

Wojciech Zyzak

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7756-1303>

The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland

Spiritual Theology: The Contribution of Edith Stein

Abstract

The author of the article studies the spirituality of Edith Stein. He presents Edith Stein's contribution to the methodology of spiritual theology, her anthropological and theological vision, her evolution of the religious experience, the life of prayer and call to mysticism. Edith Stein carried out research which today would be regarded as being interdisciplinary. Her reflections have a huge influence on the methodology of the theology of spirituality. The spirituality of the Cross which Stein writes about in compliance with the classic masters, nowadays may be an adjustment to the incarnational spirituality, in her overly optimistic view on the usage of creatures and taking for granted the spiritual value of suffering.

Keywords

Spirituality, Edith Stein, mysticism, anthropology, states of life.

1. Introduction

Edith Stein is a well-known figure. She left a legacy of very valuable works which, when analyzed, indicate the most significant elements of her spiritual heritage. Thanks to her meeting God at the moment of her conversion, deepened by the conscious experience of baptism and other sacraments, the development of her prayer life, meditation on the Bible, the catechism, and other religious books, and an active love for others, she was able to draw on various sources of the spiritual tradition of the Church. Stein reflected upon a rich variety of spiritual experiences thanks to which, in her writings, we are able to distinguish a wide range of subjects which are significant for spiritual theology, and which are the subject of this article.

2. Edith Stein's contribution to the methodology of spiritual theology

In order to understand Stein's spiritual heritage and her contribution to the way spiritual theology is approached, it is necessary to outline her philosophical evolution. Edith Stein learned philosophy from the creator of phenomenology. Over time her interests were directed towards the works of St Thomas Aquinas. Stein's comparison of Husserl's phenomenology and Aquinas' philosophy, clearly concentrates on issues related to idealism and realism. Stein's criticism concerning idealism indicates a compromise which takes onboard as little idealism as is necessary in order to secure the bond of cognition with the investigating subject and as much realism as is possible in order to ensure the bond of cognition with the investigated object.¹ In her philosophy, which was largely based on the heritage of Aquinas' teachings, Stein remained a phenomenologist to the very end, at least in the widest sense, which focuses on things in themselves. This method led her to a simple, humble scientific approach which was faithful to the object investigated, and which allowed her to strive for the truth without any prejudices.²

¹ B. Beckmann, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Erlebnisses. Religionsphilosophische Überlegungen im Anschluß an Adolf Reinach und Edith Stein*, Würzburg 2003, p. 176.

² E. Ströker, *Die Phänomenologin Edith Stein*, "Edith Stein Jahrbuch" 1 (1995), p. 34f.

Elements of this scientific method are closer to what theologians call enrichment of natural knowledge by the truth of the Revelation, where cognitive reality is interpreted in the light of natural knowledge, but at the final stage of conclusions it appeals to Revelation, and not to the rationalization of Revelation depending on the philosophical research of some aspect of Christian life. In other terminology this is more concerned with a bottom-up approach than a top-down method. The latter leads to theology understood as humanisation and rationalization of Revelation. Bottom-up theology evolves from man's situation as he attempts to illuminate it with the truth of Revelation. It is, therefore, the enrichment of natural knowledge by the truth of Revelation. This means that a significant element in this method is the spiritual experience. As was mentioned before, spiritual theology accepts cognitive realism as an epistemological fundament, and it does not resign from the verification and objectivisation of experience in the light of Revelation and the teaching of the Church.

Theological issues, when depicted in this way, find interesting points of reference in Stein's academic works. It is significant that, after working on philosophical anthropology, Stein prepared a separate paper on the science of man which was based on the Catholic doctrine of faith. This theological anthropology is almost in its entirety a collection of quotations from the compendium of Catholic dogma: H. Denzinger, C. Bannwart, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*.³ This clearly indicates that Stein was open to the new perspectives of the bottom-up theological method, which enriches human experience through Revelation. The question of the religious experience became the main subject of her scientific research. In order to reach the essence of what is experienced, she applied the phenomenological intuition method. In contrast to the modernism which was much talked about at that time, and unlike Husserl's idealism, Stein was convinced about cognitive realism, which made it possible to reach, in religious experience, a reality independent of the cognitive subject. At the same time, she saw the ultimate criterion for the verification of all truth in Revelation. Stein's way of dealing with this may confirm the spiritual theologians' belief that investigation and description of the spiritual experience with the use of elements of phenomenology does not constitute a threat to the truth of Revelation, since that truth is the ultimate criterion of the verification of the described experience.

³ L. Gelber, *Einleitung*, in: *Edith Stein, Was ist der Mensch? Eine theologische Anthropologie*, ESW 17, Freiburg im Breisgau 1994, pp. 6–8.

3. Stein's Anthropological and Theological vision

Contemplation on the subject of Christian spirituality must make reference to the integral truth of man, in other words, to the real anthropological concept, which posits the relationship of man to God. Stein was aware of this since she wrote to Roman Ingarden in 1917 that, in her opinion, it was not possible to complete an analysis of a person without facing questions related to God.⁴ Conversely, it is difficult to speak about spiritual experience without describing the subject that has this experience. The conundrum which constantly recurs in her intellectual endeavours is the issue of human nature, the structure and functioning of a person. In her best philosophical approach man is: a material body; a living being, bestowed with a soul; a microcosm; a spiritual, historical, social, and cultural creation.⁵

The main central subject of research for Stein was the study of the soul.⁶ In Stein's eyes, spiritual life is a certain dynamism and process of development. The life of the soul is a spiritual life, in other words, cognition, sensation, and desire. Thanks to this, the soul opens itself to another spiritual existence from which its powers flow and by which the soul may be carried, especially in the case of the infinite Spirit of God, which provides its strength regardless of its natural power.⁷ Particularly inspiring is her approach to the three faculties of the soul: reason, will, and memory, in relation to the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. Without doubt, interest in the relation of faith to reason is the most prevailing topic in Stein's writings. For theologians this three-way division is of great significance as it enables the union of the soul with God as Trinity to be described thanks to the three theological virtues. Finally, the main sense of depicting the construction of the soul in this way was seen by Stein in the fact that God was dwelling in it, and she saw prayer as the main gate leading to its interior.⁸

⁴ E. Stein, *Selbstbildnis in Briefen. Briefe an Roman Ingarden*, ESGA 4, Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. 46f.

⁵ E. Stein, *Der Aufbau der menschlichen Person. Vorlesung zur philosophischen Anthropologie*, ESGA 14, Freiburg im Breisgau 2004, pp. 29–31.

⁶ B. Beckmann, *Einleitung*, in: ESGA 16, Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. XIII f.

⁷ E. Stein, *Der Aufbau der menschlichen Person. Vorlesung zur philosophischen Anthropologie*, ESGA 14, Freiburg im Breisgau 2004, p. 128.

⁸ E. Stein, *Die Seelenburg*, in: ESW 6, Louvain 1962, p. 62f.

In the interior of the soul man meets God who is merciful Love. In both the Old and New Testaments God revealed himself as merciful, mainly through care and forgiveness.⁹ Stein wrote that faith shows us a loving and merciful God in personal closeness. In the dimension of the relationship of mercy to man, it is possible to know God. That is how Stein interpreted the fact that God said to Moses “I am who I am” and added, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (see Ex 3). In her opinion, “I am who I am” is a truth which is not understandable, whereas being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob makes God comprehensible.¹⁰ Stein wrote here about the possibility of a personal encounter with the merciful God who nevertheless remains some kind of mystery. On the subject of atheism, she believed that the proclamation of the faith reached out to many who did not accept it. There could be natural reasons for this, but there are also cases where a mysterious weakness is at the basis: “the hour of grace has not yet come.”¹¹ If, however, God touches man, He reveals Himself as an omnipotent power. If man seizes the “divine hand” which touches him, he finds perfect support and shelter. Then the almighty God stands before him as a merciful God, his hope and castle. Love for Him fulfills him and he feels carried by His love. Having said that, it is possible to refuse obedience to God, after which He remains present, but now represents a threat.¹²

The second essential dimension of the relationship with God in the life and works of Edith Stein, beside the Divine Mercy, is the idea of expiation. Stein believed that the real sacrifice of atonement was Jesus Christ. Just as He was killed and exalted, so all who are called to the Supper of the Lamb have, in her opinion, to go through suffering and the Cross.¹³ Stein wrote that although everybody has to suffer and die, through the bond with Christ suffering and death take on a redemptive character. In the economy of redemption they can be used for

⁹ E. Salmann, *Barmherzigkeit. II. Systematisch-theologisch*, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 2006, col. 15.

¹⁰ E. Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein. Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn des Seins*, ESW 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 1986, p. 58f.

¹¹ E. Stein, *The Science of the Cross*, trans. by J. Koeppl O.C.D., Washington D.C. ICS Publications 2002, p. 183.

¹² E. Stein, *Die ontische Struktur der Person und ihre Erkenntnistheoretische Problematik*, in: ESW 6, Louvain 1962, p. 192.

¹³ E. Stein, *Hochzeit des Lammes. Zum 14. 09. 1940*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, p. 128f.

saving enslaved sinners.¹⁴ Here we are approaching the core of the interpretation of the Old Testament sacrifice, in particular the symbol of the scapegoat in the light of Christ's mystery. Stein wanted to help free sinners by sacrificing her life. At this point her exceptional bond with the Jewish nation throughout her whole life should not be forgotten. The awareness of her responsibility for her nation became most apparent during her arrest when she said the following words to her sister, Rosa: "Come, let us go for our people."¹⁵

We can find another Old Testament story in Stein's works which is connected to the idea of expiation. In one of her letters from 1938, she wrote about the difficult situation of her relatives saying, "I keep having to think of Queen Esther who was taken from among her people precisely that she might represent them before the king. I am a very poor and powerless little Esther, but the King who chose me is infinitely great and merciful."¹⁶ Stein here alludes to Esther the Israelite, who was related to Mardocheus and the main heroine of the book bearing her name. Esther, the wife of Ahasuerus, traditionally identified as Xerxes I, saved her nation from the destruction which threatened the Jews of the Persian diaspora due to the advances of Haman, who was a high-level courtier of the king. In remembrance of that event, the Jewish holiday of Purim is celebrated in Israel. Some of the texts about Esther pertain in Roman liturgy to Mary as the queen and advocate of the people of God. As can be seen, Stein related them to herself as well. As a Carmelite nun, she edited a dialogue entitled *Nächtliche Zwiesprache*, in which we can find the autobiographical motive of Esther.¹⁷

4. The Evolution of the religious experience

One of the subjects which returns most frequently in Edith Stein's writings is that of knowing God. Initially, we can find in her work *Was ist Philosophie?*, and likewise in the works of St Thomas Aquinas, two paths: one of faith and

¹⁴ E. Stein, *Das Weihnachtsgeheimnis. Menschwerdung und Menschheit*, in: ESW 15, Freiburg im Breisgau 1993, p. 203f.

¹⁵ K. Albert, *Philosophie im Schatten von Auschwitz*, Dettelbach 1995, p. 68f.

¹⁶ E. Stein, *Self Portrait in Letters 1916–1942*, The Collected Works of Edith Stein vol. 5, trans. by J. Koeppel O.C.D., Washington D.C. ICS Publications 2016, no. 281.

¹⁷ E. Stein, *Nächtliche Zwiesprache*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, p. 170.

one of philosophical inference. However, in the writings *Potenz und Akt* she describes three ways: the natural way of knowing, and the way of faith, which is divided into ordinary and extraordinary, i.e. mystical.¹⁸ The latter was widely discussed in the thesis about the ways of knowing God by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: *Wege der Gotteserkenntnis*. In this book, Stein differentiated the natural way of knowing God, faith, as the 'ordinary' way of the supernatural knowing of God, and the supernatural experience as the extraordinary way of the supernatural knowing of God.¹⁹ Stein elaborated here three paths on the foundation of 'three kinds' of speaking about God which have different aims as they are addressed to different listeners. First of all, using natural theology, she discussed the evidence that God exists, which provides help with problems related to faith, and focuses on people who are susceptible to doubts. In this case, the natural intellect of the teacher is directed towards the natural intellect of the pupil. The next kind of speaking about God is the proclamation of the faith, in other words, proclaiming what God has revealed. The purpose here is to accept the faith and order one's life in accordance with its rules. Finally, the third kind is symbolic theology, which expresses experience in a new sense, i.e. a mysterious contact with a supernatural light.²⁰ These three paths, natural intellect, faith, and mystical experience are, according to Stein, complementary components of the human experience of God.²¹

5. The Life of Prayer

It is no possible to describe spiritual life in the perspective of this holy Carmelite without an explanation about prayer as, according to Pope St Pius X, the stages of prayer correspond to stages in internal life and conform to the grades of prayer taught by St Teresa of Avila who for Stein was the greatest authority

¹⁸ B. Beckmann, *Einführung*, in: ESGA 17, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 12.

¹⁹ E. Stein, *Wege der Gotteserkenntnis. Die Symbolische Theologie des Areopagiten und ihre sachlichen Voraussetzungen*, ESGA 17, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 38; B. Beckmann, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Erlebnisses. Religionsphilosophische Überlegungen im Anschluß an Adolf Reinach und Edith Stein*, Würzburg 2003, p. 233.

²⁰ E. Stein, *Wege der Gotteserkenntnis. Die Symbolische Theologie des Areopagiten und ihre sachlichen Voraussetzungen*, ESGA 17, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 70.

²¹ A. Ales Bello, *Edith Stein. La passione per la verità*, Padova 1998, pp. 107–109.

in this area.²² St Theresa of Avila tried to help others in experiencing subsequent grades of prayer, from vocal prayer, through meditation, and prayers of quiet and simplicity, to the border of mystical prayer, where the soul is purged of the activities of its own faculties and becomes a vessel for receiving mercy.²³ Stein often referred to the well-known Teresian comparison of the soul to an interior castle, especially in *Die Seelenburg*, which is an appendix to the work, *Endliches und Ewiges Sein*.²⁴

Stein wrote a small piece called *Das Gebet der Kirche*, which is of great significance concerning the fundamental division of prayer. The book deals with the issue of prayer with regard to the liturgy and to the Eucharist, moving onto prayer as a private conversation with God, it then discusses prayer as an expression of the internal life in action.²⁵ Due to the fact that prayer, especially the Eucharist, encompasses and sanctifies all work, Stein wrote about ‘a single liturgy’ for all life constituting *ora et labora* as *opus Dei*.²⁶ It should be noted that, for Stein, the key to understanding the prayer of the Church was the liturgical and private prayer of Christ.²⁷

The particular emphasis on liturgy, especially Eucharistic liturgy, is clearly noticeable in Stein’s works. The Church, liturgy, the Eucharist, and prayer were a comprehensive whole for her.²⁸ In the article, *Eucharistische Erziehung*, she discussed the meaning of basic truths of faith regarding the Eucharist for the entire educational process in faith.²⁹ In formal terms, prayer can be divided into vocal, meditative and contemplative. We know that Stein was delighted with Gregorian chant.³⁰ Nevertheless, it seems that most of the time she spent

²² Letter to the Carmelite General 7 March 1914. See. A. Royo Marin, *Teologia della perfezione cristiana*, Roma 1961, p. 771.

²³ E. Stein, *Liebe um Liebe. Leben und Werke der Heiligen Teresa von Jesus*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, p. 52f; E. Stein, *Eine Meisterin der Erziehungs- und Bildungsarbeit: Teresa von Jesus*, in: ESGA 16, Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. 95f.

²⁴ E. Stein, *Die Seelenburg*, in: ESW 6, Louvain 1962, pp. 39–67.

²⁵ E. Stein, *Das Gebet der Kirche*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, p. 10.

²⁶ E. Stein, *Das Gebet der Kirche*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, p. 13f.

²⁷ E. Stein, *Das Gebet der Kirche*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, p. 15f.

²⁸ E. Stein, *Christliches Frauenleben*, in: ESGA 13, Freiburg im Breisgau 2002, p. 95.

²⁹ E. Stein, *Eucharistische Erziehung*, in: ESGA 16, Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. 64.

³⁰ E. Stein, *Selbstbildnis in Briefen. Zweiter Teil (1933–1942)*, ESGA 3, Freiburg im Breisgau 2000, p. 29f.

at Carmel was dedicated to meditation. In her opinion, meditation on the historical Jesus is intertwined with the experience of the Eucharistic Christ, whose closeness helps to permeate the truth of the Holy Bible.³¹

Stein wrote that during meditation the spirit assimilates the content of the faith internally. In a higher form of reflection, the spirit penetrates deeply into the revealed truths by way of the mind, contemplates them in internal dialogue, develops trains of thought, and discovers their internal relationships. If, in addition to this, the Holy Spirit uplifts the human spirit, it appears to him that he has received instruction through divine revelation. Then words or reflections are no longer required to recognize and love God.³² Stein named this condition of the spirit ‘acquired contemplation’, as a fruit of one’s animated actions and sustained by manifold grace. This acquired contemplation, in other words a peaceful and loving self-surrender in the presence of God, is also a form of faith, namely *credere in Deum* – turning to God in faith (*in Gott hineinglauben*), surrendering oneself to Him in complete faith. If one’s own free will is surrendered to the will of God, this condition constitutes the highest peak which man himself is able to attain in the life of faith. Thus, by analysing the human effort in the active night of the soul, Stein reached the threshold of mystical life.³³ However, the strivings of man to unite with God would not come to much if God himself did not take the initiative. Stein wrote in one of her letters that the prayer of Quiet (*Ruhe*) is the work of the Lord, and that man is not capable of entering into it by himself.³⁴ Stein reiterated the thoughts of John of the Cross saying that on the path of spiritual development, one meets a border which leads from meditation (*Betrachtung*) to contemplation (*Beschauung*) and mysticism.³⁵

³¹ E. Stein, *Die Mitwirkung der klösterlichen Bildungsanstalten an der religiösen Bildung der Jugend*, in: ESGA 16, Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. 55f.

³² E. Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, ESGA 18, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 96.

³³ E. Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, ESGA 18, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 97f.

³⁴ E. Stein, *Selbstbildnis in Briefen. Zweiter Teil (1933–1942)*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2000, p. 443f.

³⁵ E. Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, ESGA 18, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 30.

6. The Call to Mysticism

In Edith Stein's life and works, becoming acquainted with the most important divine truths, which flow forth from the union with God, is combined with suffering, and in some ways focuses on the symbol of the Cross. The wisdom of the Cross was the result of Stein's longterm work with divine grace. Experiencing suffering was of great significance on this path which Stein trod. It was one of the factors which helped her to accept the grace of faith. Faith, in turn, led her to the complete truth, which is Christ crucified. In order to have the best possible participation in this, man has to unify himself with God on the path which Stein indicated as the way of the Cross. The Cross finally took the shape of martyrdom in her life. Ezequiel Rojo connects Stein's writing of her last work, *The Science of the Cross*, with her personal experiences of the night. He is of the opinion that the knowledge of the mysticism of St John of the Cross helped her to carry the Cross to the very end.³⁶ By glancing at the contents of the book *The Science of the Cross*, it can be seen that Stein, expressing the life and works of the Mystical Doctor in the key of the Cross, saw the process leading to the union with God first as the 'way of the Cross' in the night, then as the 'crucifixion and death' in the dark night of the soul, and finally, as the 'resurrection and glory' in the experience of union.³⁷ According to Stein, the Cross, just like spiritual reality in its entirety, can be accepted with a childlike, saintly, or artistic approach. We have reason to believe that, just like in the case of many saints especially John of the Cross, and also in Stein's life, three realisms were intertwined: the childlike, the artistic, and the holy realisms, preparing fertile soil for the message of the Cross, so that it was able to grow into the science of the Cross.³⁸

Hecker aptly noted that the juxtaposition of faith and contemplation alongside death and resurrection found in one of the opening paragraphs of *The Science of the Cross*, corresponds to the reality of what is experienced in contemplation, i.e. the passing through the Cross towards resurrection.³⁹ St John of the Cross differentiated three ways in which God dwells in the soul, namely through

³⁶ E. García Rojo, *Edith Stein. Existencia y pensamiento*, Madrid 1998, p. 175.

³⁷ E. Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, ESGA 18, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. VII–IX.

³⁸ E. Stein, *The Science of the Cross*, trans. by J. Koeppl O.C.D., Washington D.C., ICS Publications 2002, p. 9–11.

³⁹ H. Hecker, *Phänomenologie des Christlichen bei Edith Stein*, Würzburg 1995, p. 360; E. Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, ESGA 18, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 151, 155.

essence, through grace, and through spiritual feeling, which Stein understood as a molding union in perfect love. Teresa of Avila also agreed with John of the Cross about God as the Creator, sustaining everything in existence. In this way God lives in every human soul, and He is able, by his strength, to give new birth in the soul through sanctifying grace.⁴⁰ The Trinitarian life of grace may take place in the soul without it being aware of God's dwelling there. Stein believed that only a small number of chosen people experience the triune God within them. For most people, it is faith that leads them to the knowledge of this divine indwelling. Living faith is the firm conviction that God exists, the acknowledgment that everything which has been revealed by God is true, and the loving readiness to give oneself up to God's will. Faith, as a supernatural knowledge of God, which He has infused in us, is the beginning of eternal life. Therefore, in Stein's opinion, faith is only the beginning and should lead to union with God and to eternal life.⁴¹

The first type of divine presence is the same for all creatures and requires only subordination to the power of God. If this presence is accepted, it is indwelling through grace. Where the *amor* of creatures meets the *caritas* of the Creator, a union on the path of the active and passive night may gradually occur. Through active purification, the human will becomes more and more subordinated to God's will, but in such a way that His will is not perceived, but is accepted in blind faith. This, according to Stein, is only a difference in the grade. In passive purification the divine will penetrates more and more into human will and can be felt as a present reality. This is not only a difference in the grade but also a different type of indwelling than through grace.⁴²

7. Spirituality in different states of life

According to Edith Stein, the above-described spiritual development is possible in every state of life. The family is a principal cell in human society in which marital, parental, and formal relationships are of utmost importance. The bond which Stein had with her own multi-generational family played an important role, and it is to this that she devoted a significant part of her autobiographical

⁴⁰ E. Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, ESGA 18, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 139f.

⁴¹ E. Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, ESGA 18, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 140f.

⁴² E. Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, ESGA 18, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, p. 148.

memories which can be found in the book *Aus dem Leben einer jüdischen Familie* [*Life in a Jewish Family*]. In Stein's eyes, the basis of a family is marriage, in other words a relationship between a man and a woman. In spite of feminist trends, she highlighted the gender difference which concerns both the body and the soul.⁴³ Stein built her conception of marriage based on the Bible, and even before her conversion this view did not deviate very much in essence from what she found later in Christianity.⁴⁴ The most important, however, are her reflections on the subject of the exemplary character of the Holy Trinity for the family.⁴⁵ Attempts at such an interpretation can be found in Stein's earlier works when she wrote about the Holy Trinity saying that as the Son comes from the Father, and the Spirit from the both of them, in the same way, a woman comes from man, and from both of them a child is born.⁴⁶ In Stein's opinion, this was the most profound source of the dignity of the family.

Nevertheless, she believed that being an image of God does not only occur through marriage and having children. Both Jesus and Mary are part of mankind, but they are free from all the bonds which make the possibility of fulfilling the sense of human life dependent on the union with a second person. Instead of these bonds, both Jesus and Mary have a union with God. For Christ this is a hypostatic union and for Mary this is through giving up her entire being to be a servant to the Lord.⁴⁷ Evangelical counsels are mandatory for all followers of Christ. Nevertheless, there is a particular group of religious people who decide to follow the Lord in a more radical way, and they lead a consecrated life in which they take vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Edith Stein was one of these; she joined the Carmelite order. Stein had a very clear vision regarding religious life. She wrote about the existence of the calling to suffer with

⁴³ E. Stein, *Probleme der Frauenbildung*, in: ESW 5, Freiburg im Breisgau 1959, p. 131–133. For Edith Stein, marriage is an inseparable union of a man and woman, which, thanks to the sacramental grace, is filled with special strength to maintain reciprocal love and fidelity and also to cooperate with God in giving life and educating children. See: W. Zyzak, *Die Familie im Leben und in den Schriften der Heiligen Theresia Benedicta vom Kreuz (Edith Stein)*, „The Person and the Challenges“ 7 (2017) 1, pp. 105–109.

⁴⁴ E. Stein, *Aus dem Leben einer jüdischen Familie*, ESW 7, Freiburg im Breisgau 1985, p. 24.

⁴⁵ E. Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein. Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn des Seins*, ESW 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 1986, p. 428.

⁴⁶ E. Stein, *Beruf des Mannes und der Frau nach Natur – und Gnadenordnung*, in: ESW 5, Freiburg im Breisgau 1959, p. 20.

⁴⁷ E. Stein, *Probleme der Frauenbildung*, in: ESW 5, Freiburg im Breisgau 1959, pp. 148–150.

Christ which is incorporated in the great work of Redemption. This was, in her opinion, the fundamental way of thinking for all religious life.⁴⁸ Just as Christ was killed and exalted, so all who are called to the Feast of the Lamb have to go through the suffering and the Cross. Although all those who are baptized are called to this vocation, for Stein the calling to model oneself on Christ required a more pronounced response in the life of the religious.⁴⁹ She believed that this imitation of Christ was most keenly expressed in the vows of entry into the religious life. In 1940, at a conference on the occasion of the Feast of the Cross, *Hochzeit des Lammes*, she compared them to nails being driven into the Cross.⁵⁰ In her way of understanding, the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were like nails. The more a soul willingly stretches itself out on the Cross, the deeper it enters into the reality of the union with the Crucified. Such a crucifixion becomes the marriage for the soul.⁵¹

Since ancient times, Christianity has differentiated three states of life. They are the life of married people (coniugati), that of consecrated celibate people (continentes) and that of the clergy (pastores). It should be noted that Stein presented teachings about the priesthood in close association with ecclesiology, and primarily with the relationship to the sacrament of the Eucharist because, in her opinion, they were so interrelated that it was impossible to understand one without taking the others into consideration. Christ, established as a priest in the order of Melchizedek, offered his Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine as a sacrifice to his Father, and gave them to the apostles who then became priests of the New Covenant. Since Christ, in giving himself up on the Cross as a sacrifice for the Father, wished for His priesthood to continue, at the Last Supper he told the Apostles and their successors to celebrate this sacrifice in remembrance of Him. A new Passover was established which is made by the priests in the Church in visible signs for the remembrance of His transition from this world to the Father. This is a 'pure sacrifice' (Mal 1:11), which cannot

⁴⁸ E. Stein, *Selbstbildnis in Briefen. Erster Teil (1916–1933)*, ESGA 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 2000, p. 254.

⁴⁹ E. Stein, *Hochzeit des Lammes. Zum 14. 09. 1940*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, p. 128f.

⁵⁰ E. Stein, *Hochzeit des Lammes. Zum 14. 09. 1940*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, p. 130f.

⁵¹ E. Stein, *Hochzeit des Lammes. Zum 14. 09. 1940*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, p. 139.

be defiled by any indignity or malice on the part of those who make it.⁵² Edith Stein associated priesthood most strongly with sacrifice,⁵³ and wrote that everyone has to suffer and die, but through the bond with Jesus Christ, suffering and death take on a redemptive character.⁵⁴

8. Conclusion

Edith Stein remains one of the most fascinating figures of the 20th century. Her life and exceptional wealth of literary output are an inspiration for many researchers from different areas of the humanities. Undoubtedly, theologians of spirituality belong to this group. This is because she carried out research which today would be regarded as being interdisciplinary. For theologians of spirituality the most important characteristic in her works is that she proficiently moved through the realms of philosophy, theology, psychology, and pedagogy. The contemporary Dominican author, Innocenzio Colosio stated that a theologian of spirituality must be *au fait* in dogmatics, moral theology, psychology, Biblical studies, ecclesiology, sacramentology, and liturgics.⁵⁵ Stein fulfilled those requirements to the fullest, and that is why her reflections have a huge influence on the methodology of the theology of spirituality. So it's not surprising that a commission of scholars has been formed and the process has begun to ask for the title of Doctor of the Church to be recognized for her.

⁵² E. Stein, *Was ist der Mensch? Eine theologische Anthropologie*, ESW 17, Freiburg im Breisgau 1994, p. 151f.

⁵³ E. Stein, *Aus dem Leben einer jüdischen Familie*, ESGA 1, Freiburg im Breisgau 2002, p. 43–46; E. Stein, *Hochzeit des Lammes. Zum 14. 09. 1940*, in: ESW 11, Freiburg im Breisgau 1987, pp. 127–129.

⁵⁴ E. Stein, *Das Weihnachtsgeheimnis. Menschwerdung und Menschheit*, in: ESW 15, Freiburg im Breisgau 1993, p. 203f.

⁵⁵ I. Colosio, *Suggerimenti metodologici per ricerche storiche nel campo della spiritualità*, "Rivista di Ascetica e Mistica" 10 (1965), pp. 492–508.

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