

**EDITH STEIN**  
**Bridge Between Philosophy and Theology**  
**Edith Stein Guild**  
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Both in her life and in her works, Edith Stein traversed and indeed bridged both the disciplines of philosophy and theology. Even after her conversion to Catholicism, she always remained faithful to the rigor demanded of philosophical inquiry. Yet, it became a rigor imbued with the depths of Catholic thought and doctrine. Throughout the works that span her writings, her laser clear dissection of ideas and explanations, scholarly research, and precise language remain steady. The meaning of death, and the cross of Christ, are two concepts that rank high in her thinking and in her life. This is especially noted in a little known appendix to *Finite and Eternal Being* regarding her review of Heidegger's version of existentialism, in her essays and meditation in *The Hidden Life*, and in *Science of the Cross*, as well as in her letters and as noted in biographies of her life.

This study begins with some of the more difficult tasks of understanding her disagreement with Heidegger. The purpose here is not to dispute Heidegger, or Stein's understanding of his thought, but rather to better understand Edith Stein's thoughts on the matter, which are, of course, by the time of her writing, clearly saturated in the life of faith and written in the convent of Carmel. Two issues that she clearly takes issue with, are Heidegger's view of community, and that of *dasein* as a being towards death. In both these areas she finds his analysis faulty, and incomplete, especially regarding phenomenological insights about death and dying. This difference in existential views

particularly affects their varied views on authentic and inauthentic living and being. For instance, for Heidegger, the individual often flees the weight and responsibility of authenticity by hiding in community. For Stein, however, as Lebech reminds us, community is important in assisting one to grow and develop.

If community helps the individual towards hearing the call of authentic being, then it is no longer possible to see 'the they', as Heidegger calls them, as a form of deterioration of the self...responsibility begins with the awakening of the individual to its own life ("Martin Heidegger's Existential Philosophy" (MHEP 72).

Acknowledging that there can be inauthenticity, Stein fine tunes the distinction further.

Deterioration does not consist in communal life as such, nor in the letting oneself be guided, but in undiscerning collaboration and in ignoring the 'call of conscience' at the cost of the authentic life to which one is called. When Dasein deteriorates neither its individual, nor its community life is genuine (MHEP 73-74).

Therefore, what Stein emphasizes is that there is both authentic and inauthentic ways of being an individual, as well as being in community. The difference lies in discerning and responding to a call or hiding from it.

The other concept that plays predominately in our analysis is that of death and how one faces one's death. In Heidegger's brand of existentialism death plays a heavy role and in a way defines the human being as a being towards death. But what is death?

Heidegger answers; the end of Dasein. He immediately adds that with this no decision should be favoured as to the possibility of life after death. The analysis of death remains purely of this world (HMEP 75).

Here Stein already takes issue. In her view, if by Heidegger's logic, ultimate meaning is found in being a being towards death, then the meaning of death should be clarified.

However, this is impossible if the only thing that can be said of death is that it is the end. She asks rather rhetorically, "is this not a completely fruitless circularity?" (MHEP 75).

In addition, she finds fault in that Heidegger quickly closes the door on the possibility of life after death, and by doing so, does not leave open even the possibility of it, since death is viewed simply as the end. Herein the circularity continues. Rather, she argues, it should be possible to say that “*being-in-the-world* of human beings ends” (MHEP 75), yet another type of life might still be possible.

She agrees to a certain degree with Heidegger, that one cannot experience someone else’s death, yet she emphasizes that seeing others die informs us of our own future death, as does illnesses in our own lives, especially life threatening illnesses, and being near death. “Here is where the real experience of dying sets in...” (MHEP 76). So it is the process of dying itself that informs us about death, both of others and ourselves. With illness, especially severe illness, ordinary cares and concerns about the world recede into the background and care of the body, of survival, if you will, preoccupies. “Then there is finally one important question: being or not-being?” (MHEP 77). What Stein emphasizes is that when one reaches this point, ‘being-in-the-world’ is also receded, even ended, since “one actually sees death eye to eye” (MHEP).

Beyond that, however, is a large, dark gate: one must pass through it – but what then? This ‘what then?’ is the real question of death that is experienced in dying. Is there an answer to this question even before one passes through the gate? (MHEP 77).

Here is where Stein emphasizes questions that Heidegger ignores, namely the destiny of the soul. This is where we not only come close to our own death, but it is by witnessing and living through the dying process of others that we are also informed about death. Witnessing a difficult death especially impresses us with “the powerful sundering of a natural unity” (MHEP 77). In such a case when we witness that the human being who fought for life is no longer there, we wonder what happened.

Where is what made her into this living human being? If we cannot give an answer to this question, the full meaning of death is not clear to us. Faith knows an answer. But does there exist, within the realm of our experience, something that affirms it? In fact there does...many a dead person lies there, after the fight, like a victor: in majestic calmness and deep peace...Could the simple cessation of life, the transition from being to not being, bring forth such an impression? And could it be thought that the spirit, which has impressed this seal on the body, does not exist anymore? (MHEP 78).

In this analysis that appears almost like a meditation on death and dying, Stein offers first the religious explanation of faith in an afterlife, coupled with philosophical insights, one of them being a body/soul distinction, albeit a close unity, that separates at death. In addition she offers a phenomenological view with explanation that some deaths are harder than others, some very peaceful. In the calm peaceful cases she argues that if death were truly the end, then this peacefulness could not be, and that somehow the spirit continues. While this is by no means proof, she offers it as a viable alternative view. To add support to this view, she adds that sometimes the struggle disappears and peace sets in even before death actually sets in. Further, she implies that the person glimpses something of another world.

Here the dying person is illumined by another life in a manner visible to all those who surround him. He is illumined as his eyes see into a light out of reach for us: Its glory still lingers in the body whose soul has been wrenched away. Anyone who had not heard of a higher life, or who had lost belief in such a life, would in this sight meet the likelihood of its existence. The meaning of death as a transition from life in this world and in this body to another life, from one mode of being to another, is revealed to him. Then, however, *Dasein* – as being toward death – is not being toward the end, but towards a new [kind of] being... (MHEP 78).

What is implied here is that in such situations not only does the person dying seem to pierce the earthly veil into a life to come, but that those witnessing the event would experience a resurgence of the possibility of life after death. Further, she redefines what being towards death is, and contrary to Heidegger, she finds that it is not the end, but an

end of one existence towards a different kind of being. (Here I leave aside the philosophical discussions of what type of existence this could be). While Stein's analysis might seem naïve to many in a modern audience, and one might even wonder if she has strayed from a philosophical position, she obviously meant it to be some type of existential/phenomenological investigation. It also appears that she might have had some firsthand experiences of such deaths, perhaps through her earlier time spent as a nurse, or perhaps even in the convent. Whether such "good" deaths imply or can be correlated with a holy death is yet another matter. Of course she is also speaking from a faith stance, and this is permissible in the sense of faith seeking understanding, and philosophy as being the handmaid of theology, although strictly speaking there is a gap if one starts from philosophy, especially a modern day philosophy.

What this investigation into death and dying points to, or is directly linked to, is *authentic* being. Thus, it appears she accepts the basic existential connection and emphasis on death informing life. However, she redefines it in Christian, even Catholic terms.

Authentic being reveals itself as a being to which the human being tunes himself by reference to a different being, and loosens himself from everyday being... Living 'authentically' means to realize one's ownmost possibilities and to meet the challenges of the 'moment', which always expresses the given life-conditions (MHEP 78).

Therefore, from the view of faith, a life of grace results in a different life of glory after death, instead of merely going from being into non-being, which might be considered the more atheistic view. (Of course there are other types of religious afterlives as various alternatives to the non-being option). And authentic living here implies some sort of truthful living to one's own situation and selfhood in a given time and place, indeed even

in the moment. Of course, from a faith perspective authenticity would involve this tuning and recognition of Other Being or Higher Being, which grounds our being.

What else can the concepts of the ‘moment’ and the ‘situation’ mean apart from an understanding of an *order* or a *plan*, which the human being has not herself projected, but in which she nevertheless is included and plays a role? All this means *a bond between Dasein and a being which is not it’s own*, but which is the foundation and goal for its own being. It also means a breaking open of temporality (MHEP 78-79).

Here I will not go into all that the ‘moment’ and its fullness implies but stress two interrelated points. One is that for Stein breaking open temporality hints that we are not merely temporal and that we somehow reach for eternity. The other point is that lest we get caught up in lofty ideas of our own authenticity and possibility, Stein reminds us that in addition to choices of finitude curtailing our possibilities, there also exists willful sinful denial of obligation and involuntary errors, all of which point to our own fallibility and thus curtail authentic living. Generally speaking, we have an “inability to fully unfold our essence”, and thus even the very best of our temporal authentic selves, “is still not our final authentic being” (MHEP 79). On this point a saying of Nietzsche is added: ‘Woe to the one who says: end! For all desire wills eternity, wills deep, deep eternity’ (MHEP 79). It is worth noting that John Nota, who also commented on Stein’s analysis of Heidegger in the same appendix, stated that:

I am sure from my meeting her, the last one three weeks before her death, and from all her writings from 1922 on, that the end meant for her the beginning, the overcoming of time, finitude and cross, in the eternity of the living loving triune God (“Edith Stein and Martin Heidegger” 72).

The existential theme of authenticity can be restated as Edith’s quest during her entire life as one of pursuing truth. Quoted often by many, even in her agnostic days, she said of herself that “the thirst for truth was my only prayer” (de Fabregues 22). For her,

the journey continued with her academic pursuits, and a slow gradual pondering of what she experienced in people like Scheler, Reinach, and especially Husserl. It was this phenomenological investigative style that led her to see, regarding a burgeoning Christian perspective in those around her, that there was a new world unfolding before her. She admits that this did not lead her directly to a life of faith. Rather, what it opened was, “a vast new realm of phenomena” one that she said she could no longer ignore.

What was discovered, she continues, was that the:

The fetters of the rationalism of which I had been brought up without realizing it shook loose and I suddenly found the world of faith...I thought it at least deserved some investigation (de Farbegues 23).

Another thoughtful moment in her life regarded Adolf Reinach’s death and a request from his wife Anna Reinach for Edith to help arrange his philosophical papers.

At first she was apprehensive to go, afraid that Anna would be consumed with grief.

What she found instead was that Anna had “unshakable faith in the living God”, and reflecting back on this Edith writes:

It was my first encounter with the cross. And with the divine strength it inspires in those who carry it. For the first time, I saw the Church born out of the passion of Christ and victorious over death. At that moment my unbelief was utterly crushed, the light of Christ poured into my heart – the light of Christ in the mystery of the cross. Because of this light, I desired to take the habit of the Carmel that I might be called into the Order of the Cross [this would take many more years] (de Farbegues 26-27).

In the meanwhile, Edith would continue to apply for positions at various universities, as well as continue to apply for her habilitation thesis, all of which were denied her. These were the external constraints under which she lived. During the summer of 1921 she was visiting with friends, and this provided the framework for another ‘moment’ in her life’s path. On one occasion when her friends would be out, they invited her to read from their

library. The book that she picked out was *The Life of St Teresa of Avila*. She picked it up and did not stop until she finished reading it at which point she exclaimed “there is truth” (de Farbegues 32). It was this fortuitous and momentous event that specifically prompted her to become a Catholic. In the morning she bought a catechism and missal and another stage of her journey began.

The circumstances and events of her life did not permit her to take a university position in philosophy, her life’s dream, but she did not give up on teaching and writing. While she taught at the Dominican School for girls, arranged by her spiritual director at the time, she lived in the convent with the sisters. Later she would accept a lectureship at the Institute of Educational Theory at Munster. Gradually her interior life formed, and she reports some religious experiences and aide sought while in such states. For instance, she writes that:

There exists a state of repose in God, a total suspension of all mental activity in which one can make neither plans nor decisions, in which one can do nothing, but in which, having given over all things to the divine will, one surrenders entirely to one’s destiny. I have experienced this state somewhat, following an experience that, exceeding all my own abilities, totally consumed in spiritual energies and divested me of all possible action. And while I gave myself up to this feeling, a new life began little by little to pour into me ... (de Farbegues 33-34).

She would also write of interior experiences or call and response during communion.

I am permitted to offer myself and all my actions and sufferings together with the spotless victim on the altar. And when the Lord comes to me in Holy Communion, I may ask him like St. Teresa, what do you want of me Lord? ... and after this silent dialogue I shall know what he bids me ... Because my soul will have gone out of itself, it will be able to penetrate into the divine life ... The soul will clearly see the next stretch of road ahead ... but when it has traveled that distance, a whole new horizon will open up before it (de Farbegues 59).

This especially intimates something of which we now turn our attention, that is her Carmelite vocation and with it a specific vocation within a vocation, or call within a call,

known as being a victim soul, and how she understood and lived this in her life. It was, if you will, the culmination of authentic being as it unraveled in her life.

Edith Stein did not directly enter the Carmelite life when she first felt the call. Rather, with her spiritual director, there transpired a careful and lengthy discernment process. Taking the advice of her spiritual director, and others, she continued to teach as long as she was able. Meanwhile, she learned more about Catholic thought, even translating Aquinas, and continued to write. It was only with the Nazi decrees when she lost her teaching position that her spiritual director, and she, knew it was finally time to enter Carmel.

She understood her Carmelite vocation in a way that might be difficult for a modern audience to understand, but this understanding actually penetrates into a particular understanding of the mystical body of Christ. She wrote of this vocation accordingly:

There is a vocation that consists of suffering with Christ and thus in his redemptive work. If we are united to the Lord, we are members of his Mystical body. Christ continues to live and suffer in his members, and suffering endured in union with him becomes his, made efficacious and united to his redemptive work. The essence of the religious life, especially the Carmelite life, is to intercede for sinners and cooperate in the redemption of the world by voluntary and joyous suffering (de Farbegues 62).

The step by step process of discernment revealed itself even further to her as a necessary response to what was going on in the world, to what Hitler was doing. Once, while on her way to the Benedictine Abbey at Beuron she stopped at Cologne and prayed in the chapel of Carmel. She relates what transpired.

I spoke interiorly to our Lord ... telling him that I knew it was his cross weighing down upon our people ... was it not the lot of those who did not know him to bear his cross? That is what I want to do. I asked him only to show me how. And

when the ceremony in the chapel finished ... I became certain that he had answered my prayer. I did not know then what his cross would be for me... (de Farbegues 63-64).

Thus Edith moved from a general awakening and forming of her own life from academics and a general Christian then Catholic call, to a specific Carmelite vocation, and then even more specifically to a sacrificial offering or oblation that would culminate in her martyrdom at Auschwitz. While at the Carmel in Cologne she was fortunate that she was permitted to continue to write and it was there that she wrote *Finite and Eternal Being* (FEB) (amongst others). In it we find, for example, her explanation of the general state and vocation of the soul, as well as a hint of its more personal shaping. She writes:

The innermost being of the soul – is the abode of God. By virtue of its pure spirituality, this innermost being is capable of receiving into itself the Spirit of God ... The vocation to union with God is a vocation to eternal life ... the soul is capable of supernatural augmentation and elevation of its life, and faith tells us that [he] wills to give the soul eternal life, i.e. an eternal participation in his life ... the soul is destined for eternal being and this destination explains why the soul is called upon to be an image of God in a wholly personal manner. (FEB 504).

The innermost and most authentic nature of human being remains hidden most of the time ... Whatever we know or divine of this deeply hidden nature in ourselves and in others remains dark, mysterious, and ineffable. But when our earthly life ends and everything transitory falls away, then every soul will know itself as it is known ... (FEB 505).

Here again we return to the idea of authenticity, and with it, the incapability of total authenticity in this life. She continues:

Even the individual human being is incapable of unfolding in its life all the possibilities which have their ground or foundation in its essence or nature ... We may therefore assume that the perfection of the individual human being in the state of glory will not only free each human being from the impurities of its corrupt nature but also unfold its as yet unfulfilled possibilities (FEB 507).

Thus her view of the life to come includes a further unfolding of possibilities.

After writing this book she went on to write on pseudo Dionysius and then to her final book *Science of the Cross* (SC), which was written during her time in the Carmel at Echt. In fact she was still finishing it at the time the SS officers came to the convent to get her. Looking at her writings, especially her later ones, it is evident that they not only took on a more theological tone, but also a more mystical one. In fact, her last writing focused specifically on the writings and mysticism of none other than John of the Cross. The mysticism was therefore not only Christocentric but specifically centered on the cross. In this book she takes on major and minor writings of John of the Cross and explains the deep mystical theological insights contained therein. A dense book where one sometimes does not know where John of the Cross ends and Edith Stein begins, it attests to her penetrating analysis, as well as perhaps to a depth and state of her own soul. In the work one gleans some general thoughts of mystical theology, such as that the union and transformation of the soul in God is accomplished through love and occurs only “when the will of the soul and the will of God are merged into one, so that there is nothing in the one that would resist the other” (SC xix). Yet, this union retains the distinction of God and the soul. “It is God by participation but despite the transformation it retains “its natural being that is so totally different from the divine being”. The notion of a mystical ladder and the various stages are explained in detail. There is also the caution against seeking mystical phenomena and other spiritual gifts.

If the soul were to hoard [even spiritual gifts of visions etc.] like treasures, these impressions, images etc. would clutter up its interior and be an obstacle in its way to God that leads through renunciation of all created things (SC 48).

Hence the soul must also detach itself from all supernatural gifts of God in order to gain the Giver rather than his gifts (SC 88).

From here we see the emphasis on detachment and renunciation so typical of Carmelite mysticism.

Another philosophical and theological point is made regarding the soul. Since the inmost region of the soul is where God abides, there is a paradoxical correlation that when the will is freely surrendered as a necessary condition for entering the highest stages, it is also purified, and united to the divine it thus becomes “the sphere of the most perfect freedom” (SC 120-125). The paradoxical question/result is that while the soul boasted of its own will previously, later when it abandons its will to the divine will, only then does it become truly free. All this comes full circle to the end point of such a union and such a vocation.

That which is the business of the Eternal Father can be understood only of the redemption of the world, above all of the salvation of souls...so great is the fire and strength of their love that those who possess God are not satisfied and content with their own gain ... they strive ...to take many to heaven with them. This comes from their great love of God. Here the zeal for souls is taken to be a fruit of union ... the preaching of the cross would be in vain if it were not the expression of a life of union with Christ crucified (SC 215 – 216).

So the fruit of union is love of souls and an ardent desire for their salvation. It is here that sacrificial living and giving and the entire aspect of victim theology and the mystical body of Christ has its roots. But to understand this further it is appropriate to turn to her essays and meditation as found in *The Hidden Life*.

In one of these essays she shares “Some Thoughts for the Feast of John of the Cross” and goes further into the root of the Carmelite spirit of suffering and sacrifice and tries to explain it lest it be misunderstood as a morbid desire for suffering.

We hear repeatedly that St John of the Cross desired nothing for himself but to suffer and be despised. We want to know the reason for this love of suffering. Is it merely a loving remembrance of the path of suffering of our Lord on earth...Has he [Christ] not transported us into a kingdom of light and called us to

be happy children of our heavenly father? ... but ... the abyss of human malice, again and again dampens jubilation over the victory of light. The world is still deluged by mire ... The entire sum of human malice, from the first Fall up to the Day of Judgment must be blotted out by a corresponding measure of expiation. The way of the cross is this expiation ... Christ the head effects expiation in these members of his Mystical Body who put themselves, body and soul, at his disposal for carrying out his work of salvation... The lovers of the cross whom he has awakened and will always continue to awaken anew in the changeable history of the struggling church, these are his allies at the end of time. We too, are called for that purpose... Thus, when someone desires to suffer, it is not merely a pious reminder of the suffering of the Lord. Voluntary expiation comes from an already existing relationship with Christ. ... Only someone whose spiritual eyes have been opened to the supernatural correlation of world events can desire suffering in expiation ... the love of the cross in no way contradicts being a joyful child of god. Helping Christ carry his cross fills one with a strong and pure joy, and those who may and can do so, the builders of God's kingdom, are the most authentic children of God. And so those who have a predilection for the way of the cross by no means deny that Good Friday is past and that the work of salvation has been accomplished. Only those who are saved, only children of grace can in fact be bearers of Christ's cross. Only in union with the divine Head does human suffering take on expiatory power ... To suffer, and to be happy although suffering ... to laugh and cry with the children of this world and ceaselessly sing the praises of God with the choirs of angels – this is the life of the Christian until the morning of eternity breaks forth (HL 91 – 93).

Thus Edith explains that carrying the cross in life is not, or should not, be a morbid endeavor, but rather a joyous one. She speaks of understanding the correlation of world events in carrying that cross. Further, she clarifies that the efficaciousness of human suffering can only be accomplished when it is united with that of Christ. Once again she uses the term authenticity, here to describe a way of life of the Christian who understands what it means to build the kingdom of God. And grace plays no little part in such an undertaking.

Also found in the same collection of essays are several ones pertaining to the Feast of the Elevation of the Cross, Sept 14, the day when Carmelites traditionally renew their vows. One of the most prominent ones is “Ave Crux Spes Unica!” [Hail Cross, Our Only Hope].

The savior today looks at us, solemnly probing us, and asks each one of us: Will you remain faithful to the Crucified? Consider carefully! The world is in flames... If you decide for Christ, it could cost you your life. ... before you hangs the Savior on the cross... you too must completely renounce your own will and no longer have any desire except to fulfill God's will. He speaks to you ... by the gentle breath of the Holy Spirit in the depths of your heart...this means daily and hourly crucifying your self-will and self-love ... The arms of the Crucified are spread out to draw you to his heart. He wants your life in order to give you his. Ave Crux, Spes Unica! (Hail Cross Our only Hope). The world is in flames...But high above all flames towers the cross. They cannot consume it. It is the path from earth to heaven. It will lift one who embraces it in faith, love, and hope into the bosom of the Trinity.... The eyes of the Crucified look down on you - asking, probing...What will you answer him? "Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" Ave Crux, Spes Unica! (HL 94-96).

In this meditation she alludes to both the world situation and the martyrdom that faithfulness to Christ might cost. Again there is the renunciation of will and the centrality of the cross, but added to it is inspiration from the Holy Spirit in guiding one on the path. Most important here is the existential question cast in specific Christian terms and even more specifically to the nuns in the convent.

Another meditation titled "The Marriage of the Lamb", continues the inquiry to the hearer even further, one that calls for even deeper Christian authenticity.

Our desire for peace is undoubtedly genuine and sincere. But does it come from a completely purified heart? Have we truly prayed "in the name of Jesus," ie not just with the name of Jesus on our lips but with the spirit and in the mind of Jesus, for the glory of the Father alone, without any self-seeking? The day on which God has unrestricted power over our hearts we shall also have unrestricted power over his. If we ponder this, we will no longer dare to judge anyone else... The fountain from the heart of the Lamb has not dried up....answer his question. "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68) (HL 101).

One more meditation suffices to fill out the picture. In "Exaltation of the Cross", she takes a deeper dive into what it means to follow Christ.

Anyone who would follow me must take up his[her] cross..! To take up one's cross means to go the way of penance and renunciation...Whoever follows him must know that we have no lasting dwelling here... our citizenship is in heaven...Your will be done! This was the content of the Savior's will ...not only

to atone for the sin of disobedience through his obedience, but also to lead people back to their destiny by way of obedience. The created will is not destined to be free to exalt itself. It is called to come into unison with the divine will to participate in the perfection of creation... The human will continues to retain the possibility of choice, but it is constrained by creatures that pull and pressure it in directions straying from the development of the nature desired by God, and so away from the goal toward which it itself was directed by its original freedom. With the loss of this original freedom, it also loses security in making decisions. It becomes unsteady and wavering, buffeted by doubt and scruples or obdurate in its error. There is no other remedy for this than the following of Christ. The eternal father is unconditional love and has given his entire being to his Son. And just as unconditionally does the Son give himself back to the Father. ...He could only incorporate the persons who wanted to give themselves to him into the unity of his incarnate divine person as members of his mystical body and in this way bring them to the father. This is why he came into the world. ...he can give souls supernatural life...in union with the divine Head, and to pass it on to other souls, so awakening new members for the Head... (HL 102 – 104).

Once again we see penance and renunciation in relation to the way of the cross. What is added here is a further explanation of the function of human free will. It is a divinely created will, and as such it is meant to come into accord with the divine will. Thus, the goal of free will is actually to freely acquiesce to the divine will. In another seemingly paradoxical move, the fall disfigured human will so that when it thinks it is acting freely in going against the divine, it is actually more enslaved by sin. Further, a by-product is that there is often a lack of steadfastness, or lack of resoluteness in will, since it is easily torn in many directions. The way back includes obedience to the divine, an alignment of will, and eventually uniting with Christ which also means becoming part of the mystical body. The last line ends with continuing the work of salvation by awakening new members and thereby adding to the body of Christ.

These essays by Edith Stein seem to explain not only her general philosophical and theological position, but they also speak to the unfolding of her particular path, as she understood it, amid the unfolding of events in the world. When the Cologne Synagogue

was burned she said “the shadow of the cross has fallen over my people” (de Farbegues 88). She agreed to move to the Carmel at Echt in Holland, with the stipulation that her sister Rosa also be allowed to come. It was on Passion Sunday in 1939 that she wrote to her superiors to ask for permission to “offer herself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a sacrifice ..., and for the peace of the world” (de Farbegues 88). This oblation of self is a very serious and somewhat formal matter for Carmelites. It is undertaken only with permission, of spiritual director and her superior. (An oblation of self was made also by St. Terese of Lisieux, for example).

The convent of Echt also proved unable to ensure safety in the long run. When the Dutch Catholic hierarchy protested against the Jewish persecutions, all Catholic non Aryans in Holland would be arrested. Attempts were made, perhaps a little too late, to secure her and her sister passports with the intent of moving her on to a Swiss Carmel. There were also suggestions that she should try to illegally escape, which she refused in order not to jeopardize the other sisters. Her simple response was “I shall accept everything God wills” (de Farbegues 90 – 91). At one point she had sent a message to the prioress that

one can only learn the *scientia cruces* if one truly suffers under the weight of the cross. I was entirely convinced of this from the very first and I had said with all my heart Hail Cross, our only hope (de Farbegues 95).

Messengers and witnesses attested to her behavior in the camp. She appeared calm and serene, and often gave consolation to others. “She prayed almost all day long, except when she had to gather food. She never spoke one word of complaint” (de Farbegues 93-94). The rest is history.

In sum, her life as well as her writings, bridged philosophy and theology. She met her death as she met her life, authentically moving from one stage to another. The church honors her as a martyr. Yet we come together to also celebrate her great corpus of writings, her fine mind as a scholar and the overwhelming example she left behind.

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