel their interest in the relationship between Catholic tradition and modern thought in the sciences and in philosophy. Her inquiry into the new and innovative disciplines of psychology and phenomenology lies within the lines of inquiry established by the two earlier thinkers. From a spiritual point of view she also shared their ecumenical spirit and non-dualism<sup>237</sup> as seen in Chapter Five. Newman, von Hügel and Underhill articulated their spiritual insights and experiences through an intellectual mode, the chosen mode of Edith Stein.

As both Edith Stein and Evelyn Underhill were part of this same web of reciprocal influence and shared understanding, Evelyn Underhill's description of the Catholic mystical tradition is particularly relevant to the Catholic theological stance which Edith Stein understood. All four writers had to confront the dichotomy of their times between the spiritual riches of catholic tradition and the quelling anti-intellectualism of the Catholic institution.

Philosophically and theologically, mysticism of Western Europe was inextricably intertwined with the patristic and mediaeval view of Christianity as both the patristic scholars and scholastic theologians knew how to adopt a philosophical viewpoint to theological and mystical ends. The primary ideology of the Catholic tradition at the turn of the

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<sup>237</sup> Dualism is about the soul-body split that sees there is a war between soul and body as if the two were separate components. The soul is higher and the body lower and base. Non-dualism teaches that in the incarnation there is a wholeness to human life, which accepts the body and soul are part of the one. Summarised from McBrien, *op.cit*, pp. 1076-1077.

century <sup>238</sup> claimed a dichotomy between the spiritual and the psychological, between the sensible and the mystical. The dualism of the time did not recognise matter and spirit, body and soul as being two aspects of the same reality.

Against this dominant ideology biased towards viewing human behaviour in terms of faculty behaviour, Evelyn Underhill intuited all these aspects as parts of a whole and articulated her model for mysticism and mystical behaviour based on the validity of intuition as integral to mystical union. This is best summed up in her belief that the spiritual life becomes not a portion of life but reality itself:

"It includes everything and as such exposes the false dichotomies created by much of theology. God is the other, the wholly Transcendent and the penetrating intimacy in all things. As such God, is accessible to all through ordinary life."<sup>239</sup>

Such intense contemplation, for mystics, while it differs from any other human or psychological experience, co-exists with ordinary life and events but is irreducible to any created thing or reality. The Divine Reality experienced in contemplation is always absolute and other, greater and beyond any human being, human action or human intelligence.

The arduous process of contemplation holds the belief in accessibility to the Divine Reality based on the clear conviction of a living God as the primary interest of consciousness of a personal self capable of a communion with him.

This capability suggests a knowledge which must be based on belief or intuition. Since human beings can only "know" what is akin to themselves, in order to have direct experience or knowledge of God, human beings must partake in Divine nature.

If this is the case, human beings must have a capacity, a faculty for the discernment of the truth of the spiritual path to mystical union. Contemplation is the subjective and experiential grasp of God who is not

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<sup>238</sup> McBrien, op.cit, pp.135-36.

<sup>239</sup> Greene, op.cit, p. 21.

of one's own creation, because that would be reducible to human creativity; contemplation is being oneself immersed in an existential mystery which is beyond oneself.

The dynamic of the process of contemplation entered into by mystics, as the potential of capability of relationship, is two-fold: it is

"a communion with a living reality, an object of love, capable of response which demands and receives from him a total self-donation. This sense of double movement, a self giving on the divine side answering to the self giving on the human side is found in all great mysticism." 240

Allied to this is the component concerning disposition or attitude, which Underhill claims transcends the apparently incompatible views across the various mystical traditions and unites them. She says:

"What is essential is the way the mystic feels about his deity and about his own relation with it; for this adoring and all possessing consciousness of the rich and complete divine life over against the self's life and of the possible achievement of a level of being, a sublimation of the self, wherein we are perfectly united with it, may fairly be written down as a necessary element of all mystical life." 241

Mystical contemplation is based on experiencing myself in existential mystery, and accepts it is the "other" who draws me into its mystery. This grasp as an intuitive awakening, whereby I have a certainty that the dynamic intervention by God in the experience of being drawn, enables me to see that the reality to which I am united is love, both absolute and dynamic.

The state of mysticism, then, is the person's state of desire which is the desire to remain in the spiritual realisation of being in boundless unity. The aim of the mystic is to be transformed into the likeness of the God who is boundless and who is love.

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240 Evelyn Underhill, "The Essentials of Mysticism" in Richard Woods(ed), *Understanding Mysticism*, London: Athlone Press. p.28.

241 Underhill, op.cit, p.28.

Mysticism, because it centres in the communion of the human spirit with God as the Ground of Reality on which our human existence rests, is the very heart of religion. If God is already within, and has to be searched for in the innermost depths of the human spirit, certain actions and practices which are integral to the process of contemplation and unity are essential.

Evelyn Underhill refers to the tasks of the mystic in her description of the mystical journey. She states:

"Every person who awakens to a consciousness of a Reality which transcends the normal world of sense - however small, weak, imperfect that consciousness may be - is put upon a road which follows at low levels the path which the mystic treads at high levels. The success which he follows this way to freedom and full life will depend on the intensity of his love and will; his capacity for self-discipline, his steadfastness and courage. It will depend on the generosity and completeness of his outgoing passion for absolute beauty, absolute goodness, or absolute truth. But if he move at all, he will move through a series of states which are, in their own small way, analogous to those experienced by the greatest contemplative on his journey towards that union with God which is the term of the spirit's ascent towards its home." 242

Edith Stein's definition is also expressed as journey containing a reforming force and spells out components of the practices and self-discipline which comprise this science of union. Edith Stein asserted that:

"The mystic is simply a person who has an experiential knowledge of the teaching of the church: that God dwells in the soul. Anyone who feels inspired by this dogma to search for God will end up taking the same route the mystic is led along: he will retreat from the realm of the senses, the images of the memory and the natural functioning of the intellect, and will withdraw into the barren solitude of the inner self, to dwell in the darkness of faith through a simple loving glance of the spirit at God who is present although concealed." 243

### Six Classic Catholic Mystics.

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242 Evelyn Underhill. *Mysticism*, London.: 1930. p.444.

243 Herbstrith, op.cit, p.89

This section will describe six classic mystics in the Catholic tradition, illustrating their similarities to and differences from Edith Stein. In particular, the synthesis between their commitment to staying on the journey towards union, and their contemplation and prayer, will be taken as typical of the mystical journey in the Catholic tradition.

The mystics I have chosen influenced Edith Stein because she saw that their lives, the foundations of their apostolic fruitfulness, were based in prayer and contemplation. Many of the records of Western mysticism are also records of supreme human action (Joan of Arc, for example). Many mystics were not only wrestlers of the spirit trying to achieve perfection; their very participation in the life of prayer has seemed to force on them a national destiny in society and in the church. Edith Stein did not separate prayer from apostolic activity and now she too, has such a national destiny.

The mystics to be discussed all spent long periods of time in solitude and prayer before activity in the world, and in turn allowed the world to become their arena for prayer. These six mystics are examples of people who accepted the teachings of tradition, yet also demonstrated a spiritual freedom within orthodoxy. They were disciplined in their own genius. These mystics will be presented in chronological order as they relate to the changing history of the church. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) and Mechtild of Magdeburg (1210-1285) are part of Edith Stein's cultural and national heritage. Bridget of Sweden (c.1303-1373) and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) were considered by Edith Stein to have demonstrated a mystical integrity based on uncompromising theological premisses and were chosen by Christ "with preference to be His instruments for doing great things in the Church".<sup>244</sup> Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and John of the Cross (1542-1591) are particularly significant because they are a part of Edith Stein's Carmelite tradition. Much of her religious formation in Carmel would have been based on the example and teachings of both these reformers of the Carmelite order.

As we have seen, Teresa of Avila's influence of Edith Stein was so profound that she is described by Sister Teresia Renata and other early

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<sup>244</sup> Edith Stein, "Das Gebet der Kirche" quoted in Graef, op.cit, p. 125.

biographers as the catalyst for Edith Stein's conversion to Catholicism. John of the Cross, spiritual "Father" of the Order and intimate friend of Teresa of Avila's, remained central to Edith Stein's ongoing faith and spiritual development. As we saw, Edith Stein's final articulation of her faith journey as written in her book *The Science of the Cross* was based in the theology and mysticism of John of the Cross.

### 1. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

Evelyn Underhill sees Hildegard of Bingen is the "first great figure in the line of women mystics".<sup>245</sup> She is also the first German mystic. She offers us the finest example of what a woman in the twelfth century could achieve. If the twelfth century is regarded as a period of renaissance, then Hildegard was surely its Renaissance Woman. Hildegard of Bingen was a musician, poet, scientist, author, prophet, political activist and mystic.

Hildegard was born into a period which witnessed conflict between religious and secular power, between the Church and the Empire. At the highest level, the pope participated in the anointing of German kings as Holy Roman Emperors. The kings had some power in the election of bishops and even of the pope. Hildegard was very aware of both church and civil politics and she did not hesitate to write her denunciation of ecclesiastical laxity to the churchmen concerned. Their levels of status and power in the church did not deter her from being directly critical of them to them.

"Her rebukes and warnings to contemporaries are based on a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, which sees the world as a sign of the Kingdom. She was defended from her critics by the Cistercian Pope Eugenius III and by St. Bernard, who insisted to the Council of Trier (1147) that 'so remarkable a lamp should not be put out'."<sup>246</sup>

The monastic reform movement supported by Hildebrand (1073 - 1085), known as Pope Gregory VII, fought for papal supremacy, claiming all spiritual and judicial powers rightly belonged to the Pope. Hildegard did not endorse this radical absolutist view of papal supremacy, but

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<sup>245</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics*, p.75.

<sup>246</sup> Jones, Wainwright & Yarnold, *op.cit*, p.290.

opted for a notion of balance and interdependence and power sharing so as to avoid abuses on both sides.

Hildegard's literary output was prolific and diverse. Her first book, *Scivias*, i.e. "Know the Ways", a doctrinal work written from 1141 to 1151, was followed by a scientific medical encyclopaedia. This included a complete guide into the understanding of the nature and properties of herbs. She was skilled in medicine. Over sixty hymns have been attributed to her. Her songs were compiled under the title *Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelation*, products of her visions and divine revelations. One of her outstanding contributions to contemporary theology in the history of the church is that she places Christian revelation and human redemption into a cosmological framework.

Despite what Evelyn Underhill (p. 78) describes as her "abnormal psychic make-up and weak bodily health", Hildegard was not only active in church matters, writing and research; she also founded and administered two convents. Her responsibilities meant she had to travel many hundreds of miles completing four strenuous preaching journeys. Amidst all this activity, Hildegard, as Evelyn Underhill reminds us,

"remained first and foremost a contemplative, whose actions were always dictated by inward commands." <sup>247</sup>

These inner commands were the result of her contemplation and receptiveness to God in prayer. The symbolic pictures in *Scivias*

"continued to roll before her inward eyes, conveying spiritual teaching and prophetic denunciations of the corruptions of the age." <sup>248</sup>

For Hildegard of Bingen, her experience of God was the God of Light, and her descriptions of her visions are always expressed primarily in terms of light imagery. She describes a non-spatial light as "the reflection (or shadow) of the living light." She claimed the light would produce images, sometimes accompanied by a voice which always addressed her

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<sup>247</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics*. p.75.

<sup>248</sup> *ibid* p.78.

in Latin. She says she always recorded these words and indeed her experiences faithfully and accurately.

One of the striking features of Hildegard's works is that they are almost completely without the emotion which is so evident in the writings of later women mystics, like Catherine of Siena or Teresa of Avila. Hildegard's approach is almost a scientific analysis of her ideas and hypotheses tested out in prayer. There are no descriptions of loving conversations with Christ, because Hildegard held the view that she could be secure in the knowledge that she was a rational being. She saw her intellect as God's highest gift to her.<sup>249</sup> The illustrations in both her *Scivias* and *The Book of Divine Works* give some insight into what Hildegard saw. She analysed the physiological as well as the psychological and spiritual effects these experiences had on her.

Were it not for her "vivid sense of God and the creative quality of her spiritual life"<sup>250</sup> says Evelyn Underhill of Hildegard, there might be a hesitation in calling her experiences mystical. What Evelyn Underhill calls abnormal psychic make-up, Hildegard describes as an imbalance of the four humours in her, thus

"producing a permanent vulnerability, but also enabling her to become the dwelling place of the holy spirit." <sup>251</sup>

So the living light, her frail health and her visions were intimately connected. She could frequently predict future events:

"When fully penetrated by my light I said many things strange to those who heard them." She continued frequently and accurately to foresee future events, but only confiding in a few of her fellow-nuns, till the beginning of middle age, when she had been for some years abbess of her convent. Then her real prophetic period opened in a dynamic vision reminiscent of those associated with the calls of the prophets." <sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Hilda Graef, *The Story of Mysticism*, London: Burns and Oates. 1966. p.153.

<sup>250</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics*, p.79.

<sup>251</sup> S. Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Visionary Life*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1989. p.37.

<sup>252</sup> Evelyn Underhill. *Mystics*, p.78.

In 1141 one of her visions gave her an insight into the "spiritual meaning of Scripture, and commanded her to give her revelations to the world."<sup>253</sup> Again in 1147 she had another vision revealing the site of the convent she must build. On both occasions she kept secrecy about these prophecies and suffered ill health until she revealed her visions.

Hildegard of Bingen's writings then are prophetic in the sense of forward-looking, and didactic rather than ecstatic.<sup>254</sup> Her mysticism is neither significantly devotional nor romantic but rather focused on how to teach Christians to live and glorify God. She saw herself as a mouthpiece, a "feather on the breath of God" who is totally committed to the ongoing work of redemption. She claimed divine intervention as the inspiration and source of her works and talents. She emphasises their divine origin to the extent that she warns against any alteration of her words.

Hildegard, claims McDonnell, also represents a step in the transition from the isolated mysticism which existed in the age of Bernard

"to the full tide of articulate mysticism, first Cistercian then Dominican and Franciscan of the succeeding century." <sup>255</sup>

Her faith and quest for deepening union with God that places her among the mystics as one who had "immediate apprehension of God with its gift of freshness and joy" is summed up by Evelyn Underhill:

"From my infancy until now, in the seventieth year of my age,' she says, 'my soul has always beheld this Light'; and in it my soul soars to the summit of the firmament and into a different air....The brightness which I see is not limited by space and is more brilliant than the radiance round the sun....I cannot measure its height, length, breadth. Its name, which has been given me, is 'Shade of the Living Light'....Within that brightness I sometimes see another light, for which the name Lux Vivens has been given me. When and how I see this, I cannot tell; but sometimes when I see it all sadness and

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<sup>253</sup> *ibid.* p.78.

<sup>254</sup> Brunn, Emilie zum and Epiney-Burgard, Georgette, *Women mystics in Medieval Europe*, New York: Paragon House. 1989. p.8

<sup>255</sup> Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 1954. p.291.

pain is lifted from me, and I seem a simple girl again,  
and an old woman no more." 256

Edith Stein saw Hildegard as an example of an exceptional woman in the church of her time and a model for the twentieth century because of her love of the church and her preparedness to defend it and restate its values and doctrine. For Edith Stein, Hildegard is also an example of a person who is not afraid to speak truthfully about intimate things in her prayer life. Her non-dualistic vision of wholeness and beauty was born out of knowledge and experience of the fragmentation of the world in which she lived, a world which was nevertheless able to be transformed by God's love. Hildegard's understanding of human beings as psycho-somatic unities made in God's image and grounded in him is resonant in Edith Stein's work on the ascent to the meaning of being.

Hildegard was never canonised. The process for this was begun in the thirteenth century but was not completed. Her feast day in Germany is celebrated on 17th September, the date of her death in 1179. In 1979 the German Bishops petitioned Rome for Hildegard to be recognised as a doctor of the church.<sup>257</sup> To date this is where the matter rests.

## 2. Mechtild of Magdeburg (1210-1285).

Mechtild of Magdeburg is important for the history of mysticism because she is situated at the transition between medieval thought and the development of modern spirituality, between Hildegard's world and the world of the Rhineland mystics and Meister Eckhart. Brunn and Epiney-Burgard describe Mechtild as connecting "the feudal and sacral Medieval period to the successive courtly and individualistic part of the Middle Ages."<sup>258</sup> Her writings help advance the history of understanding of human beings as individuals whose experiences of God need not be bound by a sacral or hierarchical structure only. (This concentration on personal experiences of God would culminate in phenomenology.) Mechtild is therefore a vital link between Hildegard's somewhat abstract cosmological God-as-light and the Christ-my-

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256 Evelyn Underhill. *Mystics*, p.76.

257 A.M. Allchin, "Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen" in *Mount Carmel* 37(1989): p 132.

258 Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, op.cit, p. 43.

friend/lover of later mystics. Like Hildegard, Mechtild was a visionary in her conception of a cosmology and vision of an evolving redemption which will last till the end of time. Her expression, like Hildegard's, was comprised of pictorial visions of Christ, and allegorical revelations in prayer and liturgy as the principal media of spiritual apprehension of the mysteries of the faith she wished to communicate. Unlike Hildegard, however, she used the secular imagery of courtly love to convey her meaning.

Although Mechtild, the daughter of noble parents (her father was a knight), is identified with the mysticism of the Cistercian convent at Helfta, she was originally a beguine. The beguines created an alternative community life to the established religious orders. Their philosophy was to be self-sufficient in their community life which was based on prayer and living out their gospel values through charity to the poor and needy in their local neighbourhoods. As McDonnell describes,

"these women living together in looseknit communities did not just represent a fusion of monastic and secular elements, but had origins in a complex of socioeconomic and religious motivation." 259

The beguines were not bound by religious vows and, while they had close associations with and even commitments to religious orders, they resisted actually belonging to established religious orders. In time however under pressure from the institutional church many were swallowed up by established orders.

Mechtild chose to live with the beguines in the relative obscurity of Magdeburg where she had a basic education. While this included neither formal training in theological concepts nor advanced training in Latin, McDonnell points out it was her

"constant participation in religious life, to which she as a beguine was obligated, and a lively association with clerics and monks that gave her an abundance of theological and ecclesiastical ideas which became embodied in her reflections." 260

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259 McDonnell, op.cit, p. 88.

260 *ibid* p.379.

Mechtild claimed to have been visited by the Holy Spirit from the age of twelve. She concealed these exceptional experiences and graces until 1250 when she confided in her Dominican confessor Henry of Halle. For the next thirty years, says de Vinck, she continued to confide these mystical experiences to Henry of Halle, who instructed her to write them down. This writing task resulted in her book *Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit*, (The Overflowing Light of the Godhead).

Mechtild expressed her mystical experiences by interspersing poems and rhymed narrative prose in a lyrical vein. She wrote dialogued scenes between God and the soul and allegorical figures such as Fidelity and Lady Love.<sup>261</sup>

Mechtild's literary style borrowed from the secular poetry of her time and used allegory to account for the complete journey and consummation of the soul's life. de Vinck describes her originality expressed in the language of the

"minnesingers or troubadours who exalted the romantic excesses of courtly love, attributing heroic travails to imaginary personages. In Mechtild's works, God often appears as the emperor, Christ as the King, the heavenly choirs as the courtiers of heaven, and all of them speak in flowery terms of human love. Another of Mechtild's surprising themes is the inebriation of love, so that many of her poems sing of the joys of the tavern and of strong drink, much to the consternation of puritans." <sup>262</sup>

Mechtild too, in the name of the church, criticised the decadence amongst the clergy and state.<sup>263</sup> The intensity of her denunciation of the clergy wielded such influence, that around 1270, she was forced to seek refuge in the Cistercian convent in Helfta, away from her enemies. Like Hildegard, Mechtild claimed her teachings were from "God's heart and mouth."<sup>264</sup> Some of her visions were censured: for example, her vision of John the Baptist saying Mass was censured on the

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<sup>261</sup> Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, op.cit, p. 39.

<sup>262</sup> Jose de Vinck, *Revelations of Women Mystics*, New York: Society of St. Paul. 1985. p.5.

<sup>263</sup> Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, op.cit, p. 40; de. Vinck, op.cit, p.4.

<sup>264</sup> Graef, op.cit, p. 160.

grounds that this saint was not an ordained priest. Her book was attacked because of similar strange theological opinions considered to be unorthodox. But nonetheless her book does reflect the intense love of God, typical of the true mystics.

In Helfta, where she remained for the rest of her life, Mechtild imbibed the scholarship and spirituality of the convent. Heinrich Von Nordlingen translated Mechtild's works into High German commenting that her work was an example of

"the fruit of the most perfectly appeasing love that I have ever read in German." <sup>265</sup>

Again Mechtild insists that she did not have a learned mind but placed the responsibility of what she wrote on God, borne out of prayer and revelation.

### 3. Bridget (Birgitta) of Sweden (c.1303--1373)

Bridget of Sweden, like Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Siena, received revelations from God destined for the church.<sup>266</sup> She was born of noble parents in the Province of Uppland in Sweden. At the age of thirteen she married Lord Ulf Gudmarsson and they had eight children. Their happy marriage of twenty-eight years ended when Ulf died.

Supernatural experiences, were part of Bridget's life from the time she was seven years old.<sup>267</sup> But it was after the death of her husband that vivid visions and revelations increased in number and

"she transformed her life completely, to become 'the bride of Christ,' and developed her naturally mystical nature and intellect into that of an ascetic and an ambassador of Christ. She was both a contemplative and a woman of action."<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, op.cit, p.43.

<sup>266</sup> Teresa, op.cit, Vol. II. p.20.

<sup>267</sup> Birgitta of Sweden, *Life and Selected Revelations*, ( ed) Marguerite Tjader Harris, (trans) Albert Ryle Kezel. New York: Paulist Press. 1990. p.2.

<sup>268</sup> *ibid* p.1.

The principal action that God entrusted to Bridget in revelations was to work for the return and restoration of the papacy to Rome. Like Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila, Bridget encountered opposition, but like them was astute enough to put herself under the spiritual direction of educated men of high standing in the church.<sup>269</sup> Bridget's life is told in the *Vita* (Bridget's life) and in her Revelations which include her description of her mystical relationship with Christ, his revelation to her of his sufferings and her prophecies of future events. Her writings make up a fairly complete record of her growth of union with God.

Bridget did not use the poetic style of writing as found in Hildegard or Mechthild. She records her visions with their accompanying auditory messages and dialogues. Her writing is ordered, and her visions seem arranged in an orderly way according to subject matter - though how much of this is a result of the editorial work of her confessors is uncertain.<sup>270</sup> Bridget's writings are often opened by Bridget herself asking a question or retelling an experience or event.<sup>271</sup> Her journey of perseverance in prayer and fidelity to Christ's commands is

"most aptly understood as the result of a dialectical process partly between Birgitta and her confessors and spiritual advisers, partly between her own experiences and her mental and affective life."<sup>272</sup>

From her works, her teaching on growth in the spiritual life emerges, beginning with the desire for and practice of contrition and repentance. As Nyberg points out:

"The basic stages of spiritual development are all present in her life; purification from sin through contrition and acceptance of God's majesty, mercy, and care; illumination through steady progress in the virtues and through an ever greater

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<sup>269</sup> The three prominent theologians and spiritual directors in the life of Bridget were: Canon Matthias of Linköping, "the first Swede known to have translated and ingeniously commented upon the Bible in the Old Swedish language and whose commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John has been copied in a number of manuscripts from all parts of Europe."; the Cistercian prior Peter Olavsson from Alvastra; and Magister Peter Olavsson from Skanninge. The two Peters are the authors of the *Life* of St. Birgitta. See Birgitta, op.cit, p.14

<sup>270</sup> *ibid* p.59f.

<sup>271</sup> *ibid* p.33.

<sup>272</sup> *ibid* p.40.

understanding of and affection for God's salvific action towards his people by innumerable means; union of the soul with God as a bride is embraced by the bridegroom."<sup>273</sup>

Bridget worked most of her life on returning the papacy to Rome. She lived there for the last twenty years of her life until her death on 23rd July 1373. Her work included caring for the poor and sick while she continued to work constantly with officials and popes in Rome on the ecclesiastical and political problems confronting the church and Avignonese papacy.

Bridget, in her third major revelation, was instructed to found a religious order. The revelations associated with this request were very specific, right down to the actual design of the buildings of the monastery in Vadstena, Sweden, as well as how its Rule and membership should be structured.<sup>274</sup> The Order of the Holy Saviour (Bridgettines) as it came to be called, did not have official approval before Bridget's death. Katherine, Bridget's daughter worked to gain official approval for the Bridgettine Order.

Bridget was canonised in 1391, one of the only two laywomen to be canonised in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>275</sup> The other woman to be canonised was Catherine of Siena.

Edith Stein tells us of her impression of Bridget of Sweden as a model of of woman of prayer, dedicated to the church. She says:

"In the solitary conversation of consecrated souls there are prepared those widely visible events of the Church's history that renew the face of the earth. The Virgin, who kept every God-sent word in her heart, is the pattern of those listening souls in whom the High-Priestly Prayer of Jesus<sup>276</sup> is for ever renewed. And women who, like her, forget themselves completely in their contemplation of the Life and Passion of Christ, the Lord has chosen with preference to be His instruments for doing great things in the Church, such as St. Bridget and St. Catherine of Siena."<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> *ibid* p.40.

<sup>274</sup> *ibid* p.2-3.

<sup>275</sup> Woodward, *op.cit*, p.72.

<sup>276</sup> John 17:1 - 26.

<sup>277</sup> Graef, *op.cit*, p. 125.

#### 4. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

Catherine of Siena, a Sieneese dyer's daughter, was born at a time Evelyn Underhill describes as "almost unequalled ecclesiastical degradation"<sup>278</sup> in Italy. Politically too, Italy was in turmoil, with internal wars and religious chaos, and the Papacy exiled in Avignon in France. Like Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine's childhood imagination took a spiritual form. As a child aged five or six, she experienced vivid contemplative religious impressions accompanied by ecstasies and physical phenomena. At the age of ten she contracted a marriage with the heavenly bridegroom. By the age of sixteen, her determination to consecrate her life to God had not waned. When her family planned a suitable marriage for her, she clung to her vow of virginity, austere living and severe asceticism.<sup>279</sup> For some years, with reluctant parental consent, she remained secluded in the large family estate, fostering a religious life in the inner cell of her heart.

"Under the influence of this existence, with its total concentration on the inner life, her mystical powers developed quickly." <sup>280</sup>

Her union with God was expressed through ecstasies, visions and battles with evil spirits. Frequent colloquies with Christ and increasing raptures and ecstatic associations with his redemptive sufferings culminated in 1366 with the experience known as her "Mystical Marriage with Christ." Evelyn Underhill points out that this epoch in Catherine's development marked her

"transition from a purely ecstatic and personal to an active and altruistic mysticism." <sup>281</sup>

As her prayer and mystical experiences increased in intensity her apostolate became more active. Her ecstasies and visions reached their peak in 1370, culminating in a trance lasting four hours. It was

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<sup>278</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics*. p. 131.

<sup>279</sup> McDonnell, op.cit, p. 87.

<sup>280</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics*, p. 154.

<sup>281</sup> *ibid* p.154.

supposed she was dead. But she emerged from this experience which Evelyn Underhill claimed marked the beginning of her public career.

In a vision, Catherine of Siena had seen the Papacy manipulated by ignoble politics, the priesthood full of corruption and the Pope in exile at Avignon with the church hierarchy focused on anything but the good of souls and the purposes of God.<sup>282</sup> In her desire for unity and peace in the church, she travelled as an unofficial diplomat to Avignon following up a letter she had written to Gregory XI exhorting him to return to Rome:

"Answer the summons of God"! she wrote to him, "Who is calling you to come, hold and possess the place of the glorious shepherd St. Peter whose vicar you are'." <sup>283</sup>

Her influence was such that the Avignon exile ended, technically, with Gregory XI's return to Rome. Her political action, her ministry to a growing public who sought her counsel, and her apostolic work with the poor, took its toll. Catherine of Siena died in Rome aged thirty-three years old. Like Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena also

"combined with an ardent spirituality, remarkable intellectual power" <sup>284</sup>

despite the fact she was illiterate and had to dictate most of her letters and dialogues. She learnt to write only in the last three years of her life.

Faith is the obvious clue to Catherine of Siena's mystical integrity. It is the animating idea of her doctrine as it is of her life. Her chief literary work, the *Divine Dialogue*, largely consists of an account of the direct teaching she received from God in her ecstasies and contemplation, and the results of her reflections on these.

Through faith, she writes in her *Dialogue*, she claims to have found union with God and constancy and strength in God's love. Faith is the light that shows her the way to union with this love. The prevailing

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282 cf. Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics*, p.158.

283 *ibid* p.158.

284 *ibid* p.160

theme of the last chapter affirms that the knowledge of God in faith is the means to knowledge of self and the dynamic force of the soul which enables such an unfolding of oneself. Faith serves the primacy of love and Catherine of Siena's love of Christ was such that it led to frequent ecstasy with Him and to stigmatisation.

In the *Dialogue*, Catherine of Siena displays evidence of clarity of thought, and a scholastic approach with overtones of abstract concepts and dialectic, combined with romantic language, not the

"mere emotional outpouring of a fervent visionary, but the solemn testament of a soul which has been raised to such a contemplation of super-natural truth, that she is able to say of it, 'The more I enter, the more I find, and the more I find, the more I seek of Thee'." 285

Her love of Christ, church and neighbour is inseparable from the love of God. Her love of the church and action in it informed by her prayer life signaled for Edith Stein that Catherine too was an exceptional woman then and so a worthy model for now.<sup>286</sup> Like Hildegard, Mechtild, and Bridget, Catherine's emphasis on the interior life reinforced Edith Stein's religious life which was committed to such interiority.

She was canonised <sup>287</sup>in 1461, eighty-one years after her death and was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970.

### 5. Teresa of Avila. (1515-1582)

At the height of Spain's military and political power, in the 16th and 17th centuries, mysticism in that country flourished. The Christians had battled against the Moslems for seven centuries and:

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285 *ibid* p.161.

286 Edith Stein, *Woman*, p.268.

287 "The Bull of her canonisation (1461) says, 'Her doctrine was infused not acquired'. She told her confessor that she never learned anything from other people about the way of salvation 'but only the sweet Bridegroom of my soul, the Lord Jesus Christ'. The unique clarity, force, sweetness and profundity of her writings arises from the immediacy of her own experience of God's love, her own nothingness apart from God, and the strong visual and auditory character of her religious experiences." Jones, Wainwright & Yarnold, *op.cit*, p.312.

"The reconquest of Spain from the Moors bred a fierce militant crusading brand of Christianity in Spain which found vent, once the Moslems had all been forcibly converted or expelled." 288

The Reformation in Northern Europe which threatened church unity caused Spain to respond with the Counter-Reformation:

"This had a repressive side expressed through the Inquisition, the censorship of books, insistence on strict doctrinal orthodoxy and the tightening up of ecclesiastical institutions..."<sup>289</sup>

The Spanish mystics, according to Clissold p.4, reflect the spiritual fervour and renewal

"fed by the same sources which had led to the Reformation; a movement of pure and intense inner spirituality, but operating within the traditional framework of Catholic dogma and institutions." <sup>290</sup>

Teresa of Avila, a child of the aristocratic class and good family, entered the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation at Avila just before the age of twenty. Initially she chose convent life from a sense of duty rather than because it was her heart's desire. Her initial fervent period of prayer was interrupted by a period of paralysing illness. The years of convalescence disrupted her desire to give herself totally to contemplative prayer, which she gave up for some time. Her difficulties with prayer lasted about eighteen years, after which time she underwent an intense conversion and with renewed fervour engaged in contemplative prayer, and the fullness of mystical life. Says Evelyn Underhill:

"In two years she had passed through those degrees of prayer called 'quiet' and 'union' which are so marvellously described in her life, and reached the heights of ecstatic contemplation."<sup>291</sup>

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288 Stephen Clissold, *The Wisdom of the Spanish Mystics*, Sheldon Press: London. 1977. p.4.

289 *ibid* p. 4.

290 *ibid* p. 4.

291 Underhill, *Mystics*, p.175.

During this time she participated fully in her monastic life progressing in the interior life of prayers, receiving an abundance of revelations and visions which are described in her autobiography *The Life*.

Teresa of Avila's educational level was higher than most women of her time. She was able to read as a young child. During her years of prayer she read many spiritual books. Most of these were the product of the reform and renewal in the Church. Initiated prior to the Council of Trent, the Catholic reform in Spain actually coincided with the first half of Teresa's life. As well she had every opportunity to learn from the theologians, confessors and clergy she came in contact with. While she claims to be fond of learning<sup>292</sup> Teresa of Avila was aware that she was, compared to the educated males, a non-educated person and a non-theologian. On the other hand, by the time she reached her early forties she was secure in her confidence that she was spiritual and "experienced" in her knowledge of God. She went as far as to state that she was a "visionary woman" exposed to the censures of the theologians and the inquisitors<sup>293</sup>, but because she desired to live and walk in the truth, she took all her fears and doubts to theologians, so they could discern with her the character and authenticity of her spiritual experiences, and her activities in relation to her career in founding and reforming religious houses. This active career followed on from her years of prayer which guided her in the endeavours of reform. It was characterised by

"fewer ecstasies and visions, which were replaced by a steady inward certainty of union with God, and by a new strength and endurance, a capacity for action, which she attributed to this cause." <sup>294</sup>

The books through which Teresa of Avila's passionate spirit is made present to us were written in the intervals between organising and directing existing and new communities in her many journeys throughout Spain and abroad. Her works include letters, her autobiography, *The Way of Perfection*, *The Interior Castle*; *Foundations*; *Spiritual Testimonies*, *Constitutions* and others.

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292 Teresa, op.cit, Vol. I. pp.173-181.

293 ibid p.33-5.

294 Underhill, *Mystics*, p.43.

Teresa is an example of one who combined the life of prayer and contemplation with an intense activity for the church and religious life, and able to record the results of both in literary form. The motivation Teresa of Avila gives for writing her life is her conviction that mystical experience was predominantly the privilege of women. All her writings are underpinned by the union between her feminine experiences on the one hand, and the spiritual theology, traditionally the domain of men, in her time. Teresa analysed her experiences, rejecting them as possibly coming from the devil in favour of seeing the pre-eminence of God as being the truth and substance of her experience.<sup>295</sup> Much of what she writes is concerned with distinguishing between what is genuine experience of the presence of God and that which only appears to be:

"Insisting on the interior life, illumination from God, and passivity as requisites for spiritual growth, she prevented some of the antimystical reactions, inspired by fear of Illuminism and Lutheranism, from spoiling the spiritual renewal in Spain. Furthermore, her entire life and teaching demonstrate that the loving remembrance of Jesus Christ's human experiences and earthly mysteries is no obstacle to the highest mystical life and prayer. On the contrary, Christ remained the way and the goal for Teresa. 'This method of keeping Christ present with us is beneficial in all stages and is a very safe means of advancing in the first degree of prayer, or reaching in a short time the second degree, and of walking secure against the dangers the devil can set up in the last degrees' (*Life*, chap. 2,no.4)."<sup>296</sup>

Teresa of Avila understood that mystical experience can be critical of theology precisely because it exists within faith and church teaching, not outside it. Linked to theology, mystical experience does not collapse into disillusion or fanaticism.

"In a time when spiritual books were removed from circulation, Teresa wrote new books out of her own living experience for those who sought guidance from her. Her testimony to God's work in her soul, her enthusiastic teaching, profound wisdom, and practical sense aided the Church in finding its way through the mystical renewal of the modern age."<sup>297</sup>

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295 *ibid.* p.201.

296 Dupre and Saliers, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

297 *ibid.* p.79.

Teresa of Avila's love for the church and her many declarations of fidelity to the Church and of submission to Church teaching, indicate her thoroughly orthodox stand - or her shrewd grasp of politics. She was aware that within the church there were some who had little or no appreciation of people, especially of women, who claimed to have visions. With prudence, practical common sense and in consultation with orthodox theologians of the day, Teresa of Avila's written works and the spiritual direction they contain have met Rome's criterion for a unity between learning and holiness.

Teresa of Avila was canonised in 1622 and made the first woman doctor of the Church in 1970, based on her understanding and promotion of the union of, and dialogue between, mystical prayer and experience on the one hand, and theology and Church teaching on the other.

#### 6. John of the Cross

The militant, austere, yet practical characteristics of Spanish mystics are exhibited at their best in the writings of John of the Cross. He was a close friend of Teresa of Avila. She was an aristocrat, he was born of a peasant family. Unlike Teresa, he never refers to himself in his writings and left no autobiography.

John of the Cross was educated at Salamanca University after entering the unreformed Carmelite order in 1563 at the age of twenty-one, and was ordained in July 1567 in the fourth year of his studies. All of Teresa's books were familiar to him long before he wrote any himself. His writings were influenced by the cultural view of holiness that existed in the sixteenth century Spanish church and are therefore typical and prominent examples of Counter-Reformation devotional mysticism.

It is reasonable to conclude that his university studies equipped John with the intellectual framework that has made him a precise analytical writer on the mystical life. In the face of both positive and negative criticism over time, John displays indubitable scholarship in drawing

clear and logical distinctions in his effort to describe the interior life based on prayer and surrender to God.

In 1568 with his close friend Teresa of Avila he helped found the Discalced Carmelite Order for friars of the Discalced Carmelite Reform. From 1571 for the following year, he was the first rector of the first college of this reform. From there he became confessor for Teresa's community of nuns at the convent of Incarnation.

After five years amidst the growing opposition to the reform, by the Calced Carmelites, John was captured and taken in 1577, by an opposing faction within his own reformed Carmel, and incarcerated him for eight months in the Carmelite Monastery in Toledo. It was during this time in prison that

"he experienced those raptures of divine union,' the most supreme delight of which the soul is capable in this life', which he tried late to analyse and explain in his mystical works."<sup>298</sup>

There he also composed many of his poems and much of his 'Spiritual Canticle'. He escaped from prison and wrote his major works, namely *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul*, all completed by 1580. The two books which contain his purely mystical feelings are *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Love*, written between 1582 and 1584. The first published edition of *The Dark Night of the Soul* appeared in Spain in 1618. These works were not written with a pedagogical intention but simply as a continuation of the oral teaching he was engaged in during his Carmelite life.

"A broad spectrum of personal experience and twelve years of teaching activity in the Order and in the pastoral care of souls completed and enriched his formation before he ever wrote anything... [His writing] was more of an outburst than a treatise; his writing is a doxology, meant not for the public but for God, not for human beings. It is a book of prayer rather than about prayer - or at least it is both."<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Underhill, *Mystics*, pp.182-183.

<sup>299</sup> Frederico Ruiz OCD *St John of the Cross: The Saint and his Teaching*. Darlington, Darlington Carmel Press, 1988, p.4.

John's major works are based on describing the way to Union with God, which is a union with love. Through a process of interiorisation, purgation and purification of all the activities and sensations of the human faculties, the soul becomes God-like. The *Spiritual Canticle* describes the path to the hidden Beloved. In *The Ascent to Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night* he describes the process of ascending to the summit of Mount Carmel with alternating periods of negation, darkness and light until the searcher is transformed into God, as the log of wood is transformed when placed in the fire of the Living flame of love. All of these works were written premised on his view of the structure of the human person.

"John's doctrine rests upon a two-fold analysis of the fundamental *structure* of the human subject and of the *dynamics* involved in advancing toward 'union with God.' (Indeed the latter is significantly shaped by the former; as one would expect, John's estimation of the possible scope and character of spiritual development depends upon his convictions about the fundamental capacities and make-up of human nature)."<sup>300</sup>

John was a scholastic thinker and shared with Thomas Aquinas the view that the body is capable of blocking or impeding the total experience of God. He is not dualistic as to any basic division in human nature, between body and soul, but he believed in a division between sense and spirit.<sup>301</sup>

The soul, he believed had a "spiritual" and "sensory" dimension, the latter being the body which includes exterior and interior senses. The faculties of intellect, memory and will constitute the spiritual dimension. The word soul is John's usual term for the human person, with the body included but given secondary importance to the spiritual nature.<sup>302</sup>

Three themes constitute the main aspects of the teaching of John of the Cross, which is premised on contemplation and inner silence, which is the fundamental and all-embracing orientation of his life. God was not

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<sup>300</sup> Steven Payne OCD, *John of the Cross and the Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, Dordrecht: Kluwer. 1990. p.16.

<sup>301</sup> *ibid* p.17.

<sup>302</sup> *ibid* p.17.

merely a subject but a person who wholly occupied John's attention and with whom he sought total union. Union of life, the first theme, describes the relationship based on surrender. Self-denial or negation and the process of transformation, themes two and three, are the processes belonging to the way of union.

Edith Stein's impression of both Teresa of Avila's honesty and interiority and the importance of interiority was sufficiently strong, that Edith herself became a Carmelite nun with Teresa as one of her main spiritual guides. John's scientific approach of linking experience to theology was a familiar practice to Edith Stein right from her philosophical writings on Thomas Aquinas. John's clarity about the structure of the human person and his analytical model of the practice of the spiritual life and mystical journey of union were intellectually and spiritually appealing and applicable to her own life. John's concept of being stripped of all that is unnecessary for a life with God influenced Edith Stein to the extent that it was through John's doctrine that she described her own journey in *Science of the Cross*.

Edith Stein was conscious of the necessity to respond to the concerns of one's time in both secular and church life. Both Teresa and John were powerful models of lovers of the church and truth who struggled "to re-establish the spiritual values which alone give meaning to life".<sup>303</sup> Recent commentators on Teresa and John state that

"it was in the face of bitter hardship and continual struggle against almost inconceivable pressures of ecclesiastical and political intrigue that they [Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross] attained to a height of sanctity seldom paralleled in Christian history. Their dedication, their endurance and their unremitting love are their credentials as guides to Christians in all walks of life."<sup>304</sup>

I suggest Edith Stein was able to identify closely with these two saints in terms of the turbulence and uncertainty Nazism brought in her time. The development of her qualities of dedication, endurance and love was against the church and its fight against modernism and its policy of

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<sup>303</sup> Jones, Wainwright & Yarnold, *op.cit.*, p.364.

<sup>304</sup> *ibid* p.365.

diplomacy<sup>305</sup> during the years of the persecution of the Jews, the people of her race.

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305 John F. Morley, *Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews During the Holocaust 1939-1943*. New York: KTAV Publishing House. 1980. pp.12-13.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EDITH STEIN: ATYPICAL MYSTIC

This chapter will show the similarities that exist among the six classic mystics discussed in the previous chapter. These will be compared to Edith Stein to show that while she shares their mystical status, she is atypical, and controversial in ways that none of the former have been held to be.

First, none of these mystics led a serene quiet life detached from the world and its troubles. They all, except perhaps Mechtild, lived in turbulent times politically; certainly they all - including Mechtild - lived during crisis points in the life of the church. To this Edith Stein is no exception, and both she and the six mystics all demonstrated an acute social consciousness and energy to respond to reform in both the State and the church. Their capacity to combine a life of action and of contemplation was correlative to working in union with God.

Secondly, their prayer lives and communication with God were built out of austere asceticism, with physical and spiritual penance acceptable to church teaching and the times in which they all lived. Even before her convent days Edith Stein lived an ascetic life as much as possible during her years at Speyer and continued to do so until her entry into Carmel.

As we saw in the previous chapter, their attitude to the suffering that came their way, whether the ill-health of Hildegard and Teresa or the imprisonment of John of the Cross, was one of transcendence. Transcending suffering could even to be the key to gaining mystical union. Suffering was accepted as the redemptive power that could purify and strengthen them, so as to bring them into an intimate sharing in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. But in no case did these mystics seek to take on suffering gratuitously. Similarly, Edith Stein demonstrated no desire to suffer and die, but rather a mystical understanding of sharing in Christ's passion by being enabled to transcend whatever sufferings came her way.

Finally, these religious people demonstrated high moral and spiritual integrity in their lives. Edith Stein also demonstrated this integrity. The church has taken them all seriously and upholds them all as mystics whose example is exemplary for all who seek union with God - except for Edith Stein. Her integrity is in no doubt - but it is seen as only a fitting prelude to martyrdom. Integrity, austerity, and a social consciousness could be the mark of any Christian. Mysticism, on the other hand, is seen as needing extraordinary expression.

Hildegard of Bingen and Mechtild of Magdeburg indicate their intense love of God, and their experience of mystical union, in language of poetic imagery. Catherine of Siena, too, used poetical expression in her prayers and dialogues. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross systematize their experiences in a symbolic way. Teresa based her mystical doctrine from its beginnings to its heights in the transforming union in the seven mansions in the Interior Castle, and John of the Cross symbolises God as the summit of Mt. Carmel which the pilgrim must ascend. The two Spaniards write as a guide for those who are open to being called to the heights of union with God. Edith Stein on the other hand writes in a more prosaic and analytical way. But this in itself does not disqualify her from being a mystic: contemporary scholars of mysticism such as Steven Katz are at pains to point out that the mystical experience is inevitably pre-formed by a mystic's own cultural background.<sup>306</sup> Of all the women mystics discussed, Edith Stein alone had a male's education. Of the seven, only Edith Stein and John of the Cross went to university.

The lack of formal education was felt by the woman mystics. The women mystics, acutely aware of the dangers of false or delusionary visionary experience, all sought the advice and discernment of their spiritual directors, all male, educated, learned, acknowledged and accepted by the church. These men provided education in theology and church doctrine; spiritual direction, as well as guidance and discernment in authenticating religious experiences and visions as coming from God. Even John of the Cross, though, was reluctant to articulate the intensity of his experiences of God, and especially of the

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<sup>306</sup> See, for example, his essay "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism" in Steven T. Katz(ed), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, London: Sheldon Press. 1978.

revelation of the crucified Christ, because of the Inquisition and even because of those in his order who saw him as a dissenter. He too sought the counsel of spiritual directors acceptable to the church.

Edith Stein did not have visions or ecstasies, so did not experience fear of articulating her experiences in this same way. Her writings and lectures were the result of her reflections. However, she did discuss her reflections with her spiritual directors just like the six mystics that have been described.

Since the seventeenth century all saints authenticated by the church have been gathered into the Roman Martyrology, a general calendar of saints. This wide range of mystics is all mentioned in this document. The process for the canonisation of Hildegard of Bingen was never completed but her feast day is 17th September. Mechtild of Magdeburg is acknowledged by the church to be a genuine mystic and mystical writer. Bridget is the patron saint of Sweden and was canonised in 1391. Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross are all canonised saints and doctors of the church. Edith Stein's cause for canonisation, currently in process, is fraught with controversy. A full discussion of this controversy will be given in chapter eight.

Some differences between Edith Stein and the others mystics described are outlined in the following table: (see over)

TABLE ONEClassic Catholic Mystics

1. All born into the Catholic faith community, its culture and history. Catholicism based on Christ as redeemer and mediator.

2. Remained committed to the faith of their childhood and deepened that faith.

3. Did not question the existence of God.

4. Desire for deeper faith and union with God; for ongoing relationship with God.

5. Revelations, visions and ecstasies become the means by which they articulate their mystical understanding.

6. Mysticism and mystical experiences seen as "favours", exceptional states given to exceptional people.

7. All these ratified by the church as models of holiness. No serious controversy surrounds their status as mystics, saints or Doctors of the Church.

Edith Stein

Born into Jewish faith community. Judaism did not see Christ as the Messiah.

Jewish but grew away from Judaism and became a convert to Catholicism.

For some years a self-confessed atheist. Questioned the relevance of belief in God.

Had to transit from intellectual assent to understanding of God as Person. She had to discover relationship.

Philosophy and reflection on the writings and faith journeys of others become the means whereby she finds an intellectual articulation for her mystical understanding.

Understood mysticism and mystical journey as ordinary and accessible to ordinary seekers of union with God.

Controversial and questionable martyrdom status based on whether she died for her faith or because she was a Jew.

### Conversion to Catholicism.

Many saints in the church, because of the choices they made, have been considered to be betrayers of family, and familial roots and tradition. For example, Francis of Assisi was disinherited <sup>307</sup> when he chose to lead a life of prayer and simplicity which was incongruous and opposed to the life his wealthy family had envisaged for him as heir. <sup>308</sup> Clare of Assisi had to run away secretly from her family in order to join Francis and become the foundress of the feminine wing of the Franciscans, the Poor Clares. Thomas Aquinas was kidnapped by his brothers in order to prevent him from becoming a mendicant friar in the Dominican Order. They incarcerated him for a year after which time he escaped to join the Order in c.1244. He too was disinherited and disowned by his noble family. Thomas' teacher, Albert the Great, had also joined the Dominicans against the wishes of his noble family.

Even so, this did not betray the fundamental spiritual bond; all the estranged parties remained part of the Catholic faith and part of the mystical body of Christ. All still prayed to the same God.

When Edith Stein became a Catholic she embraced a spirituality which was, doctrinally at least, diametrically opposed to her Jewish race and religion. The interior stress which arose particularly in her mother, a believing Jew, was based on her inability to accept her daughter's conversion: in accepting Jesus Christ as redeemer and messiah, Edith Stein betrayed the God of Israel and Judaism. Edith Stein's sister Erna Biberstein, nee Stein, reported that Edith's conversion to Catholicism

"was the most severe blow for mother, for she was a truly devout Jewess. She considered Edith's adoption of another religion an act of deep disloyalty. The rest of us were hit hard, also, but we had such great confidence in Edith's innermost conviction that we accepted her decision with a heavy heart after trying in vain to talk her out of it for our mother's sake." <sup>309</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Donald Attwater, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1965. p.136.

<sup>308</sup> *ibid* p.327.

<sup>309</sup> Edith Stein, *Family*, p.17.

After her conversion to Catholicism, Edith Stein continued to attend synagogue with her mother. While the recitation of the psalms was common to both faiths, and the two women prayed these together, from Edith Stein's baptism onwards they were aware of what divided rather than what united them in terms of faith and spirituality.

A former student and friend of Edith Stein's, Gertrud Koebner, comments that there were no recriminations on either side, simply a lot of suffering,<sup>310</sup> which Graef captures well. <sup>311</sup> Koebner states that:

"Edith had a difficult road right from the start, between the pain she felt at causing her mother suffering and her joy at growing into her own authentic life. Later, as the abyss widened around her, she continued to feel secure in this inner existence." <sup>312</sup>

Along with conversion, Edith Stein desired to become a Carmelite nun. She saw her conversion as a preparation for entry into the order but did not proceed, because of the further shock and probably negative effect it would have on her mother. As Edith Stein tells us, she

"realised that she [her mother] couldn't handle another blow for the present. Not that it would have killed her - but I couldn't have held myself responsible for the embitterment it would have caused." <sup>313</sup>

The incomprehensibility of Edith Stein's Catholicism in the eyes of her mother came to a dramatic climax when Edith finally did enter the Carmelite community in Cologne. As Herbstrith reports:

"Christians themselves often have trouble understanding the value of a contemplative vocation; for the Steins it was an impossibility." <sup>314</sup>

Erna Biberstein confirmed that Frau Stein

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<sup>310</sup> Herbstrith, op.cit, p. 35.

<sup>311</sup> There are moments in human life which are fraught with symbolism; meetings when two people confront each other, not just as individuals, but as representatives of two epochs, two nations, two religions. Where such meetings occur, tragedy is never far away, and when the persons who thus meet are bound by the strong ties of blood or friendship, it is indeed inevitable. Graef, op.cit, p. 37.

<sup>312</sup> Edith Stein Archiv, Karmel, Köln. Cited in Herbstrith, op.cit, p.35

<sup>313</sup> Herbstrith,op.cit, p.66.

<sup>314</sup> ibid p.66.

"was truly in despair and never got over her grief. For the rest of us, too, the farewell this time cut much deeper, although Edith herself did not want to admit it, and even from the convent continued to take part in everything with steadfast love and family loyalty and with undiminished concern." 315

The symbolic confrontation of church and synagogue was exacerbated because not only was Edith Stein making the final break with her Jewish family and Judaism by becoming a Catholic nun, she was also doing so at a politically sensitive moment when German Jews were being oppressed and persecuted by the Nazis. Her eighty-four-year old mother felt as if her daughter was deserting her.<sup>316</sup> Edith Stein recounts those final weeks as a time of wondering "which of us is going to break first - me or my mother? But the two of us held out to the very last day."<sup>317</sup> This last day, 12th October 1934, saw Edith Stein travel to Cologne, to what she

"had scarcely dared to hope for. I couldn't feel any violent upsurge of enthusiasm over it: I had just been through something too terrible for that. But I did feel a great sense of calm, knowing that I was coming into the harbour of God's will." 318

#### Definition of Mysticism as Ordinary Rather than as Exceptional.

Edith Stein's understanding of the mystical way differs from the classic mystics described, in that these did not have the benefit of Edith Stein's philosophically informed understanding of mystical theology. Their ignorance of such theology caused them to question their mystical experiences.

As mentioned earlier, all were astute and sought the guidance of learned spiritual directors acceptable to the institutional church, and they therefore came to express their experiences in ways that were largely doctrinally orthodox. Mystical theology has surely been constructed on the back of their experiences. They described their experiences as

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315 Edith Stein, *Family*, p. 18.

316 Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p. 66.

317 Posselt, *op.cit*, p.107, cited in Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.66.

318 Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.67.

extraordinary favours, ecstatic feelings of rapture as if overpowered by the force of supernatural joy. Their visionary experiences were also hallmarks of what it was to have an exceptional relationship with God.

Edith Stein in *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* did not accept that mysticism was an esoteric phenomenon, nor "the special prerogative of people with visions nor the reward for services rendered - since Christ intended the gospel for all."<sup>319</sup> The reiteration of Edith Stein's definition of mystic with the operative words of "experiential" and "search for God" demonstrate how by her own definition Edith Stein was indeed a mystic:

"The mystic is simply a person who has an experiential knowledge of the teaching of the church: that God dwells in the soul. Anyone who feels inspired by this dogma to search for God will end up taking the same route the mystic is led along: he will retreat from the realm of the senses, the images of the memory and the natural functioning of the intellect, and will withdraw into the barren solitude of the inner self, to dwell in the darkness of faith through a simple loving glance of the spirit at God who is present although concealed." <sup>320</sup>

Her search for truth, which continues as her search for God, is illustrated with the experiential knowledge of God in her response to life situations, and her struggle to find God's will in these. But she did not deny that people did have extraordinary religious experiences such as visions. Such experiences, however, "could never transcend the limits of faith, compared to the painful endurance of naked faith".<sup>321</sup> And while Edith Stein accepted extraordinary experiences as possible foretastes of what eternal life might hold, and admitted that they had been frequently granted to "those intended for great works", she believed "God could just as easily bestow them on sinners and unbelievers."<sup>322</sup>

Edith Stein believed the mystical current in the life of the church finally comes down to the interior life of prayer in all its insightful or arid moments. Formation and growth in the spiritual life of prayer

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<sup>319</sup> *ibid* p.89.

<sup>320</sup> Edith Stein, *EES*, in Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.89.

<sup>321</sup> Herbstrith, *op.cit*, p.89.

<sup>322</sup> *ibid* p.90.

resides in the willingness to surrender to the grace of God, thereby strengthening union with God and the church. She claimed:

"The greatest figures of prophecy and sanctity step forth out of the darkest night. But for the most part the formative stream of the mystical life remains invisible. Certainly the decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is revealed."<sup>323</sup>

In this respect, then, we see again that Edith Stein's understanding of mysticism and the mystical journey is nearer to that of Evelyn Underhill. Both these women consciously searched and made choices about their spiritual development and singlemindedness to remain focussed on God. This understanding of mysticism is in fact much closer to the way mysticism is now regarded in the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. There the popular apparatus of mysticism - visions, ecstasies, stigmata - is regarded with a quite traditional suspicion. On their own they are no proof of outstanding holiness: they are only an optional adjunct to the heroic virtue that must first be proven. Woodward quotes Fr Peter Gumpel SJ from the Congregation as saying:

"Mysticism in its proper sense is simply a deep and pervasive interior awareness of God's presence."<sup>324</sup>

Even more interesting is confirmation of this viewpoint from another member of the Congregation and the relator of Edith Stein's cause, Fr Ambrose Eszer OP:

"Mysticism is nothing more than a person's awareness of faith, hope and charity operative in his soul."<sup>325</sup>

Nonetheless, it was Eszer who insisted that Edith Stein should be regarded as a martyr rather than as a mystic. There are reasons for this, as we shall see in Chapter Eight.

### Controversial Martyr.

<sup>323</sup> Edith Stein, "Hidden Life", p.110.

<sup>324</sup> Woodward, op.cit, p.116.

<sup>325</sup> *ibid* p.162

Edith Stein passed through atheism to faith and grew in holiness as a member of the Catholic church. Her life and heroic character should, in my opinion, be presented as a whole. However, her mysticism has become clouded by the simple fact that she died in Auschwitz, and her progress towards sainthood has placed her at the centre of a controversy: was she killed by the Nazis because she was a Catholic or because she was a Jew? As Woodward points out:

"The beatification of Edith Stein... was one of the most controversial episodes in the papacy of John Paul II, in ways that no other recent cause has done, it focused public attention on the purpose and methods of the church's saint-making process...From their [the saint-makers'] point of view, the cause of Edith Stein was one of three important processes - the first to emerge from the Nazi era - which allowed the congregation to expand and to a certain extent redefine its traditional criteria for proving martyrdom."<sup>326</sup>

Chapter Eight will provide a full account of this controversy. I will survey the reasons given as to why Edith Stein is considered to be a martyr, and compare them with the reasons why she is considered to be a mystic. I will argue for her canonisation as a woman of heroic character and a mystic, which would not only remove her from her controversial status as a martyr, but place her accurately as an accessible and relevant model of a woman who searched for truth, lived by the truth she discovered, and achieved outstanding holiness.

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<sup>326</sup> Kenneth L. Woodward, *op.cit.*, p.128. Woodward also points out that John Paul II has made more saints than all of his twentieth-century predecessors combined.

CHAPTER EIGHT  
CONTROVERSIAL MARTYR

In April of 1940 Holland was occupied by the Nazis. This was the same year that Edith Stein's sister Rosa also came to Echt, where she acted as a portress to the monastery. In the winter of 1937, at Cologne, Rosa had become a Catholic.

Beginning on 1st September 1941 all Jewish people in the Netherlands, including Edith and Rosa Stein, were made to wear a yellow star of David on their clothing. A large red J was stamped on their identity cards. Like all others of their race, Edith and Rosa Stein had to report frequently to the German authorities in control of Holland.

Because of the treatment of the Jews and evidence of their deportations to "work camps" early in 1942, the Prioress of Echt Carmel applied for a Swiss visa for both Edith and Rosa Stein to transfer to the Carmel of Le Paquier in Switzerland. The reply from Le Paquier said the Carmel could only take Edith, who refused to go without her sister.<sup>327</sup> This caused a delay and, as Herbstrith reports, by July the situation had become more urgent in the face of increased deportations of the Jews.<sup>328</sup>

On 1st July 1942, the Nazis issued a decree forbidding the education of Catholic children of Jewish descent. This meant these children could not attend Catholic schools, their normal means of education. The Dutch bishops protested at this move as well as at the deportations and unchecked arrests of Jewish people.

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<sup>327</sup> "Edith Stein applied for a Swiss visa. She hoped that by transferring to the Carmel of Le Paquier it would be possible to leave Holland legally. But because of limited living space, Le Paquier informed the Echt community that, while they would be glad to receive Edith Stein, other accommodations would have to be found for Rosa. This was unacceptable to Edith Stein. Although, humanly speaking, Le Paquier was offering salvation, she refused to go to Switzerland without her sister." Herbstrith, *op.cit.*, p.101.

<sup>328</sup> *ibid* p.101.

On 26th July 1942 the Protestant and Catholic church leaders expressed their indignation against the inhuman treatment of the Jews and threatened to make their protest public if the deportations continued.<sup>329</sup> The following joint telegram was sent to the Reichskommissar, Seyss-Inquart:

"The undersigned Dutch Churches, profoundly disturbed by the measures already taken against the Jews of the Netherlands by which they have become excluded from the ordinary life of the nation, have now learned with horror of the proposed action which would evacuate men, women, children and entire families into German territory. The suffering this would cause to thousands of people, the awareness that these measures are contrary to the deepest convictions of the Dutch people, and, above all, the resistance that such a step would constitute to God's commands of justice and mercy, compel us to urgently petition you not to have this directive carried out. In the case of Christians of Jewish descent, we are moved by a further consideration: namely, such measures would sever them from participation in the life of the Church." <sup>330</sup>

In exchange for the churches' silence, the German authorities offered to exempt from deportation Jews who had converted to Christianity. The Catholic Archbishop of Utrecht refused and a joint pastoral letter which included the telegram to the Reichskommissar was circulated to Catholic congregations. <sup>331</sup> Herbstrith states:

"While some of the denominations bowed to the command, the Bishop of Utrecht informed the Occupation that it had no right to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs. By his authority, the following pastoral letter, telegram included, was read in all the Catholic parishes of Holland on July 26, 1942:

Dear Brethren:

When Jesus drew near to Jerusalem and saw the city before him, he wept over it and said, 'O, if even today you understood the things that make for peace! But now they are concealed from your sight'..... Dear Brethren, let us begin by examining ourselves in a spirit of profound humility and sorrow. Are we not partly to blame for the calamities which we are suffering? Have we always sought first for God's kingdom and his

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<sup>329</sup> Lewy, op.cit, p.304.

<sup>330</sup> Herbstrith, op.cit, p.101.

<sup>331</sup> Lewy, op.cit, p.304.

righteousness? Have we always fulfilled the demands of justice and charity towards our fellowmen? .... When we examine ourselves, we are forced to admit that all of us have failed .....Let us beseech God ..... to swiftly bring about a just peace in the world and to strengthen the people of Israel so sorely tested in these days, leading them to true redemption in Christ Jesus."<sup>332</sup>

A week later, in retaliation, the Nazi authorities ordered the arrest of all Catholic non-Aryans, obviously the easiest group of Catholics to move against since they were already known to the German authorities. <sup>333</sup>

On 2nd August 1946 both Edith and Rosa Stein were arrested along with all other Jewish Catholics and sent to the holding camp of Amersfoort, and on to Westerbork on the night of 3rd August 1946. The arrest of Edith and Rosa Stein took place at approximately 5:00pm in the afternoon. Two S.S. officers arrived at the monastery ordering the two women to be ready in five minutes. The suddenness and haste impacted on Rosa to the extent that when she was surrounded by the gathering crowd outside the monastery, she was "unable to fully absorb the situation" and "began to grow disorientated." Edith's reported response was to take Rosa's hand and was to say "Come Rosa. We're going for our people."<sup>334</sup>

This outline of the following events, which are important in understanding Edith Stein's subsequent cause for beatification and sainthood, is derived from the longer narrative as reported in Herbstrith, the most reliable available source. It is against these facts that Edith Stein's reported desire to die "for the atonement of the unbelief of the Jewish people"<sup>335</sup> must be measured.

#### 1. 2nd August 1942.

"At Amersfoort, the retaliatory nature of the arrests became apparent. Protestant Jews and those of partly

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<sup>332</sup> Herbstrith, op.cit, p. 102.

<sup>333</sup> Jewish Councils, controlled by the Gestapo, were set up in Germany and in the occupied countries for the classification and registration of the Jews. On demand they supplied the names of persons the Reich needed for deportation, resettlement, work camps, etc. Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*, London: Vallentine, Mitchell. 1961. p. 352 and pp.60-66.

<sup>334</sup> *ibid* p.103.

<sup>335</sup> Jakob Schlafke, *Edith Stein: Documents Concerning Her Life and Death*, New York: Edith Stein Guild, 1984, p.5. Cited in Woodward, op.cit, p. 137.

Jewish descent were quickly released but the Catholic Jews remained under arrest, together with approximately a thousand other Jewish prisoners."

2. 5th August 1942.

"The Sisters at Echt received a telegram through the Council of Jewish affairs from Westerbork requesting warm blankets, medicines and other basic necessities for the two women."

3. 6th August 1942.

Two men from Echt drove to Westerbork with the requested provisions. "In the morning they [Edith & Rosa Stein] were informed of the impending departure and given permission to write. Edith Stein's final letter, written in a large, firm handwriting on two small pages from an appointment calendar, is a request to the Sisters at Echt for warm clothing and toilet articles for Rosa. Edith Stein wrote 'A thousand thanks. Greetings to all. Your Reverence's grateful child. B.' To it was attached a final plea to the Swiss Consulate."<sup>336</sup>

4. "A small group of prisoners had received temporary 'deferments'...These included Sister Judith from the convent at Bilthoven and Edith Stein.<sup>337</sup> Sister Judith's affiliation with the Portuguese Jewish community managed to save her for the time being, the the efforts the Swiss Consulate made on behalf of Edith Stein proved useless."

5. 7th August 1942.

Shortly before midnight the Westerbork prisoners apart from six exceptions boarded the train for Auschwitz.

6. The Red Cross Information Service confirmed the destination: "Regarding the actual date of death, in 1950, when the official Dutch Gazette published the names of all Jews who had been deported from Holland on August 7th, 1942, the following entry was found:

Number 44074: Edith Theresia Hedwig Stein, Echt.  
Born - October 12, 1891. Breslau  
Died - August 9th, 1942."<sup>338</sup>

### Towards Canonisation

<sup>336</sup> "Urge Swiss Consulate to take all steps necessary to get us across the border. Our convent will take care of the expense travel." Edith Stein, *Briefe II*, p. 177. .Cited in Woodward, op.cit, p. 137.

<sup>337</sup> Sister Judith was released at this time but was executed two years later. Herbstrith, op.cit.,p.106.

<sup>338</sup> Herbstrith, op.cit, pp.103-110.

In 1962, Cardinal Frings in Cologne initiated the canonical process for Edith Stein's cause for beatification and canonisation. Originally the cause for Edith Stein was based on proving her heroic character in terms of the virtue she displayed in the way she led a spiritual life. But on 3rd March 1983, Msgr Jakob Schlafke advanced the thesis of martyrdom on the basis of retaliatory action by the Nazis against the Dutch Bishops. This way Edith Stein's cause could be sped up because the process for martyrs is much quicker, for reasons that will be discussed below.

A Christian martyr is a person who is killed in *odium fidei* (from hatred of the Catholic faith). S/he is a saint because s/he achieved the supreme sacrifice of love for Christ and the church. The process for canonisation as a martyr is essentially dependent on proof that the candidate was killed for his or her faith and not for any other reason. The Catholic church's teaching on martyrdom states:

"Since Jesus, the son of God, manifested His charity by laying down his life for us, no-one has greater love than he[sic] who lays down his life for Christ and his brothers.  
cf.l. Jn. 3:16; Jn. 15:13.

From the earliest time, then, some Christians have been called upon - and some will always be called upon - to give this supreme testimony of love to all men, but especially to persecutors. The church, therefore, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the highest proof of love.

By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master, who freely accepted death on behalf of the world's salvation; he perfects that image even to the shedding of blood." <sup>339</sup>

Historically the early church believed the martyrs to be perfect Christians who had already attained eternal life and were united to Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body.<sup>340</sup> Inherent in Christian perfection is the concept of virtue. Christianity crowned the classical virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance - the "cardinal"

<sup>339</sup> Walter M. Abbot(ed), "Lumen Gentium" in *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York: American Press. 1966. p.71.

<sup>340</sup> "Canonisation of Saints" in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, New York: McGraw-Hill. 1967. Vol. I p.55.

virtues - with the "theological" virtues of faith, hope and love. Onto a human ethical construct was grafted a superhuman shoot: God is both the object and the measure of the theological virtues which are developed and completed as union with Him intensifies. The term "heroic" or superhuman virtue was borrowed from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* by St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas. Christianity adopted this term and it was applied to Christian perfection.<sup>341</sup> Thus another route to sanctity was opened up:

"The martyr was the first to be venerated as a "saint," but Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian and others likened the intense effort to grow in virtue to martyrdom. Thus the type of the holy "confessor"<sup>342</sup> came to be recognised, for which a basis of extraordinary virtue was understood to be requisite....The strict inquiry into the holiness of a servant of God, according to the scheme of the three theological and the four cardinal virtues, was first made in the process of canonisation for St. Bonaventure in 1482. By the time of the Renaissance, heroic virtue had become a technical term for the holiness necessary to beatification or canonisation...

"[Virtues] are called heroic when their exercise exceeds what is ordinary even among those who live virtuously. The heroic degree is, in fact, simply the perfection of virtue. It does not differ in kind from ordinary virtue, but only in the excellence of its act and the intensity of the habit from which it comes. Heroic virtue is based upon the intensity of charity...

"In later times, Benedict XV insisted upon the connection between heroic virtue and the duties of a person's state of life: heroicity consists in the faithful and constant fulfilment of the duties and obligations of one's state. So also Pius XI declared that heroic virtue was to be sought in the ordinary things of daily life [*Discorsi di Pio XI* (Turin 1960) I: 73-74, 756-760]. The church's judgment upon a person's heroic virtue involves no judgment upon the supernatural character of the extraordinary phenomena, such as visions, or stigmata, that may have marked his life."<sup>343</sup>

Heroic virtue in a non- martyr must demonstrate a life

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<sup>341</sup> "Heroic Virtue" in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* Vol 14. p.709.

<sup>342</sup> The term is now obsolete, but the distinction remains as the historical prototype of today's "non-martyr".

<sup>343</sup> "Heroic Virtue" in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* Vol 14. p.709.

"so profoundly inspired by Christian charity toward God and men that, in the actual occurrences of daily living, he practised all Christian virtues in a truly, exemplary and heroic manner."<sup>344</sup>

The place of *odium fidei* and heroic virtue in the case of Edith Stein are at the heart of the controversy over her status as martyr.

Michael Walsh has stated that the rules for making saints under the current pontiff, Pope John Paul II, have now changed and that martyrs are the preferred type of saint.<sup>345</sup> This preference for martyrs he suggests, has political implications. Woodward suggests there were three reasons to support Edith Stein's case for martyrdom:

"First, it would obviate the need for a miracle: as a martyr, she [Edith Stein] would be beatified (but not canonised) without one. Second, in the popular mind (if not in the minds of experts) Edith Stein's reputation for holiness was grounded in the story of her martyrdom; to declare her a confessor but not a martyr would, in effect, put the church in the position of questioning the significance of not only her death but also the deaths of the tens of thousands of other Catholic priests, sisters, and laymen who were victims of the Nazis. Third, to proclaim her a saint but not a martyr would suggest that the Catholic Church, as a church, had not nurtured blood witness to the crimes and horrors of the Nazis. To the bishops of Germany and Poland, this was a distortion of history that the church had to correct."<sup>346</sup>

Woodward also suggests that Pope John Paul II, because of his own interest in phenomenology, was

"genuinely moved by the figure of a modern intellectual who had come to faith in the person of Jesus through the disinterested pursuit of Truth."<sup>347</sup>

With these plausible underlying motives, it may be argued, Edith Stein's cause changed and ended up in the hands of Ambrose Eszer, the *relator*

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344 "Canonisation of Saints" in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 1 p.55.

345 Michael Walsh, "What Makes a Saint", *The Tablet*. 22nd April 1989, p.453.

346 Woodward, op.cit, p. 139.

347 *ibid* p.139.

of her cause,<sup>348</sup> whose task it became to prove she died for her Catholic faith in Auschwitz and not solely because of her Jewish race. Unlike some of his colleagues at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Eszer remains a firm believer in the need for miracles as evidence for sanctity in the eyes of God,<sup>349</sup> but according to the new processes for sanctification, a *martyr* can be declared blessed in the absence of miracles. Hence Eszer's ulterior motive, as suggested in Chapter Seven: if Edith Stein is a mystic, we could be waiting a long time for her sanctity to be proven.

The place of her death compounds the problem: a saint's tomb is the most likely place for an authenticated miracle - but one who died at Auschwitz has no tomb and no first-class relics. Even the relics-by-association, like possessions or clothes, were destroyed when the Nazis destroyed the convent at Echt.<sup>350</sup> As a martyr, Edith Stein can circumvent the wait for a miracle - and the Pope wanted to be able to declare a new German saint on his projected voyage to Germany. <sup>351</sup>

The initial decree showed signs of the desire for haste in its unprecedented fudging of the two categories: as Father Ambrose Eszer wrote:

"On January 25, 1987, in the presence of the Holy Father, the Decree confirming the *heroic degree of the virtues* as well as the *martyrdoms* of Sr. Teresa Benedicta, was read - an event without precedent in the centuries-old history of the Congregation [of Rites]. What, then, is the evidence for the martyrdom of Sr Teresa Benedicta?" [His italics]<sup>352</sup>

Eszer does explain this fudging by acknowledging that the rules for saint-making had changed in the course of Edith Stein's process. But when it came to the beatification ceremony on in Cologne on 1st May

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<sup>348</sup> Father Ambrose Eszer is a Dominican with a doctorate in theology, who specialises in the seventeenth century. From his position of professor at the Angelicum, the Dominicans' pontifical university in Rome, he was appointed as a *relator* to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Woodward, op.cit, p. 103.

<sup>349</sup> *ibid* p. 217.

<sup>350</sup> *ibid* p. 138 First class relics are parts of a saint's body. A saint's clothes or possessions constitute second-class relics.

<sup>351</sup> *ibid* p, 116.

<sup>352</sup> Ambrose Eszer, "Edith Stein, Jewish Catholic Martyr" in *Carmelite Studies* IV(1987): p.314. The whole of this text is reproduced in the Appendix.

1987, Pope John Paul II was more unequivocal: celebrating the Mass during which he beatified Edith Stein as a Catholic martyr, he began his homily as follows:

"Today we greet in profound honour and holy joy a daughter of the Jewish people, rich in wisdom and courage, among these blessed men and women. Having grown up in the strict traditions of Israel, and having lived a life of virtue and self-denial in a religious order, she demonstrated her heroic character on the way to the extermination camp. Unified with our crucified Lord, she gave her life "for genuine peace" and "for the people" .<sup>353</sup>

But what does giving one's life mean in terms of unity with the crucified Jesus? The mystical understanding of "unity" is not to be confused with a literal conception of "imitation", "repetition" or "identity". Edith Stein would have well understood that it is no part of Catholic orthodoxy to repeat the one and only sacrifice of Christ. Pope John Paul II has chosen to stress a more literal meaning of unity here, in order to put Edith Stein's heroic character into the context of her martyrdom rather than into the context of her religious life.

From the time Edith Stein left Westerbork for Auschwitz, there were no witnesses to report on her disposition in the final moments of the circumstances of her death. We do not know how heroic she was or was not.

Eszer argued that the fact that there were no witnesses to her death "was no reason to suppose that she had not persevered in her faith"<sup>354</sup>, defending his claim by appealing to her written sentiments:

"In her spiritual will [says Eszer] she had already offered herself to God as an atoning victim 'for peace' and the 'the unbelief of the Jewish people.' In other words, Eszer argues that Edith Stein's whole life as a Catholic, as manifested by her heroic virtue, was evidence of her readiness to accept martyrdom if and when it came."<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18th May 1987. p.19.

<sup>354</sup> Woodward, op.cit, p. 140.

<sup>355</sup> *ibid* p.140. It has been claimed by Posselt that Edith Stein had written she was offering her life for the conversion of the Jewish people. Posselt, op.cit, p.211.

Eszer is right in claiming Edith Stein's manifestation of heroic virtue as evidence of her readiness to accept martyrdom if and when it came, provided he means that her disposition was that of surrender, and applicable to any set of circumstances as coming from God. Edith Stein's task was always to have eyes only on Christ and discern through him God's will, as against her own. In order to avoid the difficulty caused by the lack of reliable witnesses, Eszer is willing to give selective attention to her writings to find data that might serve his case. This is where the fudging of categories was helpful, for the canonisation process for non-martyrs demands that all of Edith Stein's writings should have been strictly scrutinised in order for her to be canonised. But in fact what we have seen is that Eszer ignores her whole corpus of writing in favour of one reported remark. .

Despite what ought to be an exhaustive scrutiny, Eszer's argument for establishing Edith Stein's faith in the face of persecution is allowed, it seems, to be ratified by the presumption he makes, simply because he presumes it. Her proclaimed martyrdom has placed her at the heart of a controversy which asks whether she was killed because she was a Jew or because she was a Catholic and therefore for her Catholic faith. As we shall see in the next section, it is not only the Jewish community which is concerned by the nature of the process.

### Backlash

On 27th October 1986, after the announcement that Pope John Paul II would visit Cologne in April 1987 to beatify Edith Stein as a Catholic Martyr, an American Jew, James Baaden,<sup>356</sup> wrote to the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, voicing his opinion that Edith Stein died in Auschwitz not because she was a Catholic but because she was Jewish. He cited evidence "with ample reference to historical data and doctrinal pronouncements"<sup>357</sup> to show it was her Jewishness that condemned Edith Stein to death and asked:

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<sup>356</sup> James Baaden was working in London on a biography of Edith Stein. Woodward, op.cit, p. 142.

<sup>357</sup> *The Tablet*, 31st January 1987.

"How can she be beatified as a Christian martyr if she died as a Jewess?"<sup>358</sup>

Baaden makes the point that her death was undoubtedly accelerated by the action taken by the Dutch Bishops, but that this action and the attitudes of the Bishops did not *cause* her death. Not every Dutch Catholic, after all, was imprisoned and deported. In Holland, the policy of the Final Solution was adhered to and all Jews, irrespective of religious affiliations, were marked down as victims of it on the grounds of their race. Can Edith Stein be called a martyr in terms of the theology of martyrdom if she died on account of her race and not specifically for Christ? What has to be considered is the meaning of Christian martyrdom in the case of Edith Stein, in its tension between the unavoidable circumstances of her death and her interior disposition and heroic character, one of the central prerequisites for sainthood including martyrdom.

Kenneth Woodward reports that on 8th November 1986 Fr. Ambrose Ezser:

"incautiously responded in person - something Vatican officials rarely do with outsiders."<sup>359</sup>

An article by Baaden in the London *Tablet* on 31st January 1987 quoted extracts from Ezser's reply. Baaden also sent the "astonishing"<sup>360</sup> letter to the *National Catholic Reporter*, so that other, longer, extracts from it formed the basis of a subsequent article in the *Tablet* by their Vatican Affairs Writer, Peter Hebblethwaite. Thus we have an unusually public account of the reasons behind a beatification.<sup>361</sup> Baaden writes:

"It is alarming that the allegedly exacting processes of scrutiny which are thought to characterise the enquiries of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints appear scarcely to exist; the letter I received does not

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358 *The Tablet*, 20th March 1987.

359 Woodward, *op.cit.*, p.143.

360 The term is Hebblethwaite's: see note 359 below.

361 There may be all sorts of implicit assumptions e.g. political utility of the church to have a modern woman martyr; the fact there are not many German martyrs. In this cynicism I am not alone: cf. Walsh, *op.cit.*, p. 453: "The Congregation knows he [Pope John Paul II] likes to perform such ceremonies...in the homeland of the person being honoured. They hasten to find a suitable candidate." Perhaps too the church now wants to find a pocket of Catholicism somewhere which stood up to Adolf Hitler, e.g. Dutch bishops. See Ezser, *op.cit.*, p.316.

reflect any very careful or extensive knowledge of Edith Stein's life, work or death. Is this indeed the view of Rome? If it is, then what hope is there for Catholic - Jewish dialogue?' <sup>362</sup>

Hebblethwaite tells us that Ezser's reply begins by telling Baaden:

"You are of course free to defend your point of view, but the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints has outlooks which are rather different from yours. The Catholic church is sovereign regarding matters of faith and morals and does not depend on interference from outside."<sup>363</sup>

Ezser admits that:

"You are not the only Jew who feels uneasy about the possible declaration of Edith Stein as a martyr and her eventual beatification. She was a Catholic like Ss. Peter and Paul and many other Catholic saints, and in her spiritual testament she offered her life not only for peace but also for the conversion of all Jews to the Catholic church...

"Elsewhere she speaks of the the 'fault' of the Jews (because they did not become Catholics); at least this is the meaning I see in this phrase, and it is the more benign interpretation.

Ezser's response to the crucial point of why Edith Stein died stated that:

"The formal reason for Sister Teresia Benedicta's deportation and murder was the intention of the Nazi authorities to *punish* [sic] the Catholic church of the Low Countries for the public protest against the deportation of Dutch Jews and other persons. The protestant Jews were either not captured or immediately released. Some Jews such as Icyk Ufner survived. They were not deported at all...

"To me it is very clear that the motive of the Nazi action was odium fidei, hatred against the church...

"In a broader and nonformal sense, one can however say that the 'hatred' of the Nazis against the Jews and against the Catholic church had the same roots because they regarded (erroneously) Hebraism to be the biological foundation of the church, which is theologically of course false. Since the formal cause of

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<sup>362</sup> *The Tablet*, 31st January 1987.

<sup>363</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, "Curia Raps Scholar on Martyr's Fate" *The Tablet*, 20th March 1987. p.1.

Sister Teresia Benedicta's death is 'odium fidei,' this is substantially a case of martyrdom."<sup>364</sup>

Finally Eszer defends himself against being an anti-Semite:

"Perhaps you may think I am a secret anti-Semite. This would be an error. In our family, we were forbidden to speak with disdain of the Jews, and my mother always said the Jews were people like all other peoples in the world.....She insisted even sternly that we should not look at anti-Jewish children's books which were published by the Nazis. Here in Rome I published, posthumously, the last article written by Dr. Nathan Nash. But I must also say that I am serving the pope and nobody else."<sup>365</sup>

Baaden expresses very understandable Jewish feelings about the way the Catholic church can be seen to have hijacked one of the six million dead in the holocaust. Equally pertinent to Catholic eyes is the way in which Eszer almost whitewashes the holocaust in what can now only look like a belated anti-modernist thrust from the Vatican. The Nazis for Eszer were not "that horde of dumb and brutal creatures who came in from the darkness of history in some unexplainable fashion" <sup>366</sup>; rather,

"to a great extent the responsibility of the slaughter of the Jews...falls on those 'Liberal'[sic] forces which, during the second half of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th centuries did all they could to bring down that Christian-humanistic social order which, for example in the Austro-hungarian dominions, protected the crowds of Jews expelled systematically by the pogroms of the Western-minded jurisdictions of the Russian empire." <sup>367</sup>

Nazism is described in quaint terms as "grim and materialistic social Darwinism". In other words, there was no real difference between Nazism on the one hand and the modern liberal, democratic state on the

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<sup>364</sup> Eszer quoted by Hebblethwaite, op. cit,

<sup>365</sup> *ibid*

<sup>366</sup> Eszer, op.cit, p.318.

<sup>367</sup> *ibid* p.319. One wonders why there were, in the late nineteenth century, crowds of East European Jewish immigrants not to Austria-Hungary but to the United States, indeed even to England, if this was the case. Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, New York: Macmillan. 1980. p.624-626. One wonders about the Christian-humanist Austro-Hungarian order that only allowed to all Jews within its territory the possibility of legal marriage in 1867. There is not much historical evidence for Eszer's caring Austro-Hungarian empire.

other. Each was built on secular, "scientific" values which came from outside the theocratic ("Christian-humanistic") realm.

Eszer's interpretation rests a late nineteenth-century view of the one, monolithic, authoritarian and clericalised Catholic church. For such a church, any who advanced the idea that dogma, liturgy and the bible should take contemporary scientific ideas such as evolution into account were pestilential and enemies of the church.<sup>368</sup> For this reason Nazism - amongst other forms of modern government - could be self-evidently evil to a Roman cleric.

However, the reasons why Nazism might be evil are different to ordinary observers, and are not usually associated with a liberal late nineteenth-century church or state. It is interesting that Eszer in the longer justification that appeared in *Carmelite Studies* quotes two historians only, one British and one German, for the Nazi era. There appears to be an element of *apologia* in both these citations. The German historian, Karl-Dietrich Erdmann, backs up Eszer's anti-Liberal, anti-modernist stance with his "Nazi theory of biological materialism".<sup>369</sup>

Eszer's reasoning seems to want to ignore the German church that Edith Stein became part of, which was still under the impact of the modernist movement. It is not possible to equate liberalism and Nazism, and blame the former for the latter. And yet it is on such grounds that Eszer maintains Edith Stein as a martyr.

Eszer claims that the Nazi regime was also anti-Catholic, seeing Catholicism as an outgrowth of Judaism.<sup>370</sup> This makes it easier to claim that the action which caused Edith Stein to be arrested then deported was an action against Dutch Catholicism. But the fact remains that only converted Jews were arrested (including Protestant Jews, even if the latter were later set free). Why wasn't an indiscriminate group of "Aryan" Dutch Catholics arrested? Why were not bishops or those priests who read the offending telegram from their pulpits arrested?

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<sup>368</sup> *Pascendi dominici gregis*, quoted in Loome, op.cit, pp. 90-91.

<sup>369</sup> Eszer, op.cit, p.322.

<sup>370</sup> *ibid* p.319.

Eszer argues that Edith Stein's arrest was part of a "spontaneous ...hatred against the Catholic Church of Holland" <sup>371</sup>. If it was spontaneous, it could not be part of a pre-existing anti-Semitic policy. Yet we know that the Nazis did have a pre-existing anti-Semitic policy: there is no way that the Nazis' hatred of Catholicism (cultural) can be equated with its hatred of Judaism (racial): how many Catholic churches were torched during Kristallnacht? Even if arresting the baptised Jews was to be seen as an act of retaliation against the Catholic church, it has to be admitted that the mechanism for rounding up Jews, whoever they were,<sup>372</sup> was established; the mechanism for making wholesale arrests of Catholic bishops was not.

In addition to Eszer's own hidden agenda and dubious logic, there is the question of historical proof. His case that Edith Stein "offered her life not only for peace but also for the conversion of all Jews" rests on one unsubstantiated statement from Sister Teresia Renata whose work Eszer himself admits is of value for the spiritual insight of its author, not for its factual, historical value. And Sister Teresia Renata herself admits that writing the biography was hard because of the disappearance of so many documents as a result of the war. How much of Sister Teresia Renata's "spiritual insight" comprises the sorts of things that unthinking German Catholics believed or wanted to believe about Jews who became Christian? Reference has already been made to the liturgy's prayers for the conversion of the Jews.

Against this one piece of evidence for Edith Stein's desire to convert her people there are many pieces of evidence from Edith Stein's own pen, and these cover a wide period of time. First, from her own most considered spiritual writings there is no evidence for some kind of born-again Catholic triumphalism. The spirituality that we have examined shows a very forward-looking view of Jesus as not just creator of all human beings and types, but of the whole of creation:

"Every single human being is created to be a limb of this [i.e. Christ's] body. Here [I am] speaking about the Mystical Body of Christ in a restricted sense. It is

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<sup>371</sup> *ibid* p.323

<sup>372</sup> Cf how the Nazis came in Germany for selected groups, e.g. early candidates for euthanasia (not work slaves), the old and infirm. See Bracher, *op.cit*, pp 438-9 and p.451.

possible to understand it in a broader sense. St. Thomas calls Christ the Head of Angels - and this not only because he is God, but because he is human. For angels and humans are directed towards the same goal: the enjoyment of godly splendour, and through this they form one body. Christ is the head of this body and God the father (cf. Eph. 1:20) has set him not only above all people, but above all powers and principalities. We can go still further and under "mystical body" understand the whole of creation. According to the natural order, this is because everything is created in the image of the Son of God, and because he through his incarnation entered into the total interdependence [Gesamtzusammenhang] of this creation. Or according to the order of grace, because the grace of the head streams forth to all the limbs - not only people, but all created things. If the whole of subhuman nature is bound up with the Fall of humanity, so this nature will be renewed with humanity through the redemption. And although we cannot speak of redemption in the angels' case, because there is no going back after the Fall for them, it nonetheless must be said that those angels who remained true managed it because of the grace which Christ earned. They owe their splendour to him.

Strictly speaking, notwithstanding this justified extended meaning, humankind may and must be regarded as the Mystical Body of Christ. For humanness is the gate through which the Word of God entered creation. It took on human nature; the unity of relationship was not forged with lesser beings or with angels. As the head of humanity, which itself unites the higher and the lower, Christ is the head of the whole of creation."<sup>373</sup>

Nowhere in her writings does Edith Stein specifically or implicitly offer her life for the conversion of the Jews to the Catholic church, in the literal way as claimed by Eszer. While Edith Stein grasped the reality of union with God through sharing in the Cross of Christ, her attitude to others was ecumenical. In this she rejoins Newman and von Hügel, the modernist rather than the ultramontane church. As stated above, she believed all people are included in Christ's mystical body and she could not believe that Christ would limit his salvific power to those inside the church only:

"Salvation can not be limited to nor dependent on the exterior limits of any church. Indeed those outside the church can receive God's graces."<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Edith Stein, *EES*, pp.481-482.

<sup>374</sup> Edith Stein, "Die Ontische Struktur der Person" in *Werke VI*, p.185.

Edith Stein's understanding of redemption does not limit the power and action of God to one small category as Eszer does. The idea of attributing "fault" to the Jewish people does not fit with Edith Stein's understanding of God's love and the redeeming action of the suffering Christ.

Her desire to share in the sufferings of Christ has to be understood in the mystical way rather than in a literal and fundamentalising way. There is only one atonement and it has already happened. The final trilogy of her prayers shows a woman who wants to live and become an ongoing sharer in Christ's passion.

Edith Stein never lost her consciousness of what it was to be Jewish. She did not try to deny, or somehow spirit away, her Jewish blood. Her writing of *Life in a Jewish family* was a calculated attempt to explain honestly the reality of Jewish life and observance as she experienced it. Finally, her response to her mother's death was by no means an extra *ecclesiam nulla salus*<sup>375</sup> response. It is a further example of Edith Stein's much broader understanding of a merciful God who judges persons on their "faith alone". God is not limited by their adherence to this or that institution.

### Edith Stein's Heroic Character

The previous chapters have demonstrated that Edith Stein's heroic character resides most truly in her mysticism. It is discernible through her interior growth, in unity with the crucified Jesus, through the mystic's preferred symbolic or metaphorical path of faith, prayer and love.

The debate over her beatification serves to distract us from her mystical journey and growth in holiness. Her desire to share in Christ's redemptive action grew out of her belief that love will always conquer evil, and that the cross as the sign of that unconditional love is victorious because evil and hatred are not able to triumph over incarnate love. The cross, for Edith Stein, has salvific power and is

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<sup>375</sup> "There is no salvation outside the church."

truly triumphant because it redeems the whole world. Her sharing in this is no more and no less than

"the co-responsibility through prayer for the redemption of all who comprise the human community."  
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Without Auschwitz and the holocaust, Edith Stein's heroic character, as demonstrated in her prayer life and surrender to God's providence, was such that she stood out as having the spiritual integrity and interiority of a mystic. Right up to the time of her arrest and death she wanted to live, as shown by her final letter to the Swiss Consulate from Westerbork. Her desire to be an atoning sacrifice was to do with growth towards union. It is false and misleading to interpret it to be a desire to die or to be a martyr.

### Conclusion

The evidence that has been presented throughout this thesis has been aimed at showing that Edith Stein's spiritual value rests on her quest for truth which finds its goal in oneness with Christ in his self-giving. This mysticism is shown to be particularly attractive, accessible, and relevant to late twentieth-century Christians because it resides in a mystical understanding of unity with God, rather than in any abnormal, physical overriding of nature.

Edith Stein's mysticism is undervalued if we try to use it to serve narrowly doctrinal and ecclesiastical ends, as those do, who try to interpret Edith Stein's identifying with Christ as her physically suffering and dying for the cause of the Church. The great virtue of mysticism is its openness, comprehensiveness and non-literality. Those who would claim Edith Stein as a martyr are trying to confine her within a highly specific and unrepeatable category, one that makes it hard for others to identify with her as a spiritual example. To claim her as a martyr might make sense, politically, for a certain kind of church; but in the process, it also sells Edith Stein and modern Catholicism short.

## APPENDIX

### EDITH STEIN, JEWISH CATHOLIC MARTYR

Ambrose Eszer

*Ambrose Eszer is a German Dominican friar who works as a Relator of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican. Just recently he became a Corresponding Fellow of the Pontifical Theological Academy in Rome. He completed this study about the martyr status of Bl Teresa Benedicta/Edith Stein late in March 1987 for distribution by the Vatican Press Office at the time of her beatification. Intimately connected with the process of beatification, his words offer a quite fascinating eyewitness account of the deliberations which paved the way for the ceremonies held in Cologne this past May. (We maintain here the numbering found in the Italian version of his text from which our translation comes.)*

**W**hen World War II ended Sr Teresa Benedicta of the Cross/Edith Stein, OCD was mostly forgotten or simply unknown. The persons who had lived with her for a while had been dispersed, and the Carmel of Cologne (in which she had found her spiritual refuge) ended up totally destroyed. No one knew what end Sr Teresa Benedicta had met. Early information about it, however, began to be published rather soon, e.g., in the book of the Franciscan Dr Stokman<sup>1</sup> in which rather direct mention is made of the events which led to the violent death of the Carmelite nun. In the meanwhile her sisters of Cologne Carmel (who had moved into the former Carmelite monastery of

Our Lady Queen of Peace) also began to gather all kinds of documentation regarding Stein, including her correspondence. The fruit of these efforts was the biography written by Sr Teresa Renata of the Holy Spirit, OCD who had been Mistress of Novices during the novitiate of Sr Teresa Benedicta.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the fact that a veritable spate of other biographies or specialized studies followed this book, still today it can be considered fundamental. Its greatest worth consists in its clearly Carmelite character, also in the deep spirituality of its author.

In 1958 the Archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Joseph Frings, asked Sr Teresa Renata to draft an official study on Sr Teresa Benedicta Stein. Thus began the gathering together and publication of this Carmelite nun's philosophical and theological writings, conducted by the Edith Stein Archive of Louvain and its directress [*sic*], Dr Lucy Gelber. All this brought about, little by little, conditions (suitable) for the opening of a Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Sr Teresa Benedicta.<sup>3</sup>

2.1 Consequently, in 1962, twenty years after her violent death, Cardinal Frings proceeded to the opening of the Ordinary Process. During this process and the subsequent Petitionary Processes from New York, Regensburg, Westminster, Southwark, Speyer, Bamberg, Trier, Roermond, Liège, Aachen, Namur, Malines, Basel, Augsburg, Limburg, Salzburg and Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 103 texts were drafted by numerous leaders of the scholarly and intellectual world, and by several Jews, including Dr Erna Biberstein (*née* Stein), the sister of Sr Teresa Benedicta.

2.2 Furthermore, the Brief for the Introduction of the Cause is rich in documentation: texts from distinguished persons like Fr Erich Przywara, SJ and Rev Prof Schulemann; a considerable collection of letters of petition; as well as the Judgments (*Vota*) of two theological censors, one of which is—in my opinion—a real masterpiece.

2.3 In 1972 the successor of Cardinal Frings, Cardinal Joseph Höffner, was in a position to send to Rome the entire file of (beatification) process materials. On September 19, 1972 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith gave its "Nihil obstat"

and, so, preparations could proceed on the Brief for the Introduction of the Cause, which was ready only in 1983. Even though, according to the former rules, the *Brief for the Introduction* had as (its) primary aim proof of the fame of sanctity of the Servant of God while alive, at death and after death, our *Brief* succeeded in offering shining proof of the heroic degree of Sr Teresa Benedicta's virtues, a proof normally supposed to be supplied in the Apostolic Process investigating the Virtues! The Judgment of the Rev Promoter of the Faith turned out to be very positive on the whole. As a result it did not seem to be a difficult undertaking to reply to the few objections.

2.4 Up to that time the Cause had advanced, but really not so quickly. The work had been exhausting. In 1980 the Vice-Postulator of the Cause, Msgr Jakob Schlafke (a Canon of Cologne Cathedral), published a small work<sup>4</sup> containing documents found in the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogs Dokumentatie (Royal Institute for War Documentation) in Amsterdam, documents which possibly were already known to the above mentioned Fr Stokman, OFM. By his study of these documents Canon Schlafke offered the thesis of Martyrdom suffered for the Catholic faith, a thesis which had already been taken into consideration spontaneously in some of the texts of the Petitionary Processes but never studied in depth by Rome, given the fact that from its inception the Cause had been oriented toward proving the heroic virtues of Sr Teresa Benedicta. Consequently, this small work of the learned Vice Postulator produced no reaction. But, on March 3, 1983, Cardinal Höffner as President of the German Episcopal Conference wrote another Letter of Petition to the Holy Father which Cardinal Jozef Glemp (Primate of Poland) seconded in the name of the Polish Episcopal Conference. In this letter, both of these prelates stress the fact that the Dutch "Christian Jews" were spared from the general deportation of all Dutch Jews at an early stage and that, only as a result of the *public* protest of the *Catholic* Bishops of the Netherlands, the Jews who had become Catholic — and among them Sr Teresa Benedicta — were deported and exterminated as well. Nevertheless, even the Letter of Petition of the two Episcopal Conferences al-

most ended up forgotten, for the fact that a year and a half later it was rather difficult to find. Therefore it would be not only risky, but also false and calumnious to declare that either the Bishops or the Congregation for the Cause of Saints moved hastily in order to "get-around" the obstacle of a missing acknowledged miracle. The lack of a miracle is understandable, among other things, for want of a real tomb of Sr Teresa Benedicta in spite of the undeniable and solid presence of a reputation for possible miracles due to numerous favors granted to the requests for help from the Carmelite nun.

3.1 The early months of 1983 saw the arrival of new regulations for the causes of the Saints and for the Congregation to which they are entrusted. At that time the *Apostolic Process*, which till then had followed on the *Ordinary Process*, plus the *Introduction of the Cause* also necessary for the opening of the *Apostolic Process*, were abolished. In place of these two procedures there is now a *Single Process*; but for the causes begun under the former stipulations it was necessary to seek carry-over solutions.

3.2 On May 11, 1984 the cause of Sr Teresa Benedicta was entrusted to one of the "examining judges," just established by the Congregation, that is, to one of its Relators. During a brief vacation-time stay in Cologne he lost no time in familiarizing himself with the work of Msgr Schlafke. He felt it his duty to take into consideration also the possibilities it contained, namely, a possible declaration of the martyrdom of Sr Teresa Benedicta by the Congregation and the Magisterium of the Church. Very quickly he took encouragement also from the Letter of Petition of the German and Polish Episcopal Conferences. In the meantime he ordered some new textual depositions and did some personal research to help reply to objections of the Rev. Promotor of the Faith.

3.3 Once back in Rome the Relator wrote out his Report for the Meeting of the Congregation while Msgr Luigi Porsi, Advocate of the Cause, began preparing a *Supplementary Brief*. The validity of the Process was declared on November 15, 1985 and on January 10, 1986 the Rev. R. P. Penitentiary General of the Dis-

calced Carmelite Order—interpreting the desire of the German and Polish Episcopal Conferences—wrote a letter of petition to the Holy Father to ask him to allow that the new brief of the cause of Sr Teresa Benedicta would be entitled, presented and discussed, no longer and merely restricted to “investigating heroic virtues,” but specifically “investigating martyrdom.” The Congregation at its meeting of January 17, 1986, consented to this request and the martyrdom was included with the heroic virtues in the *Supplementary Brief* that appeared in March 1986. On October 28th of the same year the Theological Consultors met to consider the heroic virtues and the martyrdom of Sr Teresa Benedicta. This meeting was followed, on January 13, 1987 by the Plenary convocation of the Cardinal and Archbishop/Bishop Members of the Congregation. On January 25, 1987, in the presence of the Holy Father, the Decree confirming the *heroic degree of the virtues*, as well as the *martyrdom* of Sr Teresa Benedicta, was read—an event without precedent in the centuries-old history of the Congregation. What, then, is the evidence for the martyrdom of Sr Teresa Benedicta?

4.1 In 1942 the Nazi leaders in the Netherlands had decided to wipe out Dutch Judaism, except that one must emphasize there was deportation into forced labor for German industry of not only Jews but also Dutch “Aryans” on the one hand, while exceptions were made (from the beginning) of baptized Jews whether Catholics or Protestants on the other. Still, the religious leaders were especially worried about their fate, even though it was not clear whether or not any of them had been taken captive. At any rate, all the Christian churches showed their indignation over the deportation underway by a telegram sent on July 11, 1942 to Reichscommissar Dr Arthur Seyss-Inquart, to General Commissars Schmidt and Rauter, and also to General Christiansen the Commander in Chief of the German Armed Forces in Holland.<sup>5</sup> As was normal, this telegram (which at first received no reply) showed the ecclesiastical authorities pointing out their preoccupation for the fate of the “Christian Jews” to the extent that these had not found places of worship in the area. This offered the Nazis the chance, as in fact it turned out, to present an

image of almost idyllic "normalcy" in the deportation itself. The Secretary General of the Ministry of the Interior, a Dutchman, stated that the deportation of the Jews was a European problem whose solution could not be altered. This meant that all the Dutch state functionaries would have tacitly approved of the deportation. Among the Jews people thought that those able to work would be transported to the East to prepare living quarters for subsequent deportees.<sup>6</sup> The Nazi authorities, while not replying directly to the churches' telegram, then immediately prohibited public reading of the telegram from the pulpit when they heard the churches planned to do this. At the same time they told the churches that they could intervene in favor of their faithful of Jewish blood who would be exempted from the deportation if the pulpit announcement (of the telegram) did not take place.<sup>7</sup> With this, the Nazi authorities showed they accepted officially the reason of "inadequate places of worship," precisely to render more credible their "idyllic" version of the exile of the Dutch Jews. The Protestant churches, at least a majority of them, "were not closed to such reasoning," as was stated in an internal report to the Nazi high command in Holland which defined the capture of 4000 "Christian Jews" as a "consequence" of the behavior of the churches.<sup>8</sup> But the Protestant Jews were either not incarcerated or "were quickly released."<sup>9</sup> At first the Nazis had believed that the Protestant churches had also disobeyed the order of the Reichscommissar; only, the Protestant churches had been able to offer the excuse that, because of poor telephone connections,<sup>10</sup> they were unable to revoke the decision to have the telegram read. At any rate, according to the information which reached the Nazi authorities, an unspecified "synod" of the Protestant churches had, on July 24th, decided not to publish the protest telegram. Nonetheless, "according to the declarations that have to this point reached us from outlying offices, *this synodal decision was obviously not followed everywhere*. Investigations are now going on. The measures against the Church [author's note: the word should read "against the churches"] now are still being weighed. The small group of the "Evangelical-Lutheran Ecclesial Community" had refused to participate in the pulpit announcement and reading of the

telegram from the very beginning."<sup>11</sup> It seems that the number of "disobedient" Protestant churches was larger than expected, and this would explain—at least partially—the fact that, in Autumn of 1942, the Nazis began to deport Protestant Jews too. The Catholic Archbishop of Utrecht, Bishop de Jong, claimed that the Protestant churches had not kept quiet.<sup>12</sup> Another reason for the behavior of the Nazis toward the "Protestant Jews" could have been some attempt by the Dutch populace to save Jews by regarding them, for the time being, "baptized Jews." Such subterfuges in favor of the Jews were probably known to the Nazis from what was going on in Italy and in the countries occupied by the Italian army. As an extra punishment or as an alternative to the deportation of the "Catholic Jews," the Nazi authorities considered secularizing some large charitable institutions of the Catholic Church in Holland, viz., the "large Catholic hospitals of Groningen."

All these institutions had nothing to do with the Jews; still, taking them over was being considered as a direct punishment on the Catholic Church for having defended them.<sup>13</sup> If the plan was not realized, the reason probably was that, to carry it out, the Nazi authorities would have had to concern themselves also with the sick people admitted to these institutions (with an easily predictable outcome). Still, *the simple existence of the above-mentioned plan establishes proof that the motive for the capture of the Catholic Jews was not some generic racial hatred but hatred against the Catholic Church. With its protest message the latter had not only disobeyed the order of the Reichscommissar but also blown away that "idyllic" image of the deportation of the Jews which the Nazis wanted to justify in the eyes of the Dutch populace.* The proclamation of the Dutch Catholic Bishops contained, besides the text of the protest telegram, a long prayer for the persecuted Jews that cited the words of Jesus in Lk 19:43-44 in a free translation which inevitably applied to the Third Reich.<sup>14</sup> This truly very beautiful text brought on the implacable hatred of the Nazi leaders against the Dutch Catholic Church.

4.2 Just the same, some theologians could question where it

is possible to find in Sr Teresa Benedicta's case *the profession of faith* traditionally required of the victim called a "valid provocation" directed at the "Tyrant." There is no doubt that Sr Teresa Benedicta was ready to make this profession: "When first challenged (in the concentration camp) about who she was, Edith Stein said 'I am Catholic.' The SS said 'You damned Jew, stand there.' Sr Rosa, 'I am a Jew.'"<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that "Sr Rosa" was the sister of Sr Teresa Benedicta: like her sister she was converted to the Catholic religion and had joined her at the Carmel of Echt where she worked later on as a third order sister. But as far as "Tyrants" are concerned, we have to take note that those of our century are substantially different from the "Tyrant" of ancient and medieval times. The latter did not present himself so much as anti-religious as anti-Christian. Even the French Revolution established a "Religion of Reason!" Totalitarian "Tyrants" of our times come, instead, from the Christian religion (Stalin had been even a seminarian) and they want to destroy every religion from within, in order to replace them with their own totalitarian ideology (this expression was coined by Giovanni Gentile who can be identified as the most lucid theoretician of totalitarianism), that is, with a pseudo-religion. At the same time, the modern "Tyrants" use every means available to maintain the sham of *not persecuting any religion*, even unto criminalizing the true confessors of any religion. Even though he was the founder of a new, radically anti-Christian *weltanschauung*, Hitler never wanted to leave officially the Catholic Church and paid public taxes for the Church until his death. He and others saw in the Church, especially in the Catholic Church, *a burdensome relic from the past which little by little would be transformed*. This rendered the criminalization of a real believer all the more easy for him. In our case, the *provocation* of the "Tyrant" was made by the action of the Dutch Bishops, to which Sr Teresa Benedicta definitely adhered, given the fact she had always criticized in a radical fashion any behavior which could be considered too condescending toward National Socialism. Regarding her own spiritual preparation for martyrdom, as well as her perseverance, we see it in her act of offering herself as a victim for peace and the unbelief of the Jewish people in her 1939 will.<sup>16</sup> Only,

the Nazi "Tyrant" did not want to ask the fatal question, establishing the deportation of the Dutch Catholic Jews as a measure to punish the Dutch Catholic Church—not as a religious community but as a social group, because National-socialism did not persecute any church or religion officially. In other cases, too, the Nazis punished not individual persons, but entire families (*Sippenhaft*).

To return to religious persecutions, we must say that National-socialism, in the case at hand, *not only intended to avoid causing but felt most obliged to suppress any eventual confession of faith* which, in its own way, would have been able to "provoke it." Thus, the Nazis sought to reduce those persecuted to an infantile state in which they'd be unable to give expression to their faith and, furthermore, suffer the humiliation of their human dignity. The "Catholic Jews" of Holland knew very well, instead, why they had to suffer. Thus, the third order Dominican, Dr Lisamarie (Mary Magdalen) Meirowsky, wrote from Westerbork Camp: "I consider it a grace and a privilege to have to suffer in such circumstances and so give witness to the word of our Fathers and Shepherds in Christ. Even if our sufferings have been worsened a little, grace is doubled, and a magnificent crown awaits us in heaven. Rejoice with me."<sup>17</sup>

4.3.1 It remains to be clarified, as much as possible, the difference between the hate of the Nazis for the Jewish people and the "hatred for the faith" (*odium fidei*) which led to the persecution and annihilation of the Catholic Jews of the Netherlands. Some will find this complicated and abstruse beyond words. Nevertheless, it behooves us to emphasize that the complications are derived, not from any procedures of ecclesiastical courts, nor from norms of Canon Law, nor from theological concepts, etc., but rather from the Nazis' immorality and from the deep moral and social disorder created by them. Furthermore, the Nazis were not that horde of dumb and brutal creatures who came in from the darkness of history in some unexplainable fashion, but (a group) that constituted instead an example of the consequences of a massive collapse of Christian ethics over vast segments of the population of entire nations, in particular

the Austro-Germanic population. Only, to comprehend this fact we have to recognize also the value of Christian morality and not disqualify it, as an old "Liberalism" has done and modern progressives still do, by considering it as a collection of absurd "taboos."

We should not forget that to a great extent the responsibility of the slaughter of the Jews in Europe falls on those "Liberal" forces which, during the second half of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th centuries did all they could to bring down that Christian-humanistic social order which, for example in the Austro-Hungarian dominions, protected the crowds of Jews expelled systematically by the pogroms of the Western-minded jurisdictions of the Russian Empire.

4.3.2 Doubtlessly, both the Antichristian and Antisemitic hate of the Nazis have had a common root: in the *Diaries* of Cosima Wagner you read that he whom Hitler considered his one worthy predecessor defined Catholics and Jews mutually "the plague of this world." The interpretation of *Parsifal* is equally rather well-known, this opera innocently admired by many a Catholic, in which the magician Klingsor is really "the" Jesuit who directs the harlot Kundry, that is, the Catholic Church, to besmirch the innocence (not moral, but racial) of that "pure fool" Parsifal.

At the same time, materialism makes a showing in another way, given the fact that in *Parsifal*—as Msgr Scheffczyk, the eminent professor of systematic theology at the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich, has explained—it's not the bread and wine which are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, but the Body and Blood of Christ are transformed into bread and wine! In fact, National-socialism, not so much for "moral" or "religious" reasons as for its grim and materialistic social Darwinism, saw in Judaism the material substratum of the Catholic Church.<sup>18</sup> According to Josef Goebbels, head of the Propaganda Ministry of the Third Reich (*Reichspropaganda-ministerium*), Hitler saw in Christianity "a symptom of decadence and a branch of the Jewish race."<sup>19</sup> But, even though both of them were aware of their connection with Judaism, Hitler

forbade Goebbels to leave the Catholic Church.<sup>20</sup> Due to overriding concerns of the war, the Führer felt the "final solution" (*endlösung*) of the Catholic problem was to be held off until it was over. Hence, Hitler and his colleagues had to put the brakes on their own anticatholic hate because, even though they felt they were apostles of a new religion founded on race, they had not yet determined its liturgy, however well-disposed they were to the "liturgical-cultic lunacies" of Rosenberg, the author of the "Myth of the Twentieth Century," as well as those of Himmler and Darré.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, with the Catholic Church destined to be destroyed after the victory, it would have been easier to put together a pseudo-Catholic liturgy from the model of the "festival stage play" *Parsifal*, whose composer and librettist was precisely Richard Wagner, the one Hitler venerated so much.<sup>21a</sup>

4.3.3 Today no one questions how *racial* antisemitism was a structural element of the nascent neo-primitive religion of National-socialism. Even though it presupposed the existence of a popular-racist antisemitism, on the scene before WWI broke out especially in the Austro-hungarian Empire and afterwards predominantly in Germany itself, Nazi antisemitism underwent a series of strange modifications. Even with the elimination of the Jewish race always considered the ultimate goal, there was always a system of dispensations from persecution in place from the beginning. Such dispensations would not have stopped the extermination of the Jewish race and the definitive ascent of the "blond, blue-eyed" Aryan race. Richard Wagner—that simply hysterical antisemite—had already introduced this system of dispensations by opening Villa Wahnfried also to Jews, on condition, however, that they accept his verdict of extinction against their people. Two such cases were poor Maestro Hermann Levi, taken advantage of more than any other "Hausisraelit" (as a kind of "*Hoffude*") and the pianist Joseph Rubenstein in whom "a firm faith was formed regarding the possibility of being redeemed through the German spirit."<sup>22</sup> Given the fact that the most worthy predecessor (Wagner—in between one or another discourse on the best method for eliminating the Jews) had acted this way, his "disciple" Hitler also could feel he was

authorized to make use of a "dispensation" or "absolution" of the evil of Jewish blood. And he also had to do it, because in the veins of many Nazi hierarchs flowed generous doses of Jewish blood, and it was for this reason that the only woman leader of the party at Munich, Elsa Schmidt-Falk, had to provide cleansed family trees so as to offer her services to the party.<sup>23</sup> The system of "dispensation" from elimination would make possible the appointment of the Jew Erhard Milch as Field Marshal and Vice-commander of the Third Reich's Airforce; and Reichsmarschall Herman Göring used to say cynically: "I determine whoever's Jewish." Other examples include Mrs Ingeborg Malek Kohler, half-Jewish, who obtained from Hitler himself his signed permission to marry Dr Herbert Engeling, an Aryan and director of the movie company "Tobis,"<sup>24</sup> and the very popular actor-singer Hans Albers who lived with a Jewish woman, simply refusing to obey repeated and severe invitations to send her away.<sup>25</sup> Examples could be multiplied, but it should be said that often enough the Nazis made Jews emigrate, particularly well-known people. A large part of the family of Sr Teresa Benedicta emigrated; and it would have been completely within the rules followed by the Nazi authorities if they had dispensed her from arrest and deportation, seeing how the Swiss consulate and other foreign dignitaries had shown an interest in her. Still, even a "dispensation" of brief duration regarding all the Dutch Catholic Jews would have been sufficient to save Sr Teresa Benedicta, since the immigration papers to Switzerland for her and her sister Rosa were almost ready and it is well known that the Federal President of Switzerland was actively committed in her favor.

4.3.4 After having become a structural element of the Nazis' neoprimitive religion, *antisemitic hate was institutionalized and became the State's antisemitism (but, for as much as it sounds absurd, without a real measure of hatred)*. The extermination of the Jews seemed to the very Nazis an integral part of a universal plan of Divine Providence (the word "Providence" was one of Hitler's favorite terms). But here too it should be emphasized that the heads of the new "religion," due to their being mostly ex-Catholics, could logically dispense from carrying out the

horrendous plan so long as the absolute domination of the blond, blue-eyed Aryan race was not in danger. Whoever would claim that such affirmations are preposterous should read the following sentences of the American historian, Gerald Reitlinger:

The direction of the extermination of the Jews had been entrusted to Himmler and Heydrich certainly as far back as March 1941. But there is no evidence that at that time Himmler was an embittered anti-Semite or indeed that he ever became one. It is a peculiar thing that Himmler's surviving speeches are largely free from the savagely anti-Jewish utterances which were fashionable even among the more moderate of Hitler's Ministers. Himmler's one and only public allusion to the extermination of Jewry, which he made at Posen on 4 October 1943, incredibly though it reads, is worded in a whining, apologetic style.<sup>24</sup>

We could cite numerous quotations, either from Reitlinger's work or from others, which confirm such realities. And it is also very well known that Himmler himself continually admonished his troops to "remain clean," that is, *to repress every push toward personal hatred and toward sadism*. In this context the historian Karl-Dietrich Erdmann writes:

Genocide applied to the Jews did not succeed in being a terrorist measure. Terror, as it was exercised, for example, in the French Revolution or in the Bolshevik Revolution . . . is directed against political adversaries. It is carried out in public life as a means of intimidation. What happened with the Jews was not supposed to be known by anyone, not even by the German people itself. The people who were murdered — without taking into consideration the problem whether they represented or not a political factor — were judged to be of poor quality. Hence, the Nazi extermination activity cannot be compared to crude break-outs of hate for the Jews as have been witnessed time and again throughout European history, whether for political or economic reasons. The SS proceeded with a systematic bureaucracy . . . Mass extermination was the Nazi theory of biological materialism, carried out with horrific consistency . . . Murderers seek out their victim in another human being with which they confront themselves, be this an individual or a group. But the extermination of the Jews

appears characterized by a touch of total anonymity. The expression used by the Nazis to define the elimination of non-desirable life was "extermination." Extermination could have been directed against any kind of life which had been judged "not worthy of life."<sup>27</sup>

4.3.5 The way the Nazi authorities in Holland proceeded against the "Catholic Jews" reveals some very differing psychological motivations: *this was an act of revenge against the Catholic Church decided, moreover, cum ira (with anger) and premeditation with which the preceding decree of exemption from deportation was abolished.* Even though the deportation and killing of the Catholic and non-Catholic Dutch Jews was an action materially one and the same — after the abolition of the exemption, first off tacit and then later explicit, of the Catholic Jews from deportation — in it still appear two different motives and two formally different actions. The goal of the extermination of the Dutch Catholic Jews was the punishment of the Catholic Church in Holland by means of the killing off of its Jewish children, while the goal of the general massacre of the Jewish people was exactly the wiping out of this people and the exaltation of the Aryan race. Whoever does not accept Catholic rules for judging human acts might think this looks like some kind of sleight-of-hand, but it should be said right away that it is impossible to judge the acts of a religious community unless you understand and recognize its own internal logic.<sup>28</sup> The lynch pin of Catholic logic is Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Savior, and every Christian and Catholic person is judged by the Catholic Church along the lines of his or her relationship with Christ which is the only thing that counts. Regarding this fact nothing has changed since apostolic times and nothing can change. One must, nevertheless, emphasize once again that every objective observer will notice clearly *the substantial difference between antisemitic hatred of an institutionalized and industrialized type, and that spontaneous (and till that moment suppressed) hatred against the Catholic Church of Holland.*

4.4 There is one question left to answer: how could one of Hitler's henchmen, after promising and offering him a deadline

to annihilate the Jewish people in his district, then "dispense" a part of the intended victims from deportation and massacre?

Dr Seyss-Inquart (1892-1946), Commissar of the Reich in the Netherlands, came from a middle-class background and, in his homeland of Austria, showed himself more of a nationalist than a National Socialist. In 1936, while the Austrian Nazi party was still clandestine, he entered the fifth cabinet of the Federal Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg (11 Feb. 1938) but only to become, within a couple of weeks, the last Chancellor before the *Anschluss*.<sup>29</sup> Even though he was a self-proclaimed fanatical Nazi, Seyss-Inquart was more of an opportunist who sought to cash in on the changing political situations, just as they presented themselves. If it is true that he wrote Hitler that the Dutch Jews would be eliminated by a certain date, that did not exclude absolutely the possibility he would exempt from extermination a particular number of Jews, a minority less than 10%, especially if this could help keep the Dutch populace calm. In fact, Seyss-Inquart sought support from the Dutch at that time by a combination of manoeuvres to say the least strange. As an honorary SS lieutenant-general (*Gruppenführer*), he worked against the SS in the Netherlands (*Nederländische SS*) which were under the Hauptamt (or General Command) of the SS in Berlin by entering into an alliance with the national socialist movement of Adriaan Musserts whom Himmler despised as "corrupt." Already on January 5, 1941 SS Lieutenant-General Gottlob Berger had reported on these politics of Seyss-Inquart in a letter to Rudolf Brandt, Himmler's secretary: this state of things lasted until the collapse of the Nazi domination of the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> From this it becomes rather clear that the Commissar of the Reich not only could not have been "shot down" by the SS but he was, in his own "kingdom," even more powerful than they were. If he were to exempt the Catholic Jews from the planned extermination they, as it were, would become non-Jews. A colleague of Seyss-Inquart, Wilhelm Kube, who was Reichscommissar for White Russia, changed from a fanatical antisemite into an equally decided protector of the Jews: for more than two years he sabotaged systematically and with all the means at his command the

actions of the infamous *Einsatzkommandos* (quick intervention shock troops) of the SS until, on September 22, 1943, he was killed by a bomb that his partisan housekeeper placed under his bed. Not even Himmler himself was able to get rid of him even though he had told Hitler all that was happening in White Russia.<sup>31</sup> Hitler's henchmen actually possessed a wide range of discretionary powers. This fits with the situation of general chaos that reigned supreme between the different "satrapies" and big fiefs of the Third Reich, something Hitler slyly kept alive according to the old adage of "Divide and conquer!" There's no doubt, then, the Seyss-Inquart was in a position to turn the Dutch Catholic Jews into non-Jews and vice versa. As it was, he became furious and took it personally when the Dutch Bishops' public protest, marked by such harshness and therefore so surprising, seriously disturbed his well laid out plans designed to increase the popular prestige of National Socialism and of the Dutch Nazi party which he supported. (Trans. J. Sullivan)

## NOTES

1. *Het verzet van de Nederlandsche Bisschoppen tegen National Socialismus en Duitse tyrannie* (Utrecht, 1945).
2. *Teresia Renata a Spiritu Sancto, OCD, Edith Stein/Schwester Teresia Benedicta a Cruce: Ein Lebensbild, gewonnen aus Erinnerungen und Briefen* (Nürnberg, 1954), 238pp.
3. In June 1958 Cardinal Archbishop Josef Frings assigned Mother Teresia Renata of the Holy Spirit the task of writing a profile of the life of Sr Teresia Benedicta which would be of use for an eventual Beatification and Canonization Process. See Jakob Schlafke, *Edith Stein: Dokumente zu ihrem Leben und Sterben* (Köln, 1980), 24. Eng. ed. trans. Susanne M. Batzdorff (New York: Edith Stein Guild, 1984), 20.
4. *Ibid.*, 24-35 (Eng. ed., 20-31).
5. *Teresia Renata, Ein Lebensbild*, 238; Schlafke, *Dokumente*, 29 (Eng. ed., 24-25).
6. Schlafke, *Dokumente*, 32 (Eng. ed., 28).
7. *Ibid.*, 31 (Eng. ed., 27-28).
8. *Ibid.*, 32 (Eng. ed., 28).
9. *Positio sup. Intr., Summ.*, pag. 172.
10. *Teresia Renata, Ein Lebensbild*, 246.

11. Schlafke, *Dokumente*, 35 (Eng. ed., 31). In another document of the Nazi authorities cited in *Dokumente*, 30 (Eng. ed., 25) we read: "In case the majority of Protestant churches also read the telegram addressed to the Reich Commissar, the Protestant Jews will also be deported. For this purpose, lists are to be prepared."
12. Teresia Renata, *Ein Lebensbild*, 246.
13. Schlafke, *Dokumente*, 30 (Eng. ed., 25).
14. *Ibid.*, 35 (Eng. ed., 30-31).
15. *Positio* sup. Intr., Summ., pag. 409. #1005.
16. Schlafke, *Dokumente*, 9 (Eng. ed., 5).
17. *Positio* suppl. pag. 126.
18. Hans Gunter Hockerts, "Die Goebbels Tagebücher, 1932-41: Eine neue Hauptquelle zur Erforschung der nationalsozialistische Kirchenpolitik," *Communio*, 13 (1984): 539-56; 544.
19. *Ibid.*, 547.
20. *Ibid.*, 543.
21. *Ibid.*, 544.
- 21a. As far as Hermann Rauschnig is concerned, in a hysterical outburst Hitler lauded Wagner as the greatest poet the German people ever had. See Hermann Rauschnig, *Hitler m'a dit: Confidences du Führer sur son plan de conquête du monde*, trans. from German (Paris, 1939), 255: "Hitler refused to admit to predecessors. The only exception was Wagner . . . ; and 256: "Wagner received the revelation, he was the harbinger of the tragic destiny of the Germans. He wasn't only a musician and poet. He was especially the greatest prophetic figure that the German people ever had. He, Hitler, had come upon the teachings of Wagner—whether by chance or by predestination—early on. With almost morbid excitement, he stated that everything he read in the works of this great mind corresponded to intuitive ideas which lay dormant, as it were, in the depths of his own consciousness."  
See Hartmut Zelinsky, "Hermann Levi und Bayreuth oder Der Tod als Gralsgebiet," Beiheft 6 des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte (Tel Aviv, no. 103, 1984):350.
22. Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (München-Zürich, 1982), 521. For the suicide of Rubinstein see Zelinsky, *Levi und Bayreuth*: 319. See also Hartmut Zelinsky, "Richard Wagners 'Kunstwerk der Zukunft' und seine Idee der Vernichtung," *Von kommenden Zeiten: Geschichtspropheten im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Joachim H. Knoll and Julius H. Schoeps (Stuttgart-Bonn, 1984), 84-105.  
As for Hitler, he said that no one could understand Nazi Germany without a knowledge of Wagner. See Robert Gutman, *Richard Wagner: Der Mensch, sein Werk, seine Zeit*, 4th ed. (München, 1970), 478.

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23. Wilfrid Daim, *Der Mann, der Hitler die Ideen gab: Die Sektiererischen Grundlagen des Nationalsozialismus*, vol. 4 of Böhlau's zeitgeschichtliche Bibliothek, 2nd ed. (Wien-Köln-Graz, 1985), 40 and 275 n. 42.
24. *Die Welt*, 23 June 1986, no. 142, p. 8.
25. Deutsche Welle radio broadcast, 11 July 1986.
26. Gerald Reitlinger, *The SS: Alibi of a Nation, 1922-1945*, 1st Am. ed. (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1981), 277-78.
27. Karl-Dietrich Erdmann, *Die Zeit der Weltkriege*, vol. 4 of Bruno Gebhard's Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte, 8th new and rev. ed. by Herbert Grundmann (Stuttgart, 1959), 297.
28. About this topic see Joseph Bochenski, *Logik der Religion* (Köln, 1968), 23-25. Even if some do not want to acknowledge the truth of the Catholic faith they'd have to admit that the Church must follow its own internal logic, otherwise it would destroy itself.
29. Erdmann, *Weltkriege*, 233ff.
30. Heinz Höhne, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf: Die Geschichte der SS*, 3rd ed. (München, 1981), 399 and n. 208.
31. *Ibid.*, 340-42.

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